LIBRARY PROFESSIONALS: FACTS AND FIGURES

Librarians and other library professionals provide essential services for schools, universities, and communities. Americans go to libraries for free, reliable, and well-organized access to books, the Internet, and other sources of information and entertainment; assistance finding work; research and reference assistance; and programs for children, immigrants, seniors and other groups with specific needs, just to name a few.

This fact sheet explores the role of library staff in the workforce, the demographics, educational attainment and wages of librarians, as well as the benefits of union membership for librarians and other issues faced by library staff.

Library Occupations and Library Usage: By the Numbers

Library Employment

- In 2020, there were approximately 163,810 librarians, 30,810 library technicians, and 69,650 library assistants employed in public libraries, primary and secondary schools, institutions of higher education, museums and archives, as well as in libraries operated by private corporations, government agencies, religious groups and other organizations.¹

- Cumulative employment among librarians, library technicians, and library assistants dropped severely in 2020 to 264,270, down from 308,000 in 2019. This is most likely due to the widespread health and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced the vast majority of libraries to close for at least part of the year. Before the pandemic, employment of professionals had been gradually declining after hitting a peak of 394,900 in 2006.²
Library Programs

- In 2017, more than 17,000 U.S. public libraries circulated 2.2 billion print and electronic materials and offered 5.4 million programs, attended by 118.4 million members of the public. Children’s programs accounted for 56 percent of all programs offered, serving 79.9 million children and parents.³

- Electronic media, computer use and internet access are an increasing component of library materials and services, and e-books now comprise 29.7 percent of all collection materials. In addition, library patrons accessed 300,199 public computers 258 million times during 2017.⁴

- Libraries provide important training and educational programs for the public. Eighty-four percent of public libraries offer technology training programs, 73 percent provide programs to assist patrons with job applications and resume creation, and 59 percent offer assistance with finding and applying for health insurance.⁵

- In a 2016 Pew Research survey, 77 percent of Americans aged 16 and older believed libraries provided necessary resources. Among young people (aged 16 to 29), 84 percent believed libraries provided them with necessary resources.⁶

- In 2016, 46 percent of adults said they used a public library or bookmobile in the previous 12 months. Millennials (aged 18 to 35) had the highest usage rate of any generation, at 53 percent.⁷

Duties and Roles of Library Professionals

- While specific roles and responsibilities may change depending on the size and setting of libraries, librarians and other library professionals’ main role is to help people find information and conduct research on a variety of personal, professional, and academic subjects. Library professionals also teach classes, organize library collections, and tailor programs to a variety of audiences, including young children, students, professionals, and the elderly.⁸

- Librarians are also often responsible for multiple aspects of management, including ordering books and other materials, purchasing new technology, supervising library technicians, assistants and volunteers, and managing library budgets.⁹

- Library technicians assist librarians in the operation of libraries, and their tasks include assisting visitors, organizing library materials and performing administrative and clerical functions. Library assistants have similar roles as library technicians, but may have fewer independent responsibilities.¹⁰

Where Library Professionals Work

- Librarian employment in 2020 was split between public libraries (33.2 percent), elementary and secondary schools (29.4 percent), colleges, universities and professional schools (14.9 percent), federal, state and local government agencies (2.55 percent), and other libraries and archives, including those at businesses, law firms, nonprofit organizations and scientific organizations (20 percent).¹¹

- Among library technicians and assistants, 44.3 percent are employed by public libraries, and 21.96 percent work at colleges in universities. Fewer work at elementary and secondary schools (18.7 percent) and in other private and nonprofit libraries (14.2 percent).¹²
● In 2020, 25.3 percent of librarians, 45.8 percent of library technicians, and 65 percent of library assistants worked part-time.13

**Diversity and Demographics of Library Professionals**

The librarian profession suffers from a persistent lack of racial and ethnic diversity that has not changed significantly over the past 15 years.14

● Just over 83 percent of librarians identified as white in 2020. Library technicians and assistants were slightly more diverse. Among library technicians and assistants, 78.6 percent identified as white in 2020.15

● In 2020, just 9.5 percent of librarians identified as Black or African American, 9.9 percent as Hispanic or Latino (of any race), and 3.5 percent as Asian-American or Pacific Islander.16

● Librarians are slightly less diverse than the workforce of professionals in all education, training, and library occupations, which is 82 percent white. Black and African American professionals make up 10 percent of the education workforce, while Hispanic and Asian professionals represented 10.9 percent and 4.9 percent of the education workforce, respectively.17

● Librarians and other library professionals are also older than the general workforce. While Americans over 55 accounted for 19.6 percent of the total workforce in 2018, 31.5 percent of the library workforce was over the age of 55.18

**Educational Attainment**

In many settings, librarians are required to hold at least a master’s degree in library science or meet state teaching license standards for being a school librarian.19 Many other library workers, including lower-paid library technicians and library assistants have high educational attainment as well.

● In 2020, 58.15 percent of librarians held a master’s degree or higher, 26.39 percent held a bachelor’s degree, five percent held an associate’s degree, and 10.5 percent held a high school diploma.20

● In comparison, 45.5 percent of library technicians and assistants had a high school diploma or equivalent, 14.1 percent had an associate’s degree, 27.2 percent had a bachelor’s degree and 10.7 percent had a master’s, professional or doctoral degree.21

**Women and Library Professions**

● In 2020, women accounted for 83.2 percent of all librarians, and 77.5 percent of all library technicians and assistants, which was above the average of 73.5 percent for women employed in all education and library professions.22 The library professions have predominantly employed women for years. In 1995, women were 83.9 percent of librarians, and in 2003, women were 84.4 percent of librarians.23

● Women represented 82.2 percent of graduates in Master of Library Science (MLS) programs in 2018-2019. However, Black women only accounted for 4.5 percent of all MLS graduates, while Hispanic and Asian/Pacific Islander women made up 7.8 and 2.5 percent of the 2019 class, respectively.24

**Library Worker Earnings and the Wage Gap**
In 2019, the mean annual salary for librarians working full-time was $61,920. The mean hourly wage was $17.76 for library technicians and $14.34 for library assistants.25

**Regional Variance in Salaries**

Librarian earnings vary significantly from state to state. The state with the highest mean annual earnings for full-time librarians in 2019 was the District of Columbia, with mean annual earnings of $87,250, followed by California, Maryland, Washington, and Connecticut. The five lowest paying states were West Virginia, where the mean annual salary was $41,540, followed by South Dakota, Mississippi, Utah, and Kansas.26 These salaries were not adjusted for differences in cost of living across states.

**Institutional Variance in Compensation**

Library staff compensation also varied based on the type of library employer. On average, librarians working full-time at colleges, universities, and professional schools earned $68,480 in 2019, elementary and secondary school librarians earned $63,390 and librarians employed by local governments (excluding education) made $56,060.27

**Gender Inequality**

Pay inequity remains a persistent and pervasive problem in society. In 2019, median weekly earnings for women in all occupations were 81.5 percent of men’s earnings.28 For most women of color, the earnings gap is even larger: African American women earned just 69.9 cents for every dollar earned by men of all races in 2019 and Hispanic and Latina women earned just 63.8 cents on the dollar.29 Asian women were the only racial group to earn more than men of all races, but they still earned only 76.7 cents to the dollar reported by Asian men.30

Though library occupations are predominantly held by women, a wage gap still exists in the profession. In 2018, women working as full-time librarians (35 hours or more per week) reported median annual earnings that were only 92 percent of the median annual earnings reported by men.31

The American Library Association-Allied Professional Association published the 6th edition of their *Advocating for Better Salaries Toolkit* in April 2017. The toolkit includes sections on how to determine fair compensation for librarians, advocating for raises, identifying pay inequities and salary negotiation tips. Importantly, the toolkit identifies union organizing and collective bargaining as an effective means to increase librarian pay and increase equity in the workplace.32

**Health Benefits**

In 2018, 73 percent of librarians had health insurance through a current or former employer or union, and librarians working 35 hours per week or more had a much higher coverage rate of 93.4 percent. While 3.1 percent of librarians were uninsured in 2018.33

- Among library technicians in 2018, just 62 percent received health insurance through a current or former employer or union. Though 86.7 percent of library technicians working full-time received health insurance through their employer or union, a total of 6.3% of library technicians were uninsured in 2018.34
● Library assistants had coverage similar to that of library technicians. Just 62 percent had employer-provided health insurance in 2018, though the rate was higher for full-time library assistants at 84 percent, leaving 6.2 percent of library assistants uninsured in 2018.35

**The Union Difference**

Unions are an important way for library professionals to negotiate collectively for better pay, benefits, and working conditions. Unions work to elevate library professions and secure working conditions that make it possible to provide professional service.

- In 2020, professionals working in education, training, and library occupations had the highest unionization rate for any professional occupation group, 35.9 percent.36
- In 2020, 25.7 percent of librarians were union members.37

**Wages and Benefits**

Librarians and library worker union members have leveraged their collective voices to earn fair wages and stronger benefits. Wages and benefits earned by union librarians and library workers are more commensurate with the skilled and professional nature of library work.

In 2018, librarians who were union members earned 38 percent ($284) more per week than their non-union counterparts.38 While this statistic is subject to volatility due to the small sample size, trends in the data show that it pays to be a union librarian.

- In 2018, union library assistants earned 48 percent higher hourly wages ($18.67) than their non-union counterparts ($12.62).39
- Due to the small sample size, 2018 union wage data is not available for library technicians. In 2009, the last year comparative data was available, union library technicians earned 49 percent more than their non-union counterparts.40

Union members are more likely than their non-union counterparts to be covered by a retirement plan, health insurance, and paid sick leave. In 2020, 94 percent of union members in the civilian workforce had access to a retirement plan, compared with only 67 percent of non-union workers. Similarly, 96 percent of union members had access to employer provided health insurance, compared to 69 percent of non-union workers. 93 percent of union members in the civilian workforce had access to paid sick leave compared to 75 percent of non-union workers.41

**Union Success Stories**

In January 2021, professional and clerical employees (including librarians) at Augsburg University in Minneapolis, Minnesota voted to unionize and join the Office and Professional Employees International Union (OPEIU) Local 12. The staff came together to organize a union in order to gain a say in how the university was approaching the COVID-19 pandemic, including layoffs, pay cuts and reopening plans, as well as to address persistent concerns about pay equity, paid family leave and increasing workloads. After the vote to unionize, Mike Bloomberg, a librarian at the university, said, “We need systems in place to protect and support each other, and a legally binding contract will give us those systems. I believe in the Augsburg mission and I think our union will give us the security Augsburg employees need to better live that mission and serve our students.”42

In March 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic spread across the United States, many public services and institutions shut down indefinitely. In Pittsburgh, librarians and other professionals
at the Carnegie Library worked with their recently-organized union, affiliated with the United Steelworkers, to successfully demand that library employees should not be required to report to library facilities and should be paid regardless of their ability to work from home.43

In April 2019, librarians represented by the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) in the University of California system successfully ratified a new collective bargaining agreement for 2019-2024. The contract includes historic raises, totaling between 22.4 percent and 25.9 percent over a five year period. It also includes protections for librarians’ academic freedom, the right to use accrued sick time for parental leave, as well as advance notice of new job responsibilities.44

In January 2019, 30,000 teachers, librarians, counselors and other educational professionals went on strike in Los Angeles for six days. Prior to the strike, many schools only had part-time librarians. But as part of the United Teachers of Los Angeles, an affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers, they negotiated for a historic collective bargaining agreement that included a six percent pay increase over the length of the contract, as well as an increase in the number of nurses, counselors, mental health professionals and librarians in schools, guaranteeing that at least one full-time librarian will be in every LA secondary school.45

**Libraries and Library Professionals during the COVID-19 Pandemic**

As the COVID-19 virus spread across the country in March 2020, public life began to shut down, including most, if not all, public libraries. In response to the crisis, many library systems have adapted to provide virtual programs for children and highlight the many e-books and other digital downloads available in their collections. Other libraries deployed their 3D printers to produce face shields and other personal protective equipment and extended the availability of free wi-fi so visitors could access the internet from library parking lots.46

There is no doubt that the services library professionals provide are essential for members of their communities, especially those who are the most vulnerable. However, as many states and localities have begun to lift stay-at-home orders and resume in-person services, many library professionals are being forced to risk their health without sufficient personal protective equipment and lackluster health and safety plans. In many localities, library budgets are on the chopping block as tax revenues have declined during the pandemic. This has left many library professionals’ positions in question, even as more Americans are forecasted to require access to the many essential services that libraries provide, including internet access, job search assistance, and educational programs for children.47

As vaccination rates increase and many public libraries, schools and other organizations reopen their doors to the public, library administrators need to include library professionals and their unions in decision-making about the short-term and long-term future of libraries and library services.

If you are a library professional looking for more information about organizing a union to secure your rights in the workplace, please get in touch with DPE at [www.dpeaflcio.org](http://www.dpeaflcio.org).
The Department for Professional Employees, AFL-CIO (DPE) comprises 24 national unions representing over four million people working in professional and technical occupations. DPE’s affiliates represent teachers, physicians, engineers, computer scientists, psychologists, nurses, university professors, actors, technicians and others in more than 200 professional occupations.

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2 Ibid.


4 Ibid.


9 Ibid.


For the purposes of this factsheet, all private sector libraries and archives are included in the “other private and nonprofit libraries” classification, though some private, not-for-profit libraries (such as the Carnegie system of libraries in Pittsburgh) play the role of public libraries in their communities.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 In comparison, librarians were 85.3 percent white in 2015, 84 percent white in 2010 and 88.3 percent white in 2005. Source: U.S. Census Bureau. American Community Survey Microdata. 2015-2005. Available at https://data.census.gov/mdat


17 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
33 U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, Public Use Microdata, 2018. Available at https://data.census.gov/mdat/
34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
40 H Hirsch, Barry T., 2019, op. cit.
44 See elements from the agreement between UC-AFT and the University of California available at: https://ucaftlibrarians.org/2019/03/26/uc-aft-ucop-tentative-agreement-now-we-need-your-ratification/