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Peng Mu

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# **Qualifications and Skills Required for Cataloging Positions in Academic Libraries: A Job Advertisement Analysis**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This research analyses cataloging librarian job advertisements in the United States academic libraries. The purpose is to find what skills and knowledge are required for cataloging positions in academic libraries. The results may help Library Information Science (LIS) educators develop new curricula and prepare students to meet the needs of prospective employers. The research will also help LIS students find jobs in the technical service area, and incumbent cataloging librarians promote their expertise.

**Keywords:** Cataloging skills, Job analysis, Job requirements, Academic libraries, Cataloging librarian, Metadata librarian

## **INTRODUCTION**

Cataloging librarians' roles and responsibilities in academic libraries have evolved along with the changing technology and cataloging standards. Cataloging departments have experienced staff reductions due to the budget constraints in the libraries. Cataloging librarians face increasing working stress and new challenges (e.g., heavier workloads, multitasking, work-related burnout). They must acquire new skills and manipulate different metadata schemes.

The American Library Association (ALA) adopted the Core Competences of Librarianship in 2009. In 2015, the Association for Library Collections and Technical Services Cataloging and Metadata Management Section (ALCTS CaMMS) Competencies and Education for a Career in Cataloging Interest Group (CECCIG) charged a task force to create a core competencies document specifically for catalogers (Evans, 2018). ALCTS approved the Core Competencies for Cataloging and Metadata Professional Librarians in 2017. The document defined competencies of knowledge, skills, and behaviors for cataloging and metadata professional librarians.

This research analyses cataloging librarian job advertisements in the United States academic libraries. The purpose is to find what skills and knowledge are required for cataloging positions in academic libraries. The results may help Library Information Science (LIS) educators develop new curricula and prepare students to meet the needs of prospective employers. The

research will also help LIS students find jobs in the technical service area, and incumbent cataloging librarians promote their expertise.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Analysis of job announcements has been a popular method since the 1950s to observe trends in the library profession. Job announcements reveal current trends in desired qualifications and skills that employers look for in new personnels.

Reser and Schuneman (1992) examined 1,133 jobs advertised by 480 institutions in 1988. They found technical services positions required more computer skills, previous work experience and foreign-language skills than public services positions. Xu (1996) analyzed job advertisements from 1971 to 1990 to trace the impact of automation on requirements and qualifications of catalogers. Xu's study showed positions for cataloging librarians were likely to require previous work experience, computer skills, and special knowledge of Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules (AACR2), Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH), Library of Congress Classification (LCC), Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC), and the Machine-Readable Cataloging (MARC) format. Hosoi (2000) examined 124 advertisements for catalog positions in U.S. academic libraries. She found that almost all the job postings required the MLS degree; a majority of the postings required at least 1 year of work experience; and most positions involved special cataloging responsibilities and skills.

Chaudhry and Komathi (2001) carried out a study to identify the requirements for cataloging positions in the electronic environment. They analyzed 131 advertisements from 1990 to 1999. They concluded that "knowledge of cataloging tools and resources had been the most important requirement while IT skills also appeared to be in high demand". Khurshid (2003) reviewed the job descriptions published in American Libraries and College & Research Libraries News from 2000 to 2001. She found major changes in job requirements and qualifications of catalogers occurred in the skills area. Hall-Ellis (2005) explored 150 entry-level cataloger position announcements from 2000–2003 to identify employers' expectations and requirements. She found "the entry-level cataloger needs to possess an accredited library degree, understand the cataloging code, rule interpretations, classification, subject analysis, authority control, MARC formats, database quality assurance processes, and integrated library system operations." Park (2009) conducted a content analysis of 349 job descriptions to study the roles that cataloging professionals play in the digital environment. The results indicated that "the advancement of technology has affected every aspect of the cataloging profession: job titles, competencies/skills, and responsibilities."

Another study conducted by Hall-Ellis (2015) investigated 146 entry level position announcements posted from September 2000 through August 2013. She found "An applicant for an entry-level position as a catalog librarian or a metadata specialist needs to possess an accredited library degree and to understand the emerging RDA cataloging code, rule interpretations, classification schemes, subject analysis, authority control, MARC formats, metadata schemas, database quality assurance processes, and integrated library system operations." Dieckman (2018) analyzed qualifications sought by employers for serials/continuing resources catalogers between 2002 and 2017. The results showed "qualifications related to traditional cataloging were common."

Qualifications related to serials management, and electronic resources management were often listed.

## METHODOLOGY

This research examines the qualifications and skills required of cataloging librarians in American academic libraries. Data was collected from job advertisements for cataloging librarian positions posted on universities' websites, Indeed.com, and Code4Lib Jobs from 2016 to 2023. Only full-time positions at academic libraries in the United States were included. The position must be a professional position rather than a para-professional position, or a part-time position. Job titles should have the word "cataloging", "cataloger", "catalog", or "metadata". Technical services positions could be included if the main responsibilities are cataloging. The advertisements selected should contain the section of required and desirable/preferred qualifications.

The data was entered into a spreadsheet for analysis. Duplicate postings were removed. Repeated advertisements were only counted once. The categories included institutes, posting dates, job titles, education and work experience, original cataloging, content standards, structure standards, data encoding standards, value standards, conceptual models for library data, rare materials, e-resource, library management systems, metadata tools, computer skills, and language skills. The contents collected included required and desirable/preferred qualifications in the job advertisements. Responsibilities were also examined to see if the required qualifications lacked details.

## FINDINGS

### Job Titles

A total of 108 position advertisements were identified. Table 1 shows the different job titles. Cataloging and Metadata Librarian (25) and Metadata Librarian (24) are the most popular titles in cataloging positions, followed by Head of Cataloging & Metadata (11), Technical Services Librarian (6), Cataloging Librarian (5), and Metadata Management Librarian (5). Head of Technical Services has 4, Catalog Librarian, E-Resources Metadata Librarian has 3 respectively. Other titles included in this study have 2 or 1 respectively.

**Table 1**

#### *Job Titles*

Job Titles	Number	Percentage
Cataloging and Metadata Librarian	25	23.1
Metadata Librarian	24	22.2
Head of Cataloging & Metadata	11	10.2
Technical Services Librarian	6	5.6
Cataloging Librarian	5	4.6
Metadata Management Librarian	5	4.6
Head of Technical Services	4	3.7

Catalog Librarian	3	2.8
E-Resources Metadata Librarian	3	2.8
Coordinator of Metadata	2	1.9
Metadata and Discovery Librarian	2	1.9
Acquisitions and Metadata Librarian	2	1.9
Digital Metadata Librarian	2	1.9
Special Collections Cataloger	2	1.9
Other Titles	12	11.1

### Education and work experience

The findings show that almost all (103 out of 108 or 95.4%) professional cataloging positions require the Master of Library Science (MLS) from an ALA-accredited program. 56 advertisements out of 108 or 51.9% accept equivalent degrees. Only 5 advertisements did not mention the MLS degree requirement. Those employers might think the MLS degree requirement is default.

In terms of academic library work experience, 101 advertisements out of 108 (93.5%) required experience. Experience in an academic library is preferable. 13 advertisements required a minimum of one year of experience, 24 advertisements required more than two years of experience, 25 advertisements required a minimum of three years of experience, 2 advertisements required five years of experience, 1 advertisement required seven years of experience. 36 advertisements did not specify a period.

### Standards

According to the Core Competencies for Cataloging and Metadata Professional Librarians approved by ALCTS, content standards include Resource Description and Access (RDA), AACR2, Descriptive Cataloging for Rare Materials (DCRM), Describing Archives: A Content Standard (DACS); structure standards include Metadata Encoding and Transmission Standard (METS), Dublin Core, Metadata Object Description Schema (MODS), Metadata Authority Description Schema (MADS), MARC, linked data, Bibliographic Framework (BIBFRAME), Resource Description Framework (RDF), Encoded Archival Description (EAD); value standards include the LCSH, LCC; conceptual models for library data include Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records (FRBR), Functional Requirements for Authority Data (FRAD).

**Table 2**

#### *Standards*

Standards	Number	Percentage
RDA/ AACR2	81	75.0
DACS/DCRM	15	13.9
METS	20	18.5
Dublin Core	52	48.1
MODS/MADS	42	38.9
MARC	87	80.6
Linked data	54	50.0
EAD	30	27.8

LCSH	68	63.0
LCC	62	57.4
FRBR/FRAD	10	9.3

Table 2 highlights that knowledge and experience with standards for bibliographic data (MARC, AACR2, RDA), controlled vocabularies and classification LCSH, LCC are the most frequently mentioned in the advertisements, followed by the experience with non- MARC metadata, particularly Dublin Core, MODS/MADS, and EAD. 15 advertisements mentioned familiarity with archival descriptive standards (especially DACS) and experience cataloging rare books according to DCRM standards. It is interesting that up to 54 advertisements mentioned familiarity with linked data concepts, understanding of linked data principles (e.g., BIBFRAME, RDF).

### Skills

The skills in this research include working knowledge of common bibliographic utilities (e.g., Online Computer Library Center (OCLC), or ExLibris) and data manipulation tools, experience working with national cooperative cataloging programs, performing original and complex cataloging for materials in a variety of formats, practices in specialized cataloging, such as rare materials and e-resource, experience working with integrated library management systems, computer skills, and a working knowledge of non-English languages.

**Table 3**

#### *Skills*

Skills	Number	Percentage
OCLC/ExLibris	61	56.5
PCC	19	17.6
MarcEdit/OpenRefine	37	34.3
original cataloging	49	45.4
rare materials	36	33.3
e-resource	35	32.4
library management systems	66	61.1
computer skills	41	38.0
foreign languages	43	39.8

Table 3 indicates that experience working with integrated library management systems (61.1%), bibliographic utilities OCLC/ExLibris (56.5%) are the most mentioned skills in all the job advertisements, followed by original cataloging (45.4%), and computer skills (38%). Integrated library management systems include ALMA, Sierra, Voyager, or Millennium. Discovery layer systems include Primo, Summon, and Blacklight. 49 advertisements (45.4%) mentioned experience with creating original MARC records, copy cataloging, editing, exporting, and importing bibliographic records in all formats in OCLC Connexion. 43 advertisements (39.8%) required reading knowledge of foreign languages, particularly Spanish, French, German, Italian and non-Roman scripts. 41 advertisements (38%) mentioned computer skills, including experience with scripting languages and/or tools for data manipulation: Python, Perl, PHP, Java shell script,

XSLT, etc. and knowledge of SQL and databases. 37 advertisements (34.3%) mentioned knowledge of data manipulation tools, such as MarcEdit and OpenRefine. 36 advertisements (33.3%) mentioned cataloging rare materials in archives and special collections. 35 advertisements (32.4%) mentioned cataloging of electronic resources, including integrating resources, e-books, electronic journals, and licensed databases. 19 advertisements (17.6%) mentioned experience with a national cooperative cataloging program such as the Program for Cooperative Cataloging (PCC), NACO, BIBCO, CONSER or SACO.

## DISCUSSION

Analysis of the data shows that a Master's degree in library science has been considered an essential qualification for entry into academic librarianship; meanwhile 51.9% employers accept equivalent degrees. Cataloging is an essential aspect of library work. Cataloging librarians need a strong understanding of cataloging principles, standards, as well as knowledge of metadata, and classification systems. Coursework in cataloging is a critical component of an MLS program. Students who have taken cataloging courses have the skills and knowledge necessary to work in cataloging roles. The finding in this study agrees with the previous research. Sproles and Ratledge (2004) found the demand for an ALA-MLS peaked in 1997 for technical services positions with 97% of positions requiring one. The acceptance of equivalent degrees was at its height in 1997 with 10%. This study has the same result for the requirement of the master's degree in library science. On the other hand, the data shows that more employers are willing to accept equivalent degrees.

In terms of academic library work experience, 101 advertisements out of 108 (93.5%) required previous working experience. It is a significant increase compared to the previous research. Chaudhry and Komathi (2002) reported working experience relevant to the job was mentioned as a requirement in 48.1% advertisements. Sproles and Ratledge (2004) reported technical services positions saw an upward trend towards working experience, from a low of 34% in 1987 to a high of 49% in 1997. The applicant who wants to find a position in cataloging areas should no longer expect that a graduate degree in library information science is enough. He/she should seek to gain as much practical experience as possible. Reser and Schuneman (1992) stated that a cataloger requires more training than a public services position, therefore there are less entry-level technical services positions. Sproles and Ratledge (2004) noted that experience gained on the job appears to be mandatory for most advertised positions. Applicants without prior experience will find themselves at a major disadvantage. They also declared that new hires in professional positions did not receive sufficient training.

The data indicates that traditional cataloging knowledge and skills continue to be highly valuable and necessary. Traditional cataloging skills encompass practices and techniques used to organize and describe information resources in libraries. These skills include descriptive cataloging, subject analysis and classification, authority control, and metadata creation. Most of the jobs required knowledge and experience of cataloging standards and protocols, such as RDA/AACR2, MARC, LCSH, and LCC. Over half of the jobs required experience of automated library management systems, and bibliographic utilities. Nearly half of the jobs asked for experience with non- MARC metadata, particularly Dublin Core, MODS/MADS, and EAD. 45.4% of employers ask for the skills for original cataloging, copy cataloging, editing, exporting, and importing bibliographic records in all formats in OCLC Connexion.

Cataloging is heavily dependent on technology. 38% of advertisements mentioned computer skills, including scripting languages (Python, Perl, PHP, Java shell script, XSLT, etc.), Microsoft Office software suite, SQL and databases. 34.3% of advertisements required working knowledge of common automation and data manipulation tools (MarcEdit, OpenRefine). An interesting trend was many of positions required familiarity with emerging trends and issues in cataloging, such as linked data and semantic web technologies.

The result of this study indicates 39.8% of job postings mentioned foreign language skills. 19 jobs asked for working knowledge or bibliographic knowledge of foreign languages; 14 jobs asked for reading knowledge of foreign languages; 5 jobs asked for knowledge of foreign languages; and 5 jobs required advanced reading knowledge of or proficiency in non-English languages. It appears that language skills are still desirable in cataloging positions. Beile and Adams (2000) found that 30.7% of technical services positions required or preferred foreign language skills in 1996. Deeken and Thomas (2006) reported that 64% of cataloging positions required foreign-language skills.

## CONCLUSIONS

This research studies the qualification and skills required for cataloging positions in academic libraries. Based on the findings, today's cataloging librarian in an academic library should have the following qualities:

- A Master's degree in library science (MLS) from an ALA-accredited program.
- One or more years of experience in academic libraries.
- Knowledge and experience with standards for bibliographic data and cataloging tools.
- Experience with creating original MARC records, copy cataloging, editing, exporting, and importing bibliographic records.
- Experience working with integrated library management systems. High level of computer/automation knowledge and experience. Knowledge of new technologies like Linked data.
- Working knowledge of foreign languages.

Future studies need to address the cataloging librarians' skills other than cataloging tools and resources, like management skills, interpersonal skills, project management skills, supervision/leadership ability, diversity awareness and teamwork skills. The responsibilities of cataloging librarians have been expanding over the years. Many employers require cataloging librarians to serve as the primary contact for research queries and individual consultations for faculty and students in liaison areas, participate in the library instruction program by teaching classes in the liaison area, engage in service to the libraries, the university, the community, and the profession, including serving on committees. More research should be done on the adaptability and versatility of cataloging librarians in academic libraries.

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