From Science to Librarianship

Career Motivation of the Scientist-Turned-Librarian

A Secondary Analysis of WILIS Data by Shannon Walker

Why librarianship?

"Wanted to stay in my field of study, but do something different. Science without the lab work" — WILIS respondent

The grass was not always greener for science graduates prior to the LIS degree

- 53% Left the "prior job" to seek more interesting or challenging projects
- 40% Left the "prior job" to seek a better salary

Science graduates were indistinguishable from others for nearly all work motivations and values

- Work environment: Scheduling, autonomy, quality of management
- Importance of social interaction, social good, & "making a difference"
- Opportunities for advancement, leadership, creativity
- Compensation: Salary and benefits

LIS graduates with science degrees remain in the profession and are satisfied

There were significant differences in only 3 of 67 narrow areas:
- Administration
- Access and collections
- Information services, education and research
- Information technology and consulting

What responsibilities did they hold?

- Of science graduates claimed responsibility for academic research and publications
- Of others claimed responsibility for academic research and publications

- Of science graduates claimed responsibility for database development
- Of others claimed responsibility for database development

- Of science graduates claimed responsibility for "other" IT and consulting
- Of others claimed responsibility for "other" IT and consulting

But libraries found them anyway!

- Of others claimed responsibility for academic research and publications

Research Questions

Why might someone with a science degree pursue a library career? What library settings and roles do former scientists find attractive? Understanding might help recruitment, particularly for science libraries.

Methodology

Secondary analysis of data from the Workforce Issues in Library & Information Science (WILIS) study, a career-tracking survey of graduates of North Carolina LIS programs (1964-2007). Additional coding distinguished science majors. Those with degrees in natural science and math before entering LIS programs were compared to all others (including those with applied science or engineering background).

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Which scientists sought LIS degrees?

Overall, 5% of LIS students had a science or math degree before entry.