

Library Retirements – What we can expect

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In 2004 the American Library Association updated its 2002 study of librarian retirements and the issues of library workforce recruitment.ⁱ Using the 2000 U.S. Census data the researchers (Lynch, Tordello and Godfrey) determined that retirements would be slightly delayed than described in the 2002 study (which used 1990 Census data), but with that delay more librarians would be eligible to retire (more would be age 65 or older). Figure 1 replicates a table from the 2004 study presenting retirement intervals for those individuals self-reporting as Librarian. Figure 2 is from a presentation made by Stephen Tordello to the Special Libraries Association at its annual conference in June 2005.ⁱⁱ The greatest estimated retirement wave occurs between 2010-2020, creating a potential deficit of LIS graduates between 2015-2019.

Figure 1.

Number of Librarians Reaching Age 65 (2000 Census Base)	
Number	Time Period
5,479	2000-04
12,898	2005-09
23,208	2010-14
25,014	2015-19
14,400	2020-24
8,674	2025-29
6,517	2030-34
5,544	2035-39
691	2040-44

Figure 3. U.S. LIS Program Graduation Rates and Estimated Retirements

<i>Year</i>	<i>Academic & Public Library MLS Positions</i>	<i>USDE</i>	<i>Graduation Net Change</i>	<i>Estimated Retirement Year</i>	<i>Estimated Retirement (Census Bureau)</i>	<i>Graduation Retirement Gap (all MLS)</i>
		<i>All master's degrees</i>				
1980-81	61,536	4,859		2010-11	4,642	217
1985-86		3,564	-1,295	2015-16	5,003	-1,439
1986-87		3,783	219	2016-17	5,003	-1,220
1987-88		3,674	-109	2017-18	5,003	-1,329
1988-89		3,906	232	2018-19	5,003	-1,097
1989-90	59,269	4,341	435	2019-20	3,505	836
1990-91	60,423	4,763	422	2020-21	2,880	1,883
1991-92	60,827	4,893	130	2021-22	2,880	2,013
1992-93		4,871	-22	2022-23	2,880	1,991

Although this comparison does not estimate growth in the numbers of libraries, nor the numbers of available professional positions, it does raise questions about staff shortages at the librarian level.

ⁱ Lynch, Mary Jo, Tordello, Stephen, and Thomas Godfrey. *Retirement & Recruitment: A Deeper Look*. *American Libraries*. 36(1) (January 2005): 26. Study details are available at <http://www.ala.org/ala/ors/reports/recruitretire/recruitretire-a-deeperlook.pdf> and <http://www.ala.org/ala/ors/reports/recruitretire/recruitretire-a-deeperlook-figures.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Stephen J. Tordella. Presentation made at the Special Libraries Association conference, Annual Diversity Breakfast. June 2005, Toronto, Canada. Slides are the property of Decision Demographics. Arlington, VA 22204.