

# Leaving Librarianship: Career Paths of Librarians Who Exit the Profession

Susan Rathbun-Grubb, MAT, MSLS, doctoral student – School of Information and Library Science, UNC Chapel Hill

## Background

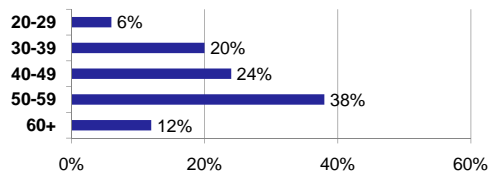
Staff and succession planning will be increasingly important to library administrators as an aging library and information science (LIS) workforce becomes eligible for retirement. Retaining early- and mid-career professionals is critical to preserving organizational continuity during this transition; however, little is known about turnover in librarianship, and whether the field is losing many librarians to information careers outside of libraries.

This research investigates the career patterns of librarians who leave the profession, and those who indicate that they intend to leave within the next three years. The study explores differences between leavers and non-leavers, and the motivations for career change as articulated by those who intend to leave LIS. This type of research may provide useful guidance to both library administrators and LIS educators, in the areas of workforce planning, staff development and retention, LIS program development, and career advisement and placement.

## Methods

The study analyzes a subset of the data collected for the Workforce Issues in Library and Information Science (WILIS) project, a large-scale retrospective career survey of graduates of North Carolina LIS programs (1964-2007). The subset consists of respondents who graduated with a Master's degree in library science, worked as a librarian or archivist in their first position after graduating from the LIS program, and are currently working (N=1,533). Quantitative and qualitative analyses of the survey data have been conducted.

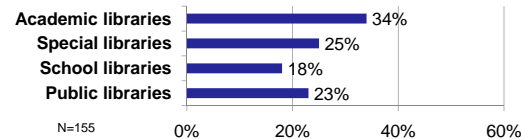
## Age Distribution of Respondents



## Results: Leavers

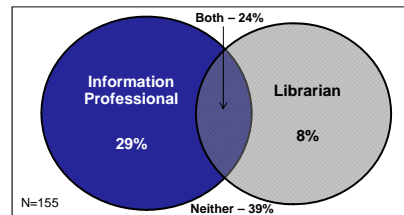
- Only **10%** of respondents have left librarianship.
- On average, they are slightly older than their counterparts who stayed in the profession, but are otherwise demographically similar.

### Where did they begin their library careers?



### Current professional identity

Do you consider yourself to be a librarian, an information professional, both, or neither?



- Post-library careers show no consistent pattern of employment in particular industries. **Current positions:**

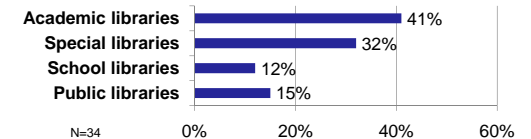


- More likely to be self-employed and to have flexible work schedules.
- Earn more than non-leavers on average, but are also working more hours than they would prefer. Both groups are equally satisfied with their jobs (92%).

## Results: Current Librarians' Intentions to Leave

- Only **3%** of respondents still working as librarians (n=1248) plan on leaving LIS within the next 3 years for reasons other than retirement.

### Where are they currently working?



### Why do they want to leave?

- ✓ Stress/burnout
  - ✓ Low salaries
  - ✓ Lack of flexible work arrangements
  - ✓ Desire to use LIS skills in a different setting
- **Career satisfaction** among those who intend to leave:
    - ✓ 59% are satisfied with a career in LIS
    - ✓ 44% would still choose the career if they "had it to do over again."
  - Given the right incentives, some leavers might be persuaded to stay.

WILIS is a collaborative research partnership of the UNC Chapel Hill School of Information and Library Science and the UNC Institute on Aging

Principal Investigators:  
Joanne G. Marshall  
Victor W. Marshall

<http://www.wilis.unc.edu/>

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