

Librarians for the Study of the African-American Experience: A Content Analysis of Position Announcements, 1970–2019

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Every isolated group or race must have its “preservers;” those who keep alive their rich heritage. Today your role is vital to the salvation of black people and perhaps all people. Our society appears to be at the crossroads. Social problems, that have direct bearing on the destiny of black people are increasing. Problems growing out of poverty, population explosion, minority discrimination and racial unrest ignited by the uncertainty of action by governmental officials are the everyday syndrome of American life.¹

— Norman W. Walton, in his paper “Black Librarians, Archivists and Black Collections,” presented at the Institute for Training Librarians for Special Black Collections and Archives, April 1973.

To document the change over time in African-American/Africana/Black Studies (AABS) librarianship in the United States, this study analyzed 71 position announcements published in physical and digital sources beginning in 1970 through 2019.² Using content analysis, the author found that most AABS librarians should expect to have an MLIS and work in academic settings where they develop collections and provide reference services. This study hopes to fill a gap in the current research by exploring how these positions, the job market, and librarianship in this particular field have evolved. Administrators assessing staffing needs, faculty seeking collaborative partners, students interested in AABS librarianship, and anyone curious about the evolution of library work will find this study useful.

Introduction

In 1619, people of African descent disembarked from their first forced voyage to North America, marking the beginning of the African-American experience and an inextricable link to United States history. However, almost 350 years passed before academic programs dedicated to the study of African-American life and history gained official recognition at an American uni-

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versity.³ When programs did emerge during the 1968–69 academic year, they did so amid social movements for ethnic studies and nationwide civil unrest. This sudden growth in new programs often translated to AABS library collections suffering from rather hasty organization because their campus libraries lacked the staff, funding, and knowledge to answer the demands of a new curriculum.⁴ During these formative years, underprepared librarians, along with faculty, focused the bulk of their efforts on stocking many of these “instant black collections” with mostly reprinted material.⁵ Over the next four decades, AABS programs and departments proliferated rapidly and, as of 2013, the number of institutions with what Abdul Alkalimat identified as “formal units” in AABS stood at 361.⁶ Scholar Henry Louis Gates, Jr. recently argued that the “role of black studies in the academy has never been more crucial,” and that “its interdisciplinary perspectives have not just added information; they have also helped bridge a serious intellectual gap among academic specialties and disciplines.”⁷ Creating knowledge and bridging intellectual gaps requires not only substantial resources but, perhaps more importantly, knowledge about where those resources are and how to access them. But what do we know about the librarians who have long served as guides to students, faculty, and scholars in AABS? Who are the information professionals that help scholars connect the past with the present? In 2018, librarian Courtney Becks observed that, when it comes to the library and information studies literature, very little “has been written about African American Studies *collections* specifically”; the author of this study argues that the same sentiment applies to African American Studies *librarians*.⁸ And so, this study seeks a better understanding of those individuals and their work. Specifically, it hopes to gain insight into the change over time in their roles, responsibilities, and qualifications, in addition to the location and nature of the institutions in which they labor.

Literature Review

Readers of LIS literature are likely familiar with content analysis and its application to job announcements. The popularity of this approach stems in part from the thousands of MLIS graduates and early-career librarians interested in the job market every year, as well as researchers interested in long-term shifts in library trends.⁹ However, despite its rather widespread application, no previous publications analyzing the content of AABS librarian job announcements could be located.

Other area studies positions have received scholarly attention.¹⁰ In 2009, Jesús Alonso-Regalado and Mary Van Ullen examined the Latin American and Caribbean Studies (LACS) specialists’ changing “requirements, roles, and responsibilities” from 1970 to 2007 and subsequently built a blueprint around which the present study was constructed.¹¹ Consulting sources like print copies of *College & Research Libraries News* and an archived listserv, Alonso-Regalado and Van Ullen found that, as the years passed, LACS librarians were increasingly expected to have a related advanced degree, Spanish language proficiency, and the ability to manage a rising number and variety of duties.¹² In addition to developing collections, providing reference services, and teaching, the authors noted that LACS librarians were being asked to demonstrate proficiency with electronic resources and instruction methods, all while routinely facing budget uncertainties.¹³

Previous researchers also explored area studies librarianship using surveys. In 1972, Robert D. Stuart surveyed area specialist bibliographers, library administrators, and faculty members on their perceptions of area studies librarians. He wanted to know more about what

each group thought the librarian ought to be doing on a daily basis.¹⁴ Stueart found several points of disagreement. For instance, librarians liked the idea of evaluating materials in relation to curriculum, teaching with materials, weeding, taking buying trips, and attending faculty meetings and area librarian conferences, whereas faculty and administration tended to disagree with the librarian performing such duties.¹⁵ Administrators were not as enthusiastic about sending librarians away on buying trips and conferences; faculty members were similarly uneasy about librarians attending faculty meetings and their role in instruction.¹⁶ Stueart also noted that librarians were tasked with so many duties “that often he isn’t sure what he is or what he is not supposed to be,” — a description that busy librarians might find as befitting now as it was nearly five decades ago, gendered language aside.¹⁷

Scholars exploring position announcements can use content analysis to trace the origins and patterns of certain skillsets. William C. Robinson reviewed *C&RL News* issues published from 1980 to 1991 to determine what skills and experience were most required of applicants for collection development and management positions. Robinson analyzed over 400 positions; key among his findings were that 80% of the positions advertised required time on the reference desk and 45% of announcements asked for applicants with effective communication skills.¹⁸ In 2002, Croneis and Henderson scoured issues of *C&RL News* published between 1990 and 2000 for announcements containing either “digital” or “electronic” in the title. The authors found that the number of positions handling responsibilities of an electronic or digital nature was rising in tandem with the number of duties these librarians were expected to perform. Additionally, the authors noticed increasing variety in the types of institutions advertising these positions.¹⁹ Croneis and Henderson built from Gary W. White’s 1999 study of academic subject specialist position announcements covering the better part of a decade, from 1990 to 1998. White consulted print copies of *Chronicle of Higher Education*, *American Libraries*, and *C&RL News* to look at advertisements for librarian positions concentrated in business and the sciences, taking note of their required skills, desired education, and desired qualifications. Chief among White’s observations was a noted increase in skills and responsibilities related to technology.²⁰ Rebmann, Molitor, and Rainey performed a content analysis of job ads placed from 1996–2010 in the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) archive. Using “distance” as their key search term, the authors sought to discover what trends and patterns surrounded distance learning skillsets. They noticed a sharp rise in the number of positions requiring these skills in the late 1990s and then a fairly steady decline from 1999 to 2010.²¹ Their study updated and expanded upon one published in 2006 by Boff, Singer, and Stearns, where the authors analyzed job announcements from 1970–2004 for librarian positions related to outreach. While Boff, Singer, and Stearns found that these positions were not advertised in *C&RL News* until 1979, they did find that the demand for people to fill these positions was on the rise, as late as 2004.²² Yingqi Tang also modeled a 2013 study after the work of Boff, Singer, and Stearns. Among 82 distance education announcements found in *American Libraries* between 1970 and 2010, Tang noted that communication skills and being technologically savvy were among the most sought-after qualities.²³

Content analysis is useful for exploring positions thoroughly. Rebecca S. Albitz used *College & Research Libraries* job announcements from 1996 to 2001 in her analysis of electronic resources librarian positions. Albitz’s findings mirrored White’s in many ways, including those that suggested librarians were asked to perform a myriad of duties, including managing electronic resources. Moreover, Albitz found that electronic resources librarians’ responsibili-

ties often matched those of subject specialists, with the perhaps surprising requirement of previous work experience totaling three years or *less*.²⁴ In his 2006 examination of job ads for the “newly emerging position of Instructional Design Librarian,” John D. Shank analyzed ten job announcements from 1999 to 2004 and found that most positions required applicants to have knowledge of internet navigation, instructional technology, and products like Adobe, as well as the ability to create online learning resources.²⁵ Similarly, Linda Frederiksen explored Access Services librarian job announcements in *College & Research Libraries News* and found 217 advertisements published between 1977 and 2004 with “access services” in the title. The author discovered that these positions were not typically entry-level, existed at libraries of various sizes and different types, and usually included circulation among their required duties.²⁶ As the volume of previous scholarship makes clear, content analysis of job announcements is not a new methodology in library science literature, yet it remains useful for exploring a variety of positions and skills.

Methodology

Researchers use content analysis to ask questions of a variety of data sources. While its origins are traced back to the early days of journalism and mass communication, where it was used to study newspaper content, library researchers today value this methodology for the non-reactive and unobtrusive way it can be used to obtain data from human-produced materials.²⁷ Rather than observing people and their behavior directly, LIS researchers can mine print resources, websites, and images for information without geographic limitations or IRB approval.

A combination of digital and analog sources informed this study. The author gleaned 71 position advertisements from websites and listservs, along with classified ads printed in *College & Research Libraries News* and *Library Journal*. Collecting and analyzing sources began with either a keyword search or by reading through physical journals’ classified section. Only those announcements for a professional position with “African-American,” “Black,” “Afro-,” and/or “Africana” were considered. Terminology specific to the position varied, including job titles with “librarian,” “bibliographer,” “curator,” and “specialist,” as part of their description. Duplicated postings were not considered; however, positions that were advertised, for example, two years apart, were both included. Next, the details of each qualified job advertisement were entered into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and then coded for entry into SPSS. To periodize these announcements, the author divided results into year groups: 1970–1985; 1986–2002; and 2003–2019.

The author posed the following research questions to the resulting data:

- R1. How has the title of this position changed over time?
- R2. What pattern do the job advertisements reveal over time? How do the job ads correspond to degree-granting institutions and where are they geographically?
- R3. How have the educational and professional requirements changed for this position?
- R4. How have the duties and responsibilities of this position evolved?

Assumptions and Limitations

It was assumed that by employing the aforementioned methods and consulting the sources outlined above, the number of position announcements collected would enable a useful analysis. It was also assumed that the position announcements collected would contain enough data to answer the research questions. Further, it was assumed that the roles, responsibilities, and

qualifications listed in these position announcements were actually used in judging applicants and that the librarians who assumed these roles actually carried out these duties. Lastly, it was assumed that regardless of the position's title, the librarians filling these particular positions did in fact work with collections and researchers focused on African-American life. This study was limited by its inability to obtain position announcements published in obscure resources. This study also could not consider any job ads published electronically that were deleted or obscured by a broken URL link. Additionally, this study is limited by the extent of archived information stored by websites like [Indeed.com](https://www.indeed.com) and the IFLA online archive. Once positions are filled, they are removed from [Indeed.com](https://www.indeed.com) and the IFLA archive dates back to August 1995, so this study uses *C&RL News* and *Library Journal* in their entirety from 1970 to 2019 and uses others to the extent possible.

This study did not consider job advertisements for paraprofessional staff or administrative positions. Also, this study could not include positions that may have been advertised internally and therefore published only electronically on a particular institution's job website, and only for a short period of time. Those announcements typically go unnoticed by larger aggregated employment websites and this study could not reasonably attempt to locate and analyze all positions advertised since 1970. Finally, this study made no differentiation between librarians or curators or subject specialists in Africana Studies or Black Studies, for instance. This study may be the first of its kind and was therefore interested broadly in any librarian position facilitating study of the African-American experience.

Findings

Eight separate resources (two print and six digital) yielded the 71 announcements used in this study: 45.1% came from *C&RL News*; 14.1% from IFLA online archive; 12.7% from *Library Journal*; 12.7% from [Indeed.com](https://www.indeed.com); 9.8% from Google keyword searches; 2.8% from ALA listserv; 1.4% from ACRL listserv, and 1.4% from the LALIBJOBS listserv. As was expected, all 16 announcements placed between 1970 and 1986 came from print sources while, conversely, only one announcement from a print source was located from 2003–2019. Overall, 57.8% of ads came from physical resources and 42.2% were digital.

Institutions hiring AABS librarians fell into three familiar categories: academic, public, and special/research. Academic libraries include both public and private colleges and universities. Advertisements for public roles came from the Seattle Public Library, District of Columbia Public Library, New Orleans Public Library, and the Multnomah County Library in Oregon. Special/research libraries include the Schomburg Center, Library Company of Philadelphia, and the Library of Congress, among others. In total, 73.2% of the ads were for academic library roles, 18.3% were for special/research libraries, and 8.5% were for public library positions. Academically, 27 out of 29 (93.1%) schools offered at least an undergraduate minor in AABS. One school only had an Ethnic Studies department and, the other, while not having a dedicated AABS program, is an HBCU. Fourteen positions were advertised at schools offering just an undergraduate degree, while 21 (42%) of the ads were placed by institutions offering AABS as a stand-alone PhD, co-PhD, or PhD emphasis, and 88% of the job ads from academic institutions came from those offering at least a bachelor's degree. The two most frequent categories that ads fell into were from Northeastern schools offering a bachelor's degree (18%) and Midwestern schools offering both bachelor's and master's degree programs (16%). As this shows, schools with AABS programs of study are much more likely to have librarians to

support those students and faculty. This study does not account for “Ethnic Studies” or “Area Studies” librarians whose duties might also include AABS.

In their roles, this study confirmed what readers may have suspected: most AABS librarians would be asked to provide reference assistance (77.5%), develop collections (78.9%), and have an MLIS (80.3%). Providing instruction was required of 32.4% of the positions.

R1. How has the title of this position changed over time?

As might be expected, the language used to describe these positions has changed since 1970. This study found 60 distinct titles. Announcements were categorized into seven title groups, as illustrated by Table 1. Most recently, from 2003–2019, “librarian” appeared in 75%, or 18 out of the 24 job titles posted. Titles such as “subject specialist,” “curator,” and “bibliographer” rose from 35.5% of job titles posted between 1986 and 2002, then fell to 12.5% of position titles advertised most recently.

TABLE 1				
Job Titles over the Years				
	1970–1985	1986–2002	2003–2019	Total
Librarian	8	12	18	38 (53.5%)
Cataloger	2	5	2	9 (12.7%)
Curator	0	6	2	8 (11.3%)
Bibliographer	2	4	1	7 (9.9%)
Librarian/Bibliographer	2	3	0	5 (7.0%)
Subject Specialist	2	1	0	3 (4.2%)
Subject specialist/librarian	0	0	1	1 (1.4%)

R2. Do the job advertisements reveal any sort of pattern over time? How do the job ads correspond to degree-granting institutions and where are they geographically?

As Figure 1 indicates, in years when jobs were advertised, the number of postings hovered around one to three per year before experiencing a three-year spike beginning in 2017. Five position announcements were located for 2017, six in 2018, and five again in 2019.

Geographically, the author used a regional distinction drawn by the National Geographic Society to separate the United States into five areas: West, Southwest, Midwest, Southeast, and Northeast.²⁸

Geographically, the 71 job announcements were distributed unevenly: 25 in the Northeast, 20 in the Midwest, 13 in the Southeast, 11 in the West, and 2 in the Southwest. The most common time and place for a job announcement was in the Northeast from 1986–2002 (18.3%). On the other hand, only two positions were advertised for positions in the Southwest, most recently in 2011. Together, the Northeast and Midwest were home to 63.3% of all of the announcements located. That these two regions should combine for so many AABS positions is not surprising, considering the number of colleges, universities, and research centers they contain compared to regions with significantly smaller populations and academic institutions, like the Southwest.

FIGURE 1
Number of Job Postings Located per Year, 1970–2019

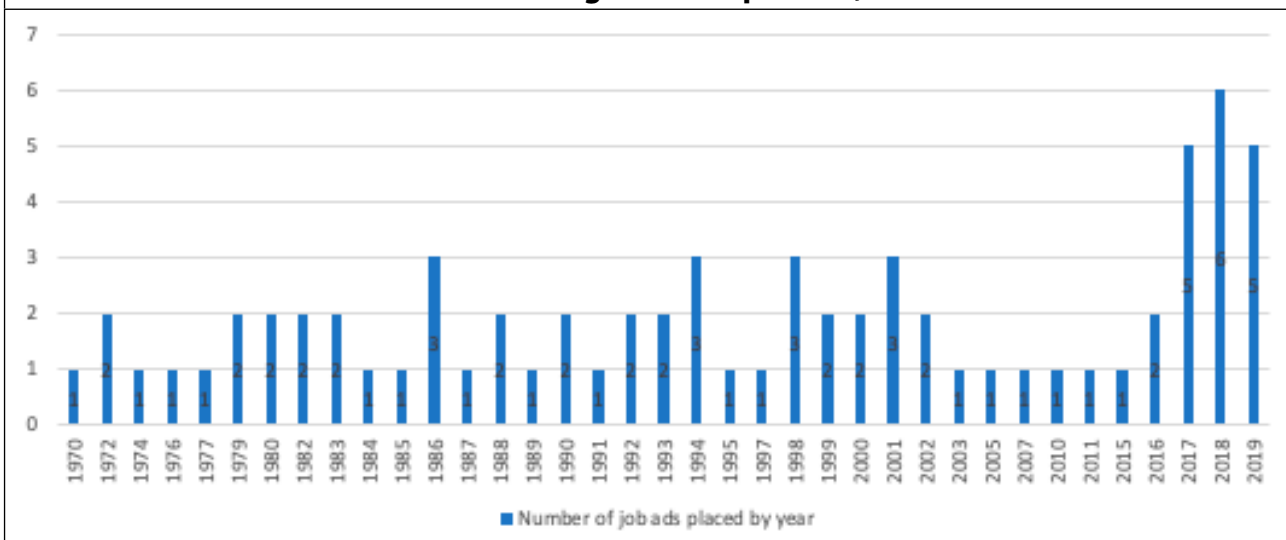
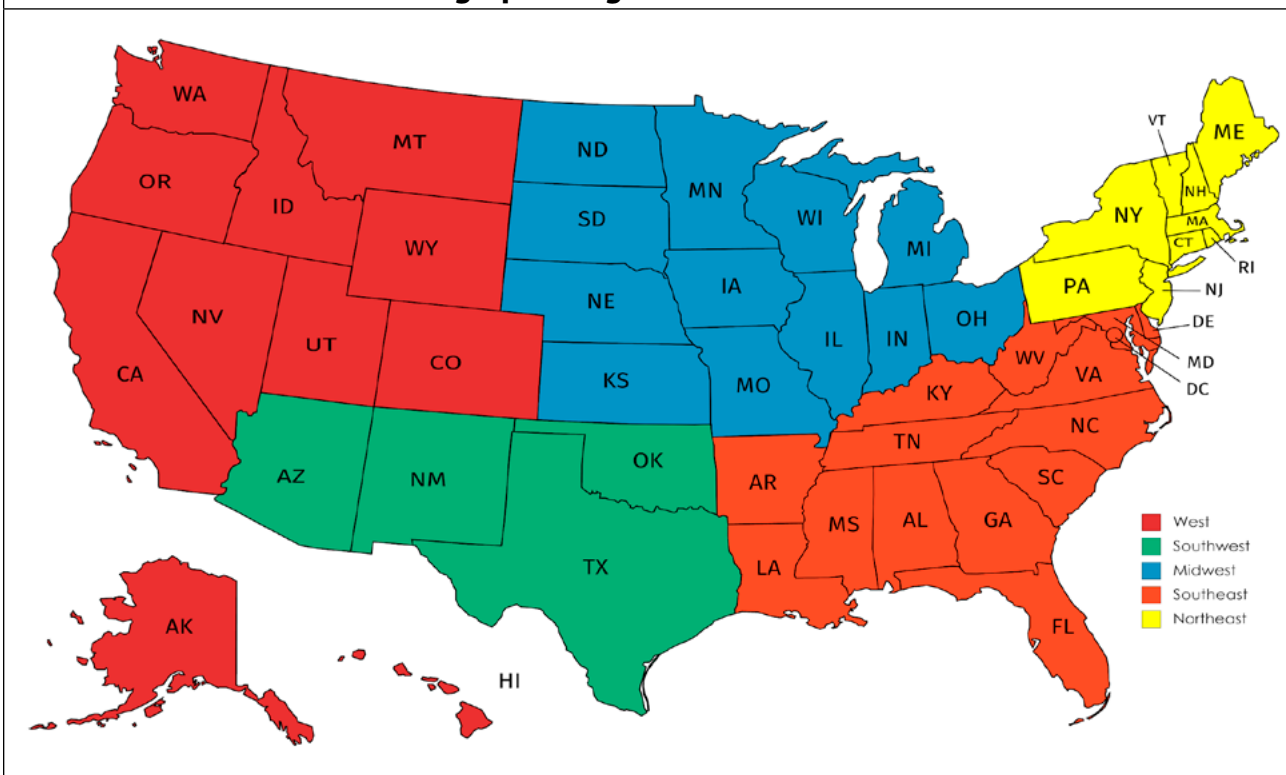


FIGURE 2
Five Geographic Regions of the United States



Map created using MapChart, <https://mapchart.net/usa.html>

Academic libraries contributed 52 of the job announcements, with 29 different schools represented. Twenty-two of those (75.9%) were public institutions while the remaining seven (24.1%) were private schools. Their average student population was 32,111, meaning that 89.6% of the positions were posted from “very large” institutions.²⁹ In fact, only three schools had populations below 10,000 students.

R3. How have the educational and professional requirements changed for this position?

As Table 2 indicates, 57 of the 71 (80.3%) advertised positions required that applicants possess an MLIS. This percentage increased and then decreased over time. An MLIS was required in 75% percent of positions from 1970–1985; that number increased to 90.3% from 1986–2002, and then dropped down to 70.8% from 2003–2019.

TABLE 2 Number of Positions that Required an MLIS Degree				
	1970–1985	1986–2002	2003–2019	Total
Not required	4	3	7	14 (19.7%)
Required	12	28	17	57 (80.3%)

Table 3 indicates whether a job advertisement listed a master’s degree of any type among its educational qualifications, and 60 of 71 (84.5%) did. Somewhat mirroring the pattern in Table 2, 75% of ads from 1970–1985 required a master’s degree of any kind; that number increased to 93.5% before sliding back to 79.2% from 2003–2019. As far as how this requirement varied by institution, all public libraries asked for master’s degrees from their applicants, 88.5% of academic positions did the same, and less than half (46.2%) of special/research libraries had the same requirement.

TABLE 3 Number of Job Ads that Listed a Master’s Degree of Any Type as a Requirement				
	1970–1985	1986–2002	2003–2019	Total
Not required	4	2	5	11 (15.5%)
Required	12	29	19	60 (84.5%)

In some cases, holding only a library-related graduate degree is not enough for librarians who specialize in a particular discipline or area of study. Table 4 shows to what extent an additional degree, such as a bachelor’s or master’s degree in a field like history or African-American Studies, was preferred or required. This study found that nearly half of all jobs preferred or required that applicants have additional educational training. Again, percentages spiked in those positions posted from 1986–2002, rising from 43.8% to 61.3% and then dropping to 37.5% from 2003–2019. One job announcement made a second degree as an absolute requirement. Institutionally, 59.6% of academic libraries, 16.7% of public libraries, and 23.1% of special/research libraries preferred or required an additional degree of its applicants.

TABLE 4 Positions that Either Preferred or Required an Additional Academic Degree				
	1970–1985	1986–2002	2003–2019	Total
Not preferred/required	9	12	15	36 (50.7%)
Preferred/required	7	19	9	35 (49.3%)

Proficiency in a language other than English helps librarians open new research avenues for students and faculty. Table 5 illustrates the preference or requirement of an additional

language or languages by hiring committees. Overall, nearly half (47.9%) of the advertised positions either preferred or required that their librarians have knowledge of one or more languages other than English; for twelve positions (16.9%), it was a requirement.³⁰ By institution type, 31 of the ads came from academic libraries and three from research/special libraries.

TABLE 5 Languages in Addition to English Preferred or Required				
	1970–1985	1986–2002	2003–2019	Total
Not preferred/required	7	13	17	37 (52.1%)
Preferred	9	9	4	22 (31%)
Required	0	9	3	12 (16.9%)

Table 6 illustrates the extent to which previous work experience was preferred or required of job applicants. Overall, 67.6% of job announcements preferred or required previous work experience. This percentage began at 50% in the first year group, rose to 70.1%, and increased yet again to 75% most recently.

Specifically, 45.1% of announcements asked candidates to have experience ranging from one to three or more years. One announcement asked for four years of experience while another asked for five. Nearly one-quarter (22.5%) of all positions did not require previous experience while 15.5% of the ads did not specify what, if any, their requirements were. Institutionally, all 13 special/research librarian positions preferred or required previous experience, while 63.5% of academic libraries, and 33.3% of public libraries did the same.

TABLE 6 Previous Work Experience Preferred or Required				
	1970–1985	1986–2002	2003–2019	Total
Not preferred/required	8	9	6	23 (32.4%)
Preferred/required	8	22	18	48 (67.6%)

R4. How have the duties and responsibilities of this position evolved?

Librarians perform in a wide range of roles. Technological advances mean that the skills required of AABS librarians continue to evolve; however, some duties remain the same, if in name only.

Table 7 shows how the duty of collection development has figured into the responsibilities of the AABS librarian. Overall, 78.9% of job ads listed collection development as part of their required duties. Collection development has been a consistent charge, listed in 81.3%, 77.4%, and then 79.2% of job announcements over the three groups. Institutionally, 84.6% of academic libraries and 76.9% of special/research libraries made it a requirement. For public libraries, it was listed in 33.3% of advertisements.

TABLE 7 Collection Development Duties for the AABS Librarian over Time				
	1970–1985	1986–2001	2002–2019	Total
Not required	3	7	5	15 (21.1%)
Required	13	24	19	56 (78.9%)

Table 8 illustrates how the requirement of instruction has changed over time. In total, 32.4% of advertised positions required their librarians to engage in instruction while more than two-thirds (67.6%) percent) did not. From 1970–1985, one out of 16 job ads required teaching as part of its duties; on the other hand, 14 positions required it from 1986–2002 and that number dropped back down to eight in the last year group. Most teaching was required by academic positions. 42.3% of academic ads listed instruction as a duty whereas no public librarians were expected to teach, and 7.7% of librarians in special/research libraries could expect to lead instruction sessions.

TABLE 8 Instruction Duties Required of the Librarian				
	1970–1985	1986–2002	2003–2019	Total
Not required	15	17	16	48 (67.6%)
Required	1	14	8	23 (32.4%)

Table 9 shows how reference duties have factored into AABS positions over time. Overall, 77.5% percent of job ads listed reference—either general or specialized—as part of their required duties. Reference duties have been consistently important, required by 87.5% of positions in the first group, 74.2% in the second, and then 75% most recently. Institutionally, academic librarians would provide reference services in 80.8% of positions; public librarians would provide reference in 83.3% of their roles; and special/research librarians would offer reference services in 61.6% of their positions.

TABLE 9 Reference Duties for the Librarian				
	1970–1985	1986–2002	2003–2019	Total
Not required	2	8	6	16 (22.5%)
Required	14	23	18	55 (77.5%)

Regarding subject area responsibilities, AABS librarians have increasingly been able to focus solely on AABS. For example, from 1970–1985, 11 out of 16 positions asked that AABS librarians also handle duties related to, for instance, Asian American studies or Social Sciences. By contrast, in jobs posted from 2003–2019, 4 out of 24 required the same. In other words, the percentage of AABS librarians who focused only on AABS increased from 31.3% to 83.3% over time.

Discussion and Conclusions

According to the analysis, most AABS professionals have “librarian” in their title, possess an MLIS, and perform collection development and reference duties. This study found that a library science graduate degree has been a common requirement since 1970 and, in fact, was required in 90.3% of job announcements placed in 1986–2002. From 2003–2019, the MLIS requirement dipped to 70.8% of advertisements. Some of this recent drop could be attributed to institutions accepting either an MLIS or a PhD in, say, African-American Studies or history. This drop could also be tied to a reevaluation of librarian education that appears to be gaining traction.³¹ More data and analysis are required to better understand this percentage decrease,

however. More generally, this study found that 81.2% of AABS positions required at least a master's degree of some kind, illustrating that a vast majority of AABS librarians hold positions that are professional in stature; however, further research is needed to track the salary history and tenure-track status of these positions. Students interested in AABS librarianship should certainly plan on at least one master's degree after their undergraduate work.

Respected and relied on for their expertise, librarians—particularly those in academic settings—were often asked to have extensive training. The data showed that for 49.3% of the positions, it was preferred or required that the candidate have a second, related academic degree. These were often in humanities and social sciences disciplines. As proponents of lifelong learning, it should surprise no one that extensive educational training has remained important to hiring committees; this study found that the number of positions requiring schooling beyond the MLIS climbed from 43.8% to 61.3%, before dropping down to 37.5% in the last group. Similar to the MLIS trend, positions advertised from 2003–2019 that required a second degree dropped significantly, in this case, 23.8%, from the previous group. It is perhaps disappointing then to find that less than half of academic AABS librarians teach. Demonstrating expertise and building relationships with students, faculty, and researchers is perhaps the best way to build enthusiasm for AABS and get the attention of the folks crunching the numbers for next year's budget. Library leaders should make every effort to get their AABS librarians into the classroom or facilitating public discussions; when students and patrons witness firsthand the added value librarians provide, it makes a lasting impact.

In that same vein, previous work experience was also important to hiring committees. Data extracted from the job advertisements showed a steady percentage increase from 1970 to 2019, from 50% of ads in the first group to 75% of them in the last. Overall, 67.6% of position announcements either preferred or required previous experience. This represents a marked difference from the first Black Studies librarians in the late 1960s who were often faculty members or librarians thrust into the position. A breakdown by institution reveals that 100% of special/research librarian positions asked for previous experience; that figure was 63.5% for academic libraries and 33.3% for public libraries. This increase is reassuring because it supports the professional image of this position on campus; public libraries still have room for improvement in this area.

One surprising requirement was that applicants have knowledge of at least one language other than English. Overall, 47.9% percent of positions either preferred or required this skill. While some may question the need for AABS librarians to have international language proficiency, the reasoning becomes clearer considering librarians may be asked to develop collections for an Africana Studies program, for instance, that has much larger geographic and linguistic scope. To that end, it makes sense that 59.6% of academic library jobs preferred or required a second language proficiency, with 19.2% actually requiring it. Knowledge of international languages also opens doors for AABS librarians to collaborate with, for example, Spanish or Portuguese departments, as a way of incorporating Afro-Latino and Afro-Brazilian history and resources into the cultural component of language coursework. The opportunities there are only limited by our creativity.

Titles for AABS positions have changed over the years while maintaining some consistency. From 1970 to 1985, eight of the announcements were for “librarians” while two each were for “bibliographer” and “subject specialist.” As time passed, “librarian” became more common among academic library positions while titles like “bibliographer,” “subject special-

ist," and "curator" disappeared entirely from positions advertised from 2003 to 2019. In fact, an academic library has not sought a "bibliographer" since 2001, a "subject specialist" since 1998, or a "curator" since 2002. Perhaps the more general "librarian" description grew in popularity as the number and nature of duties increased over time, while titles that seemed to pigeon-hole the position fell short in their descriptive accuracy. Surprisingly, no positions of "reference librarian" specializing in African-American studies were located. Likewise, *C&RL News* advertised many positions for Humanities or Social Science librarians over the decades, yet none of those located required expertise in AABS. This might point to the reluctance on the part of reference departments to dedicate a position to AABS—a sign that it still faces an uphill climb to gain an equal footing with disciplines like history and American Studies.

Despite variations in position title, core duties for these positions remained fairly consistent over the decades. Both reference services and collection development continue to feature heavily in the librarian's daily tasks. Since 1986, 77.5% of AABS librarian positions called for the development of collections. In the most recent time period, 75% of librarians were required to provide reference assistance. Reference has long been important for librarians in AABS, appearing in 77.5% of job ads since 1970. Instruction has become more important since the 1980s and continued to be a requirement for 33.3% of librarian positions since 2002. Instruction was a duty in 42.3% of academic librarian positions while it was not a duty in any of the public library roles advertised.

When compared with Alonso-Regalado and Van Ullen's similar analysis of position announcements for Librarians for Latin American and Caribbean Studies, this study revealed many similarities and found some interesting points of departure. For instance, Alonso-Regalado and Van Ullen also found "librarian" to be the most common job title, replacing "bibliographer." Similarly, most of their job ads came from academic institutions and required the duties of providing reference services and developing collections. Overall, however, instruction was required of 57.4% of the positions they analyzed, compared to just 32.4% of all AABS roles. Moreover, even with twelve more years in its scope, this study located 23 fewer job ads, representing significantly fewer AABS ambassadors building relationships with students, faculty, and patrons in the classroom.

Continued analysis of AABS position advertisements will shed more light on the profession. For instance, analysis may explicate the change in the skills required of AABS librarians with the digital revolution beginning in the 1990s. Or interviews with librarians in these roles could describe how their jobs differed from the position described in the announcement. Could the recent spike in position announcements reflect changes in academic libraries or academia overall, or reflect library budgets growing or shrinking? The long-term impacts of COVID-19 and social justice movements will surely make for important studies. For instance, how did AABS librarians handle the transition to online learning and building e-resource collections and did the independent Black presses, who often project the voices of the underrepresented in the form of the printed book, survive?

With 16 postings in the final three years of this study, sources for future research appear to be plentiful. The increase documented in this study could be recency bias, in that internet advertisements are difficult to access as time passes or they disappear entirely after the positions are filled. This spike could also be the result of there simply being more AABS programs or an increase in their student enrollment. Perhaps future scholars will find a correlation between the number of job ads placed and the economic fortunes of the universities hiring.

This recent increase can also be viewed with some skepticism. With the drastic increase in AABS departments over the decades, one would have expected a corresponding increase in the number of AABS librarian positions; however, the number of job ads remained steady until 2017. Does this increase finally mark a turning point? Is this when university administration begins supporting AABS faculty, students, and researchers? As Frederiksen argued, analyzing the changes in positions “acts as an indicator of how the academic library continues to define and present itself.”³² With the growing number of underrepresented groups, departments, and programs across college campuses, libraries would do well to demonstrate—not just talk about—their commitment to student learning and research by having an AABS librarian on staff. If what Frederiksen said is true, then the relatively stagnant number of job ads over the past 50 years illustrates the work left to be done in this regard.

The announcements also tell the reader something in the pattern they *do not* reveal. For instance, the first public librarian announcement appeared in 1972, not far behind academic libraries; however, it would be another 25 years before a public library position advertisement was located. The IFLA archive, which dates back to 1996, contained public librarian job ads from 1997 and again in 1998. Perhaps this is an indication that the present study’s resources were not optimal for locating public library jobs. Or maybe this is an indication that public libraries are lagging behind their academic counterparts when it comes to addressing their collections and community’s research needs. In fact, only two of those 16 jobs posted from 2017–2019 were by public libraries. This is an opportunity for AABS librarians to reach across library lines to shore up the disparity: co-curate book displays and exhibits in each other’s libraries, co-host guest speakers, and co-develop collections that build patron excitement and interest in AABS titles. Patron enthusiasm could translate into bigger budgets for AABS positions and collections moving forward. Additionally, these partnerships can go a long way in reducing the barriers between a campus and its surrounding community—a common challenge for institutions of higher education.

On university and college campuses, AABS librarians and faculty should find every opportunity to collaborate in strengthening their collections and their partnerships. As McDougal III stressed, it is absolutely critical for “researchers to be familiar with the breadth of analytical tools at their disposal.”³³ With their education and experience, AABS librarians do not simply find resources and build collections, they *are* resources. Perhaps this study can help AABS librarians and faculty envision their shared space both in the library stacks and in the classroom. It is also hoped that those students who see the value that librarians add to their academic experience will remember it once they become alumni, faculty members, administrators, and educated voters. Finally, if library administrators are creating a new AABS librarian position, hopefully they see that the individuals in these roles will benefit from support in the form of professional development opportunities, mentorship programs, sufficient funding, and time to adjust to new job functions. Librarians new to AABS roles should also embrace the ideas that libraries are not race-neutral spaces and that they should actively remove barriers to success that are faced by underserved groups.

Today, it seems that American society is facing a crossroads very similar to the one Norman W. Walton described in his paper from 1973. Unfortunately, according to Kara Olidge, executive director of the Amistad Research Center, libraries and archives are *still* suffering from reactive rather than proactive collecting, and many lack a real plan for the future. In a somewhat optimistic tone, Olidge continued, “It’s a marathon...we just have to keep passing the torch.”³⁴

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Notes

1. Norman W. Walton, "Black Librarians, Archivists and Black Collections," in *Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing: Papers Presented at an Institute for Training Librarians for Special Black Collections and Archives*, April 12–14, 1973, ed. Harry Robinson, Jr. (Montgomery: Alabama State Univ., 1974), 47.
2. Following Serie McDougal III's lead, this study uses the terms "Africana Studies," "African American Studies," and "Black Studies" interchangeably. See footnote 1 in Serie McDougal, III, "The Future of Research Methods in Africana Studies Graduate Curriculum," *Journal of African American Studies* 15, no. 3 (2011): 280.
3. Oba T'Shaka, "Africana Studies Department History: San Francisco State University," *Journal of Pan African Studies* 5, no. 7 (2012): 21.
4. Denise M. Glover, "Academic Library Support for Black Studies Programs: A Plea to Black Studies Faculty and Administrators," *Journal of Negro Education* 53, no. 3 (1984): 314. See also E.J. Josey and Ann Allen Shockley, eds., *Handbook of Black Librarianship*, (Littleton, CO: Libraries Unlimited, Inc., 1977). In her chapter, "The Role of the Curator of Afro-American Collections," Shockley recalls that "oftentimes, curators were appointed without subject or even reading background in the field. In most instances, the qualifying credential was a black face. It is common knowledge that black skin does not automatically denote erudition in black books, history, culture, or black people." In "The Role of the Curator of Afro-American Collections," E.J. Josey and Ann Allen Shockley, eds., *Handbook of Black Librarianship*, (Littleton, CO: Libraries Unlimited, Inc., 1977), 192.
5. Ann Allen Shockley, *A Handbook for the Administration of Special Negro Collections*, (Nashville: Fisk University, 1970), i. See also Harry Robinson Jr.'s *Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing. Papers presented at an Institute for Training Librarians for Special Black Collections and Archives April 12–14, 1973*, in which he discusses the early years of black studies librarianship. Robinson specifically mentions institutes held at Fisk University, Atlanta University School of Library Services, and Alabama State University in order to increase "the number of qualified librarians in the area of black studies librarianship." Atlanta University held its institute in 1965, an indication that it foresaw the coming expansion of this field. Unfortunately, as Robinson notes, "since most of these institutes were either funded by the Office of Education or a foundation, the host institutions were only able to invite a selected number of librarians." (iii). <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED104355.pdf>, accessed February 6, 2020. Robinson notes that his institute at Alabama State attracted attendees from 22 states and even students from outside of the library education field. (iv).
6. Craig Chamberlain, "African American Studies in the U.S. is 'Alive and Well,' New Report Says," last modified August 29, 2013, <https://news.illinois.edu/view/6367/204755>. "Through a national Web-based survey of 1,777 U.S. colleges and universities, U. of I. researchers found that 76 percent of those institutions had some form of black studies. Twenty percent, or 361 institutions, had formal academic units, most classified as departments or programs, according to the study. But another 56 percent, or 999 institutions, had a course or courses dedicated to the black experience." See Abdul Alkalimat, Ronald Bailey, Sam Byndom, Desiree McMillion,

LaTasha Nesbitt, Kate Williams, and Brian Zelip. *African American Studies 2013: A National Web-Based Survey*. 29 pages. University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign Department of African American Studies, 2013. Available at <http://afro.illinois.edu>.

7. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "Academe Must Give Black-Studies Programs Their Due," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 63, no. 11 (2016): 46. Also, according to the National Council for Black Studies, there are 16 institutions offering a standalone PhD in AABS. See National Council for Black Studies, "Africana Studies Graduate Programs," <https://ncbsonline.org/students/as-grad-programs/>. Accessed February 13, 2020.

8. Courtney Becks, "African American Studies Collections and the American Season of Redemption," *Proceedings of the Charleston Library Conference*, 2018, 59. My emphasis.

9. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, from 2010–2017 the average number of MLIS degrees awarded annually was 6,146. NCES, "Table 323.10. Master's degrees conferred by postsecondary institutions, by field of study: Selected years, 1970–71 through 2016–17." The present study grew out of a capstone project the author completed for his MLIS program at the University of Southern Mississippi when a survey of LIS literature turned up scant information on AABS librarianship, https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d18/tables/dt18_323.10.asp, accessed February 7, 2020.

10. The author uses "area studies" because it is currently a widely-understood term, while also recognizing its troubling connections to colonialism and colonialist language. See, for example, Katharina Schramm "Leaving area studies behind: the challenge of diasporic connections in the field of African studies," *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal*, 1:1, (2008): 1–12, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17528630701676588> and Megan Browndorf, Erin Pappas, and Anna Arays, eds. *The Collector and the Collected: Decolonizing Area Studies Librarianship*, (Sacramento: Litwin Books, 2021).

11. Jesús Alonso-Regalado and Mary Van Ullen, "Librarian for Latin American and Caribbean Studies in U.S. Academic and Research Libraries: A Content Analysis of Position Announcements, 1970–2007" (2009). *University Libraries Faculty Scholarship*. 2: 139.

12. Alonso-Regalado and Van Ullen, "Librarian for Latin American and Caribbean," 139.

13. Alonso-Regalado and Van Ullen, "Librarian for Latin American and Caribbean," 151.

14. Robert D. Stueart, *The Area Specialist Bibliographer: An Inquiry into His Role*, (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1972), 113. Stueart's selected bibliography contained more than 150 works on area studies librarianship, indicating its well-documented history up to the early 1970s.

15. Stueart, *Area Specialist Bibliographer*, 110.

16. Stueart, *Area Specialist Bibliographer*, 110.

17. Stueart, *Area Specialist Bibliographer*, 113.

18. William C. Robinson, "Academic Library Collection Development and Management Positions: Announcements in *College and Research Libraries News* from 1980 through 1991," *Library Resources & Technical Services* 37 (April 1993): 134.

19. Karen S. Croneis and Pat S. Henderson, "Electronic and Digital Librarian Positions: A Content Analysis of Announcements from 1990 through 2000," *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 28, no. 4 (2002): 233.

20. Gary W. White, "Academic Subject Specialist Positions in the United States: A Content Analysis of Announcements from 1990 through 1998," *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 25, no. 5 (1999): 379.

21. Kristen Radsliff Rebmann, Simone Molitor, and Bonnie Rainey, "Distance Learning Skills and Responsibilities: A Content Analysis of Job Announcements 1996–2010," *Journal of Library & Information Services in Distance Learning* 6, no. 2 (2012): 106–108.

22. Colleen T. Boff, Carol Singer, and Beverly Stearns, "Reaching Out to the Underserved: More Than Thirty Years of Outreach Job Ads," *University Libraries Faculty Publications* (2006), Paper 4.

23. Yingqi Tang, "Distance Education Librarians in the United States: A Study of Job Announcements," *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 39 (2013): 500.

24. Rebecca Albitz, "Electronic Resource Librarians in Academic Libraries: A Position Announcement Analysis, 1996–2001," *Libraries and the Academy* 2, no. 4: 597. My emphasis.

25. John D. Shank, "The Blended Librarian: A Job Announcement Analysis of the Newly Emerging Position of Instructional Design Librarian," *College & Research Libraries* 67, no. 6 (2006): 521–522.

26. Linda Frederiksen, "Access Services Librarians: A Content Analysis of Job Advertisements, 1977–2004," *Journal of Access Services* 3, no. 2 (2005): 25.

27. Vera Armann-Keown and Liane Patterson, "Content Analysis in Library and Information Research: An Analysis of Trends," *Library & Information Science Research* 42 (2020): 1.

28. National Geographic, "United States Regions," <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/maps/united-states-regions/>

29. Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, "Size & Setting Classification Description,"

https://carnegieclassifications.iu.edu/classification_descriptions/size_setting.php

30. The languages, in descending order by frequency of appearance are: French, 20; Spanish, 13; Portuguese, 11; any European language, 7; any African language, 7; German, 5; Italian, 3; Afrikaans, 3; Arabic, 1. Some advertisements asked for knowledge of more than one language, so the numbers exceed the total number of postings.

31. For instance, see the ALA's Librarian Education Reform Discussion Group.

32. Frederiksen, "Access Services Librarians," 16.

33. McDougal, "The Future of Research Methods," 280.

34. Kara Olidge, "When WHITE Libraries Happen to BLACK Rare & Distinctive Collections: Finding Pathways from Marginalization to Narratives of Empowerment," (webinar from Cornell University Library Rare & Distinctive Collections [RAD] Hour webinar, October 19, 2020), https://vod.video.cornell.edu/media/Cornell+University+Library%2C+Rare+and+Distinctive+Collections+%28RAD%29+HourA+When+WHITE+Libraries+Happen+to+BLACK+Rare+%26+Distinctive+CollectionsA+Finding+Pathways+from+Marginalization+to+Narratives+of+Emp/1_sy6plfuq. My emphasis.