

# LOW STOCK, HIGH DEMAND: STRATEGIES FOR RECRUITMENT AND MENTORSHIP OF NEW ENGINEERING LIBRARIANS

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## INTRODUCTION

While hiring committees often seek engineering information professionals with subject specific knowledge, availability of such candidates is low. The issue is not new, but will persist without active effort by practicing engineering librarians.

The following poster:

- Examines the obstacles and challenges in finding qualified engineering librarians
- Offers strategies for recruiting new librarians
- Explores opportunities for mentoring

## LITERATURE REVIEW

It may be commonly acknowledged within the engineering librarian profession that the majority of engineering librarians do not hold degrees in engineering, but there is a lack of evidence in recent literature to support this assertion. Mosley (1995) surveyed engineering special librarians and found that of 56 respondents, only 7% held undergraduate degrees in engineering. In 1998, Winston (2001) conducted a survey to examine the educational backgrounds of science and engineering librarians and found that only 3.3% of the 103 respondents had a major in engineering.

There are several studies that look at the educational backgrounds of science and technology librarians in general and findings indicate that the majority of these librarians have some sort of science background (Sandy, Lembo & Manasco, 1998; Hackenberg, 2000; Hackenberg & Chu, 2002). With the exception of Mosley's 1995 study, no research was found that looked specifically at engineering librarians. Also, 69.6% of respondents in Mosley's study were corporate librarians.

Would these same findings hold true in academic libraries?

## METHODOLOGY

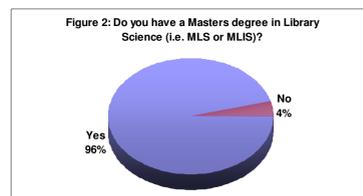
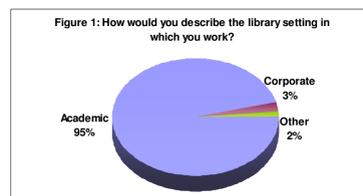
A five-question, multiple choice/yes-no answer survey was developed to elicit information from practicing engineering librarians on:

- Basic demographics
- Educational backgrounds
- Subject related duties
- Ideas on recruitment

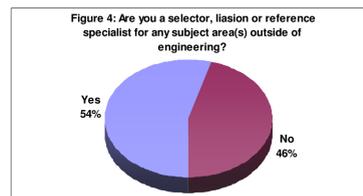
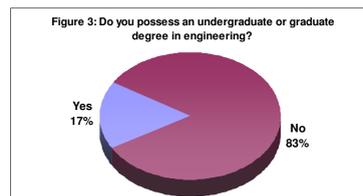
The survey was produced and hosted in Survey Monkey, an online survey instrument. An email requesting participation in the survey was sent on March 19, 2007 to ELDnet-L, the online discussion list for the Engineering Libraries Division of the American Association for Engineering Education. There are 488 subscribers to this online discussion list across North America and internationally, heavily weighted to academic libraries.

## SURVEY RESULTS

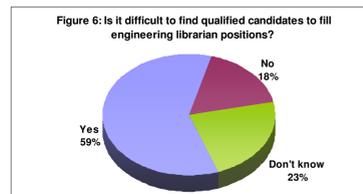
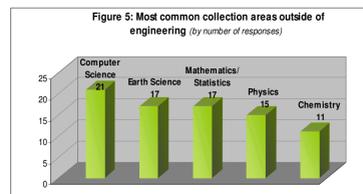
A total of 120 responses were collected; a response rate of 25%. The majority of respondents worked in academic libraries (figure 1). Of the respondents, 95.4% held Masters Degrees in Library and Information Science (figure 2):



Participants were asked if they possessed an undergraduate or graduate degree in engineering and 83% indicated that they did not (figure 3). In terms of subject specific duties, 46% percent of respondents were selectors, liaisons and/or reference specialists exclusively for engineering while 54% held subject responsibilities outside of this subject area (figure 4).



The most common selection areas outside of engineering were Computer Science, Earth Sciences, Mathematics, Physics and Chemistry (figure 5). Finally, respondents were asked if, in their opinion, it was difficult to find qualified candidates to fill engineering librarian positions. Figure 6 highlights responses to this question:



## DISCUSSION

The results from this survey provide evidence to support the assertion that few engineering librarians hold engineering degrees. Of the 120 responses collected, the majority of respondents worked in academic libraries, held Masters Degrees in Library Science, but did not hold an undergraduate or graduate degree in engineering.

While few of the survey respondents held engineering degrees, Hackenburg's (2002) study provides evidence that the majority of Sci-Tech librarians hold some sort of background in the sciences, and undoubtedly, this science background provides applicable and transferable knowledge to field of engineering. Future research could collect more in-depth information on the specific educational backgrounds of engineering librarians to explore the issue in greater detail.

A natural progression for aspiring librarians is to become subject specialists in the field where they possess an educational background. Since this is not the case when it comes to engineering librarianship, finding and recruiting individuals to this field presents a significant challenge. In order to address this problem, active effort by practicing engineering librarians is required. The concluding sections of this paper provide practical strategies for recruiting engineering librarians and explore opportunities for mentoring.

## STRATEGIES FOR RECRUITING

- Watch for student assistants who demonstrate enthusiasm/interest in the library; give them opportunities to develop skills that will take them forward
- Participate in Career Fairs at high schools, colleges, and universities
- Develop a relationship with the Careers Department at your institution in order to promote the library profession and reach out to students investigating career opportunities
- If you have an on-campus or nearby Library School program:
  - o Talk to MLIS professors about presenting to their classes on how you became an engineering librarian, who your patrons are, how you do faculty liaison work, issues in engineering librarianship, and major resources in the field
  - o Invite a science or engineering professor who you work closely with to co-present at a library school class with you. Describe to the class how faculty and librarians work together on collection development, course specific library instruction, and research
  - o Teach a one-credit course at the library school focused on engineering resources and reference

## STRATEGIES FOR MENTORING

We recognize there is a long history of mentoring in the library profession. Here we wish to present some ideas and thoughts that worked for us in our mentoring relationship:

- Be a mentor for support in different situations. It could be important to be a mentor to people within your unit, somewhere else on your campus, or beyond your campus
- Trust is perhaps the most important element to create a successful mentoring relationship

## STRATEGIES FOR MENTORING (CON'T)

- Mentoring goes beyond training. Mentoring can include any further support you and your mentee think is relevant and important. Such as:
  - o Both formal and informal mentoring. Schedule regular meetings with your mentee, but also be available via email or IM should questions arise. Offer general support as a resource for any questions
  - o Be proactive. Extend offers to read over resumes and cover letters, practice interview questions, or be an 'audience' for rehearsal of presentations. Mentees may be concerned that you are too busy for such things, and it's important to let them know you are available

## SUGGESTIONS FOR UPCOMING ENGINEERING LIBRARIANS

- **Learn specialized language/terminology**
  - Read through engineering magazines such as *Prism*; keep an engineering dictionary at hand to look up new words and concepts
- **Learn about trends in the field**
  - Set up alerts for engineering journals such as *Journal of Engineering Education* and join the mailing list for *Science and Technology Librarianship* (<http://www.library.ucsbc.edu/ist/>)
  - Sign up for online discussion lists such as ELDNET, PAMNET, LIS-SCITECH, STS-L
  - Sign up for newsfeeds from Blogs such as SciTech Library Question (University of Alberta) and Engineering Resources (Drexel University)
  - Join professional societies such as ASEE
  - Take time to familiarize yourself with the research areas of the faculty members at your institution
- **Learn the collections/literature**
  - Use books such as *Using the Engineering Literature*, edited by Bonnie Osif; *Guide to Information Sources in Engineering* by Charles Lord; *Information Sources in Grey Literature* by C.P. Auger; *Information Sources in Engineering*, edited by R.A. MacLeod and J. Corlett. For additional titles, search LOC Subject Heading: Technical Literature

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