Ikumi Crocoll and Kelli Hansen

An Analysis of RBMS News Blog Job Advertisements, 2013–2021

While many studies related to library job postings exist, they are often not focused on special collections and archives. Those that are focused on special collections and archives usually offer more targeted research (e.g., a specific kind of librarian role within special collections). In order to begin to tackle the broader question of, "What types of jobs have been advertised to the special collections and archives community in recent years," the authors chose to focus the study by analyzing job advertisements posted on the RBMS News Blog from 2013 to 2021. Specifically, the authors compiled and analyzed data relating to the geographical location of the job, when positions were advertised by month and year, type of institution where the job was located, position term, required degrees, and position title and responsibilities. This RBMS-specific data revealed that almost all the positions advertised were in the United States, with the top states including California, New York, Texas, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania; most institutions represented were universities; a majority of the jobs were continuing, rather than term, positions; most positions mentioned library degrees but did not require them; only 1% were specifically designed for recent graduates; most position titles had "Librarian" in their title; and skills related to management and digital projects were well represented in job responsibilities. The authors note discrepancies between job titles and responsibilities that may be indicative of expanding job duties within the profession.

Introduction

This study aims to begin to answer the following overall question: what types of jobs are being advertised to the RBMS community?[1] The authors attempted to respond to this by analyzing all of the job advertisements posted on the RBMS News Blog dur-

---

1.   By the phrase "the RBMS community," the authors intend to point toward those who have access to and/or interest in the professional development materials and groups of the Rare Books and Manuscripts Section of the Association of College and Research Libraries, a division of the American Library Association.

ing a nine-year period, from 2013 through 2021.[2] While limited in scope by its focus on RBMS job listings on its website, through this more specific study of a major, US aggregator, of postings, the authors hoped to understand the kinds of job opportunities made available to special collections librarians, and aspiring special collections librarians, with different levels of experience, and in many different geographic locations across the United States and beyond.

Literature Review

While many studies related to library job postings exist, they are often not focused on special collections and archives. However, studies of academic librarian job postings may offer insights that are applicable to special collections. The general literature is wide-ranging, but recent studies have employed similar methods, gathering data from job boards and analyzing groups of postings for various categories of information, such as location (state), stated duties, required experience and qualifications, salaries, and tenure status.[3]

Studies that focus on special collections and archives have offered more targeted research to shed light on specific aspects of job searching, qualifications, and duties for various subgroups within the field. In a previous investigation, co-author Hansen explored opportunities for entry-level special collections librarians through an analysis of eighty-eight job advertisements, from a variety of sources, over a five-year period from 2004 to 2009.[4] She analyzed advertisements based on location, salary, degree requirements, titles, length of experience, and duties. Hansen found that most entry-level jobs required some experience and that an additional graduate degree beyond the library degree was preferred. Hansen specifically excluded

---

    2. The authors acknowledge that those interested in special collections jobs may want to visit a variety of different websites. However, focusing on RBMS News Blog, which posts many major special collections jobs in the United States, allowed the authors to explore different aspects of job postings while not getting further overwhelmed by data. Focusing on the RBMS News Blog also allowed the authors to draw conclusions about positions within a defined professional community. For future studies, data from other sites and listservs could provide useful information on job trends.

    3. For examples of such studies, see: Robert Detmering and Claudene Sproles, "So, You Want to Be a Southeastern Librarian? Entry-Level Academic Library Job Trends in the Southeast," *The Southeastern Librarian* 60, no. 1 (2012); Therese F. Triumph and Penny M. Beile, "The Trending Academic Library Job Market: An Analysis of Library Position Announcements from 2011 with Comparisons to 1996 and 1988," *College & Research Libraries* 76, no. 6 (September 2015): 716–739, https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.76.6.716.; Beth Seltzer, "One Hundred Job Ads from the Humanities Ecosystem," *MLA Profession* (Fall 2018), https://profession.mla.org/one-hundred-job-ads-from-the-humanities-ecosystem/; Xiang Li and Tang Li, "The Evolving Responsibilities, Roles, and Competencies of East Asian Studies Librarians: A Content Analysis of Job Postings from 2008 to 2019," *College & Research Libraries* 82, no. 4 (June 2021): 474–89. https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.82.4.474; Yin Zhang et al., "A Content Analysis of Job Advertisements for Digital Humanities-Related Positions in Academic Libraries," *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 47, no. 1 (January 2021). https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2020.102275.

    4. Kelli Hansen, "Education, Training, and Recruitment of Special Collections Librarians: An Analysis of Job Advertisements" *RBM: A Journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts, & Cultural Heritage* 12, no. 2 (2011), https://doi.org/10.5860/rbm.12.2.358.

archivists from this study. The current study is broader, as it includes more than entry-level special collections positions and includes archivists; it also updates Hansen's 2011 analysis.

Other studies focused specifically on archival jobs. Tansey surveyed professional archivist jobs posted between 2006 and 2014, pulling a large number of job advertisements from a single source, the Society of American Archivists' listserv, to understand requirements and trends.[5] Tansey found that most of the positions in her study were at universities and were located in the South, followed by the Northeast and Midwest. Tansey also found that most positions required a master's degree, but that archival certification was not mentioned in a majority of advertisements. She found that most job ads did not specify required years of experience. Most of the ads in her study were for permanent positions.

Similarly, Haack et al. focused on entry-level archivist positions listed on ALA Job-LIST, narrowing their analysis of job advertisements to one job type and applicant group.[6] They studied job advertisements posted between August 2006 and March 2013. Like the present study, Haack et al. coded job advertisements based on state location and educational requirements, but they also analyzed skill requirements and job duties to answer questions about what opportunities were available to new graduates, and what types of jobs they were expected to do. They found that archivist jobs overwhelmingly require a library degree and that almost all of the positions were at universities. They also performed a limited content analysis and found that 56% of the job descriptions surveyed contained some form of the word "digital."

Finally, Warren and Scoulas examined job advertisements for public services professionals in special collections environments for a shorter window of time (2017–2019) to understand the relationship between job duties and work burnout.[7] Their study was more focused than the present study in that it attempted to address the roots of a specific work problem in a specific kind of special collections librarianship. Warren and Scoulas analyzed job duties according to the RBMS Competency Guidelines[8] to determine how many public services positions include duties that exceed reference,

5. Eira Tansey, "The Landscape of Archival Employment: A Study of Professional Archivist Job Advertisements, 2006-2014," *Archival Practice* 2, no. 0 (June 5, 2015), http://libjournal.uncg.edu/ap/article/view/1084.

6. Allison Haack et al., "New Archivists Seeking Employment: Exploring Entry-Level Jobs in Archives," *Archival Issues: Journal of the Midwest Archives Conference* 38, no. 1 (January 2017): 19–42.

7. Kellee E. Warren and Jung Mi Scoulas, "A Content and Comparative Analysis of Job Advertisements for Special Collections Professionals Using ACRL RBMS Guidelines," *Journal of Library Administration* 60, no. 6 (September 8, 2020): 613–630, https://doi.org/10.1080/01930826.2020.1748435.

8. "Guidelines: Competencies for Special Collections Professionals," Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL), March 6, 2017, https://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/comp4specollect.

instruction, and outreach. They found that 95.8% of the advertisements they surveyed contained management and supervisory responsibilities in addition to public services duties, and they cautioned administrators against crafting job descriptions that could lead to burnout.

Method

The RBMS Web Team provided the authors with an XML download of all the positions posted on the RBMS News Blog from 2013 to 2021. The year 2013 was when job data for RBMS News Blog became available,[9] and 2021 was the first full year before the authors began their research. There were 861 postings in all. The authors converted the XML file into an Excel spreadsheet and then broke the text of the position advertisements into the following categories:

- Position title
- Posting date
- Responsibilities/position description
- Required qualifications
- Preferred qualifications
- Salary
- Country
- US state
- Type of institution
- Position term

A web form with associated Google spreadsheet was used for the sake of consistency in data entry. For the "Type of institution" category, a set of radio buttons corresponding to the choices in the 2014 RBMS Member Survey was used. Choices included college, university, public library, historical society, museum, independent research library, private library, other special library, bookseller, and other. Only one choice was allowed per advertisement. For position term, the authors used a set of checkboxes allowing two selections. Choices were part-time, continuing, and limited-term. Positions were assumed to be full-time and continuing unless otherwise specified.[10]

---

9. The Web Team is a three-person group of volunteers who are members of the RBMS Publications and Communications Committee. Lara Friedman-Shedlov, email message to authors, February 17, 2022.

10. In addition to the categories above, the authors initially categorized advertisements based on the following criteria: faculty status, tenure eligibility, collective bargaining agreement, years of experience required, years of experience preferred, requirements/preferences not based on skill/ability. However, these criteria were not used in the analysis due to the small number of advertisements that included them.

Simple counts and percentages were performed on the advertisements to analyze them by date, country, state, type of institution, and position term. For titles, responsibilities, and requirements, various textual analysis methods were used. These are detailed in the Findings section below.

Findings

The sample of position listings examined in this study is necessarily limited by RBMS's posting policies and parameters. RBMS began requiring job postings to list salary information in the summer of 2020;[11] the data include many positions advertised before that date for which no salary information was available. It is possible that the sample of positions posted after 2020 excludes institutions with policies that prohibit the public posting of salary information. On either side of the policy change, the data may be incomplete.

The following section is organized according to the aforementioned categories of analysis determined by the authors.

Geographical

Of the positions posted to the RBMS News Blog, 97% were in the United States.[12] States with the highest number of advertised positions were California and New York, followed by Texas, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania. Taken together, these six states represent 52% of the total advertised US positions on the RBMS News Blog. Figure 1 shows a breakdown of the US positions advertised on the RBMS News Blog by state.

---

11. The RBMS Publications and Communications Committee proposed this new requirement, in line with ACRL's *Guidelines for Recruiting Academic Librarians* (revised 2017, https://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/recruitingguide). It then became codified as policy by the RBMS Executive Committee at a public meeting. The authors have not focused on salary due the incomplete nature of the data in this category, however there are a number of surveys related to salary in the profession. Some examples are included in the "A*Census II All Archivists Survey Report," while other broader reports—from the *Library Journal*, for example—contain special collections salaries amongst their data (and broken out as a category). See Makala Skinner and Ioana Hulbert, "A*Census II All Archivists Survey Report," *Ithaka S+R*. Last Modified 22 August 2022. https://doi.org/10.18665/sr.317224. Andrew Gerber, "Holding Steady | Placements and Salaries Survey 2022," *Library Journal*, 16 October, 2023, https://www.libraryjournal.com/story/holding-steady-placements-and-salaries-survey-2023.

12. Fifteen of the jobs advertised were in Canada, and the remaining eight positions were in Australia, Hong Kong, Italy, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the United Arab Emirates.
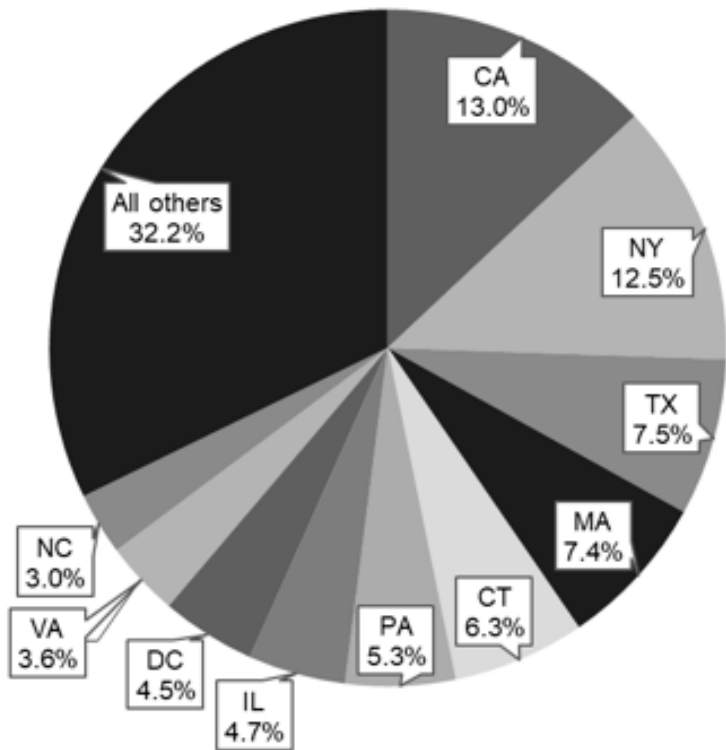
Figure 1. US positions advertised on the RBMS News Blog by state.

By Year and Month

The number of positions advertised on the RBMS News Blog rose sharply from 2013 to 2016, from twenty-seven positions in 2013 to 121 positions in 2016. The years 2018 and 2019 saw the highest number of positions advertised, with 140 and 135, respectively. As the authors expected, the number of positions advertised dropped precipitously in 2020, with only fifty-nine positions advertised. However, 2021 saw a swift rebound to near pre-pandemic levels, with 129 advertised positions. It is important to remember that these numbers specifically reflect the postings on the RBMS News Blog, which, while a major site, may not mirror all special collections postings around the United States. Although some trends appear as expected, such as the decline in jobs during the height of the pandemic, factors like institutional and RBMS posting policies may also play a role.

Taken in aggregate, the months with the most position postings were March (ninety-one) and August (eighty-three). The month with the least postings was December (forty-eight). The dip in December may relate to the observance of various holidays in the United States at that time. The first and third quarters, defined as January–March and July–September, saw 233 position postings each, with the second (April–June)

and fourth (October–December) quarters slightly lower, at 195 and 200 postings, respectively.

Type of Institution

Nearly seventy-two percent (71.9%), or 610 institutions, were universities. This is followed by institutions that self-identified as independent research libraries or as part of the Independent Research Libraries Association (7.9%, or sixty-eight institutions), colleges (6.6%, or fifty-seven institutions), public libraries (3.7%, or thirty-two institutions), other special libraries[13] (2%, or seventeen institutions), historical societies (1.5%, or thirteen institutions), and museums (1.4%, or twelve institutions). It should be noted that the authors endeavored to categorize institutions as they categorized themselves but made some determinations on how best to group institutions, including the "other special libraries." Table 1 illustrates this complexity.

TABLE 1
Types of institutions represented in RBMS job ads

Type of Institution	Number of Job Postings	Percentage of Total[a]
University	610	71.9%
Independent research library	68	8.0%
College	57	6.7%
Public library	32	3.8%
Historical society	13	1.5%
Museum	12	1.4%
Other special library	17	2.0%
Bookseller	8	0.9%
Archival consultant group	6	0.7%
Educational nonprofit	5	0.6%
Partnership of organizations related to history, scholarship, and art	3	0.4%
Private library	2	0.2%
All other types of institutions[b]	15	0.1% each

[a] Percentages rounded to the nearest tenth.
[b] Institution types included in this category: arboretum and botanic garden, auction house, consortium, consulting group genealogical society, library services company, membership organization, nonprofit, privately funded public library, professional staffing firm, radio station, scholarly organization, society for bibliophiles and enthusiasts in the graphic arts, theatrical-producing organization/theater company/archive, and university-affiliated research library.

13. "Other special libraries" was a general category the authors used to designate libraries that did not fit into the other categories.

Position Term

Most positions (85.2% or 734) were continuing; the remaining 13.6% (117), were term positions, and 0.5% (four) were part-time positions. Additional data, including for those positions that had combinations of these types of terms and were less frequently represented, is provided in Table 2.

TABLE 2
Types of position terms represented in RBMS job ads

Position Term	Number of Job Postings	Percentage of Total[a]
Continuing position	734	85.3%
Term position	117	13.6%
Part-time	4	0.5%
Term position, Part-time	4	0.5%
Continuing position, Term position[b]	1	0.1%

[a] Percentages rounded to the nearest tenth.
[b] This was a term position that turned into another position, which was a continuing position.

Required Degrees

Required degrees were complicated to analyze because of the numerous different ways of describing them, many different combinations of degrees, and occasional lack of clarity in some of the surrounding posting language. Sometimes, for example, the grammar made it unclear how many components were required and/or in what kind of combination. For this reason, not only did the authors sometimes need significant interpretation of what was intended by job descriptions, but they also decided to

TABLE 3
Number of jobs with required degrees in RBMS job ads

Question	Number of Jobs that Have These Degree Requirements
Is a library degree mentioned?	604
Is a library degree required?	330
Is a PhD mentioned?	44
Is a PhD required?	11
Is experience accepted as an alternative to some or all degree requirements?	52
Is a degree in a specific subject area (not information studies) required?	44
Only require a bachelor or high school degree?	33
Position for a recent graduate?	9

group the data to avoid analyzing every possible combination of degrees. Table 3 contains the questions asked of the data and the number of jobs the authors determined to have degree requirements that fit these questions.

Of 861 positions, 185 did not mention degrees in the posting, or had no accessible description. Therefore, these numbers are based upon 676 postings. As can be seen from these numbers, many of these jobs (604, or about 89.3%) mentioned a library degree. However, not all of these *required* a library degree; they mentioned some kind of alternative (only 330, or about 48.8% required a library degree). Among these postings, a PhD was mentioned forty-four times (about 6.5%) and required in eleven postings (about 1.6%). For fifty-two (about 7.7%) of the jobs, experience was accepted as an alternative to some or all degree requirements. Forty-four (about 6.5%) postings required a degree in a subject area that was not information studies. Thirty-three (about 4.9%) positions required just a bachelor's degree or high school diploma. In other words, most positions required some kind of graduate degree.

Position Titles and Responsibilities

Position titles were coded according to functional titles such as "Librarian" or "Archivist." Positions that included more than one functional title were coded by the first title to appear in the job announcement. Eleven titles appeared with some degree of frequency in the job announcements; remaining titles were designated as "Other" and constitute approximately 2% of the total. (fig. 2.)
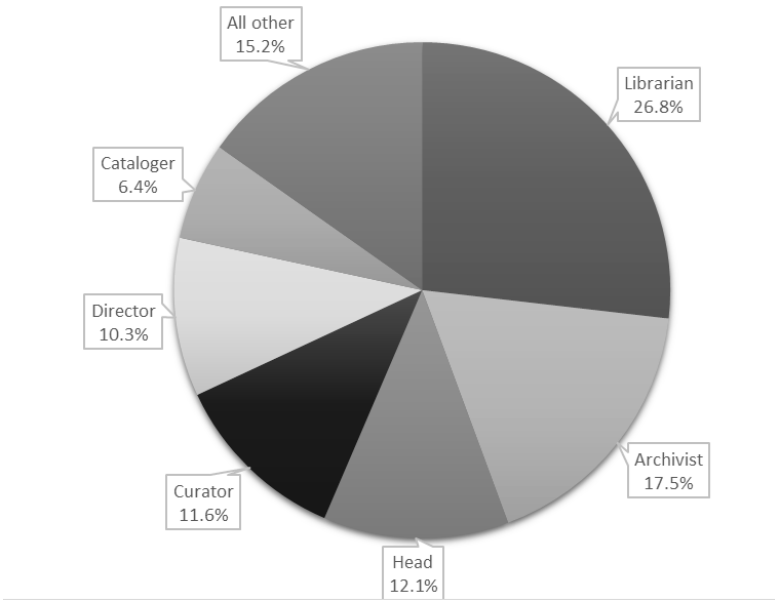

Figure 2. Positions advertised on the RBMS News Blog by position title.

TABLE 4
Titles and their frequency represented in RBMS job ads

Functional title	Positions	Percentage
Librarian	231	26.8%
Archivist	151	17.5%
Head	104	12.1%
Curator	100	11.6%
Director	89	10.3%
Cataloger	55	6.4%
Manager	27	3.1%
Other	16	1.9%
Coordinator	15	1.7%
Specialist	14	1.6%
Fellow	13	1.5%
Resident	8	0.9%
Dean	6	0.7%
Conservator	6	0.7%
Professor	5	0.6%
Assistant	5	0.6%
Supervisor	5	0.6%
Chair	4	0.5%
Bookseller	4	0.5%

"Librarian" was the most frequently posted title, with 231 postings (26.8%). "Archivist" was second, at 151 postings (17.5%). "Head," as in "Head of Special Collections," or "Head of Research Services," followed as the third-most-frequent title, with 106 postings (12.1%). All 861 position listings were included in this analysis. Table 4 summarizes all titles and their frequency.

Out of the 861 job advertisements in the initial sample, 841 advertisements contained details about position responsibilities. Using Voyant Tools, the authors performed a basic text analysis, with the extracted position responsibilities sections of the job advertisements loaded as separate documents to make up a corpus.[14] Excluding general terms such as "collections," "library," and "special," the terms listed in Table 5 emerged among the top fifteen words related to job functions. Collocates, the terms that Voyant Tools found frequently nearby, are also listed to provide context.

---

14.   A batch script in Windows PowerShell was used to break the responsibilities section of the authors' overall CSV file into 841 separate files, which were then uploaded to Voyant Tools.

TABLE 5
Terms and collocates represented in RBMS job ads

Term	Word count	Collocates[a] (word count)
digital	1,091	preservation (137), materials (118), projects (108), scholarship (107)
services	1,089	staff (108), reference (99), head (95), research (88)
materials	1,084	cataloging (108), including (85), rare (71), formats (69), preservation (65)
research	1,076	services (169), teaching (148), support (102), reference (100), learning (67)
university	1,010	archives (204), archivist (90), librarian (82), community (63)
development	851	management (80), digital (74), policies (59), activities (54), including (53)
including	753	digital (72), development (46), research (45), services (44), reference (42)
work	740	closely (79), staff (77), collaboratively (45), digital (40), plans (36)
cataloging	682	metadata (107), rare (91), materials (91), original (87), services (70)
archives	674	rare (52), digital (45), university (43), materials (42), head (42)
rare	643	books (302), book (223), materials (135), manuscripts (93), cataloging (87)
management	623	development (74), digital (62), services (55), team (54), preservation (36)
preservation	616	conservation (120), digital (91), access (84), materials (66), digitization (52)
archival	590	processing (112), materials (103), manuscript (71), description (61), access (45)
reference	581	services (181), research (99), desk (69), service (64), instruction (62)

Note: Terms presented are in descending order of frequency.
[a] Words frequently occurring nearby term in column 1.

Upon further review in Voyant Tools, the authors discovered several terms were used with a variety of meanings, depending on the job context. For example, "management" was one of the top fifteen terms analyzed, and was also present in over 300 advertisements. However, some instances referred to personnel management, while others denoted collections management, digital asset management, workflow manage-

ment, and other aspects of work in special collections. To provide more specificity for words that could have different meanings in different contexts, the authors referred to the ACRL Competencies for Special Collections Professionals[15] and devised the following list of terms to search the corpus of job advertisements:[16]

A. **Collection development:** collection development, acqui*, purchas*, apprais*, donor
B. **Description and Access:** cataloging, processing, arrang*, descri*, metadata
C. **Information Technologies and Data Management:** data, digital, digitiz*, born* (as in born-digital), repositor*, technolog*
D. **Instruction:** instruction, teach*, curricul*, education*
E. **Management, Supervision, and Leadership:** manag*, supervise/supervising, lead/leading/leads/leader/leadership, oversee/oversight
   a. **Management, Supervision, and Leadership – Fiscal:** budget*, fund*, grant*[17]
F. **Preservation and Conservation:** preservation, conservation, treatment, handling
G. **Promotion and Outreach:** outreach, promot*, communicat*, exhibit*, social media, blog, publication
H. **Reference:** reference, researcher, patron, reader

The most common terms from this round of focused searching proved to be "manag*" (526 positions, 62.5%), followed by "digital*" (405 positions, 48.2%), variations of the word "lead/leading/leadership" (345 positions, 41%) "reference" (314 positions, 37.3%), and "preservation" (305 positions, 36.3%). A few terms were searched and aggregated because they can be used interchangeably or have similar work contexts, such as "researchers/readers/patrons" (222 positions, 26.4%) and "social media/blog/publication "(200 positions, 23.8%). In addition, authors assigned each term a ratio by dividing the raw count of occurrences across the entire corpus by the number of documents containing the term. This ratio gives an idea of the average number of times a term is used. Terms with the highest ratio—or the most mentions per advertisements in which they appear—were "digital*" (2.72), "cataloging" (2.66), "metadata" (2.50), "manag*" (2.48), and "preservation" (2.02). "Digital" and "manag*" are the only two terms that appeared in both of the top five lists. A full listing of terms, ratios, and percentages can be found in Table 6.

---

15. "Guidelines: Competencies for Special Collections Professionals."
16. The asterisk (*) is a wildcard character that matches a word ending with any combination of characters. For example, manag* would match management, managing, manager, and manages. For more on search syntax in Voyant Tools, see https://voyant-tools.org/docs/#!/guide/search.
17. Fiscal management was separated from the more general "Management, Supervision, and Leadership" competency because it allowed the authors to isolate a subset of terms to provide a more focused idea of how many positions included fiscal responsibilities.

TABLE 6
Terms and collocates represented in RBMS job ads

Term	Count	Documents	Ratio	Percentage of positions
manag*	1307	526	2.48	62.5%
digital*	1101	405	2.72	48.2%
lead*	669	345	1.94	41.0%
reference	581	314	1.85	37.3%
preservation	616	305	2.02	36.3%
outreach	415	301	1.38	35.8%
promot*	460	295	1.56	35.1%
exhibit*	531	288	1.84	34.2%
supervise|supervises|supervising	365	274	1.33	32.6%
descri*	470	269	1.75	32.0%
cataloging	682	256	2.66	30.4%
social media|blog|publication	377	250	1.51	29.7%
acqui*	429	248	1.73	29.5%
processing	466	247	1.89	29.4%
instruction*	436	247	1.77	29.4%
oversee|oversees|oversight	376	241	1.56	28.7%
researcher*|reader*|patron*	374	222	1.68	26.4%
digitiz*	353	210	1.68	25.0%
donor/donation	283	208	1.36	24.7%
teach*	312	198	1.58	23.5%
metadata	458	183	2.50	21.8%
collection development	240	183	1.31	21.8%
grant*	203	170	1.19	20.2%
fund*	239	169	1.41	20.1%
conservation	314	164	1.91	19.5%
communicat*	200	142	1.41	16.9%
budget*	170	138	1.23	16.4%
technolog*	183	135	1.36	16.1%
arrang*	169	121	1.40	14.4%
education*	125	94	1.33	11.2%
data	119	81	1.47	9.6%
born*	139	74	1.88	8.8%
handl*	84	71	1.18	8.4%
apprais*	80	67	1.19	8.0%
curricul*	75	62	1.21	7.4%
treatment	66	60	1.10	7.1%
purchas*	52	45	1.16	5.4%
repositor*	51	41	1.24	4.9%

By concatenating the search terms, the authors searched in Voyant Tools to find the number of job ads containing evidence of each competency.[18] The Management, Supervision, and Leadership competency is by far the best represented in the advertisements included in this study, with 77.6% of job advertisements containing any form of the terms associated with this competency. (fig. 3.)
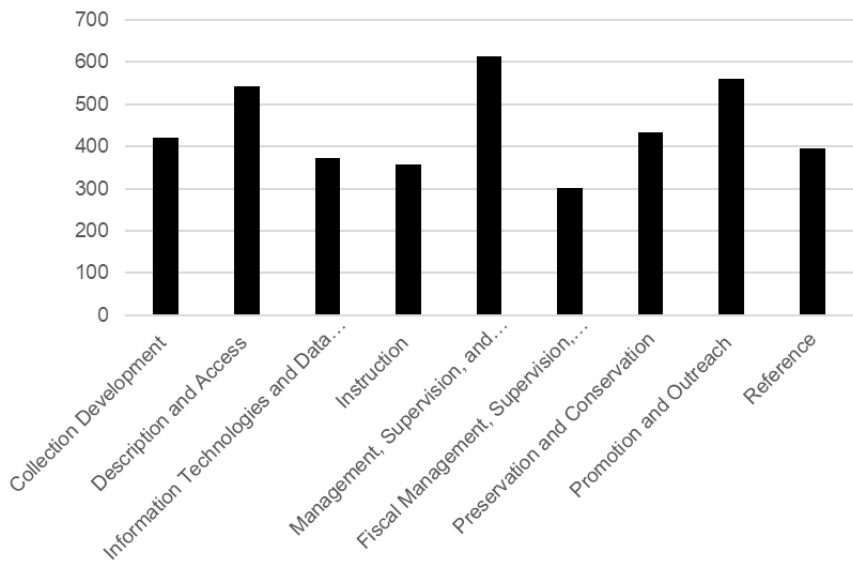

Figure 3. Number of positions by competency in RBMS job ads.

Promotion and Outreach was the next highest competency (65.6%), and Information Technologies and Data Management was represented in 64.2% of advertisements. The least represented competency was Fiscal Management, which appeared in 35.5% of advertisements.

Discussion and Conclusions

The geographic distribution of the job postings closely mirrors results reported by Healey and Nykanen in the 2015 RBMS Membership Survey, which found that the five states with the highest representation were California, New York, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Connecticut. Those five states accounted for 38% of the RBMS survey population.[19] This indicates that RBMS members may often be the ones posting the

---

18.   Search syntax was used to match separate terms as a single occurrence. For example, the search string for Management, Supervision, and Leadership was manag*|supervise|supervising|lead|leading|leads|leader|leadership|oversee|oversight. An advertisement containing all of those terms would have been counted once. An advertisement containing only the term "supervise" would also have been counted once.

19.   Elspeth Healey and Melissa Nykanen, "Channeling Janus: Past, Present, and Future in the RBMS Membership Survey," *RBM: a Journal for Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Cultural Heritage* (April 10, 2017): 61, https://doi.org/10.5860/rbm.17.1.461.

positions on the RBMS News Blog, which is to be expected. Moreover, some of the highest numbers of positions are in very populous states, which naturally may have more institutions, staff, and local people to serve.

However, these results contrast somewhat with those found in previous studies. Tansey found that the South had the largest share of ads, followed by the Northeast and Midwest. Haack et al. found that the highest number of jobs were in California, followed by Georgia and Indiana. Because Tansey and Haack et al. focused on job advertisements for archivists, it may be that positions for archivists have a different geographic distribution than jobs for special collections librarians. While most of the positions in Hansen's study of entry-level special collections librarians were in the Northeast, only 13.6% were in the West, meaning that California must not have been well represented. It is unknown whether this data reflects normal fluctuation in the job market or represents broader geographic trends. It is also important to emphasize that each of these studies has a slightly different focus and date range from the current one so that the results may also differ; there are limitations to the authors' ability to compare geographical results.

The fact that most of the jobs were in the United States is not surprising, considering RBMS is part of the American Library Association. Another study would need to be done (comparing numbers of special collections postings in different countries, for example) if conclusions were desired about how these postings compare to those in other countries.

The authors were also unsurprised to find an overwhelming majority of the jobs at universities, considering the number of special collections that are part of universities.[20] Colleges, as another type of institution within academia, represented a significant number of positions as well, coming third among the authors' categories. The data demonstrate that special collections positions are closely tied to academic environments. However, unlike hiring in related academic fields, there appears to be a fairly even distribution of job postings on the RBMS News Blog throughout the year, with no one season dominating. That independent research libraries came second in the number of postings is also noteworthy, since they are not affiliated with a university/college but nevertheless are a significant source for jobs.

---

20. Some different surveys of archives and special collections reflect similar university leanings, such as Skinner and Hulbert and the OCLC Survey of Special Collections and Archives in the US and Canada (https://www.oclc.org/research/areas/research-collections/hiddencollections.html). See also Healey and Nykanen, "Channeling Janus," 53–81. The Healey and Nykanen article includes data about the institutional affiliation of RBMS members.

This study also finds that the overwhelming majority of the RBMS job ads were for continuing (i.e., permanent), not term, positions. This might reflect the need for such positions, as well as a push against term positions.[21] While the ratios are somewhat different, the emphasis on continuing, rather than term, positions is reflected in Healey and Nykanen's survey of current special collections and archives professionals, as well as Tansey's study of archives job ads.[22] The authors hope that reliance upon permanent positions will continue to grow, and that this report's demonstration of the number of permanent positions puts pressure upon institutions to follow this "standard" practice of hiring for continuing work.

The emphasis on required graduate education in the data is consistent with previous studies by Hansen, Tansey, and Haack et al., all of which found that graduate education is a requirement for employment in the special collections and archives field. Nine (about 1.3%) positions were specifically designated for recent graduates, which does not preclude positions that are open to, but not exclusively for, recent graduates. The mostly low numbers in required academic training (outside of the library degree) could indicate that there is a fair amount of flexibility, perhaps substituted by preferred degrees or required experiences. This could reflect an attempt at creating more inclusive positions, but it should also be noted that this is just one aspect of what inclusivity might look like in a job description.[23] While this may be obvious, it is important to note as a limitation to this project that this analysis does not cover what degrees may or may not be required for specific types of positions. For example, a curatorial position may be more likely to require a PhD. However, this study was not focused on specific types of positions but rather intended as a broad survey.

Turning the analysis toward the data on job duties, this study exposes possible discrepancies between job titles and responsibilities. The data clearly show that digital skills are in high demand. Variations of "digital" appear in nearly half of job advertisements, and are used 2.72 times, on average, per those advertisements. More than 500 job postings contained evidence of the Information Technologies and

---

21. The problems of temporary employment in special collections and archives are a significant topic within the field(s), particularly discussed with archivist positions. See "Best Practices for Archival Term Positions.Docx" (February 2, 2022), https://osf.io/https://osf.io/j9d8f and Peter Monaghan, "Are Temporary Appointments a Threat to Archiving?," *Moving Image Archive News* (blog), accessed December 11, 2023, https://www.movingimagearchivenews.org/are-temporary-appointments-a-threat-to-archiving/.

22. For examples, see the OCLC Survey of Special Collections and Archives in the US and Canada and Healey and Nykanen, "Channeling Janus," 53–81.

23. Although discussed in other areas of hiring, one of the more thorough discussions and assessments of specifically special collections job descriptions occurred during the RBMS 2024 conference, the panel presentation, "'But do they really want ME?: An Exploratory Diversity Audit of Job Postings" by Ruth Xing and Yuzhou Bai. Some other special collections-specific resources can be found on RBMS's Diversity Committee's webpage, including its Diversity Toolkit.

Data Management competency, based on the terms listed above. The term "digital," however, only appears in forty-nine, or about 5.7%, of job titles. At least among the positions advertised on the RBMS News Blog, there does not seem to be an emerging position type based solely on the Information Technologies and Data Management competency. Instead, these findings indicate that the traditional responsibilities of special collections librarians and archivists are expanding to incorporate work with digital collections, born-digital materials, and digital scholarship. While this result is consistent with the 2017 findings of Haack et al., more research is needed to uncover and understand the trends related to this issue.

Expanding responsibilities and roles also appear under other competencies. The prevalence of keywords related to management and leadership in the overall corpus of job responsibilities is incongruent with the number of managerial titles such as Head, Director, and Manager, which appeared in around 25% of position listings. In context, the authors observed, anecdotally, that many instances of the term "management" seemed to correspond to section III.E.10 in the RBMS Competencies—which applies to project management skills—and many uses of the term "lead" referred to leadership of programs and initiatives.[24] The collocates appear to reinforce this idea. Collocates for "manag*" differ slightly from the ones for "management," which are listed in Table 5. The top collocates for "manag*" are digital (116), services (109), development (eighty-nine), staff (eighty-one), and team (seventy-six). The number of occurrences is higher for project-related terms, such as "digital" and "services," than for personnel-related terms, such as "staff" and "teams."

These results appear to bear out the observation by Warren and Scoulas that the "specialized competency that most exceeded that of the traditional duties of a public services special collections librarian was that of Management, Supervision, and Leadership."[25] However, this observation cuts across all of this study's specializations, and is not limited to public services competencies. As noted above regarding the Information Technology and Data Management competency, the prevalence of management keywords in ostensibly non-management job descriptions may be a symptom of the ever-expanding range of duties librarians are required to perform at all career levels. Several recent studies have reported expanding job responsibilities and receding profes-

---

24. "Guidelines: Competencies for Special Collections Professionals."
25. Warren and Scoulas, "A Content and Comparative Analysis," 625.

sional support across the field of librarianship.[26] This trend is concerning when viewed within the context of the conclusions Warren and Scoulas made in their 2021 follow-up study: "job creep" can lead to work-work conflict, damage work-life balance, and hinder efforts to cultivate diversity and equity within the profession.[27] More research is needed to ascertain whether librarians with managerial duties at all levels are being provided with the training, resources, and compensation appropriate for their roles.

Additional possibilities for future research include surveys of other popular job sites and more specific examinations of the elements discussed here. For example, additional studies may examine the number of job postings in other countries' major job sites, required degrees for specific types of special collections positions, etc., or additional fields of the job description not included as part of this study.[28] One might also further analyze how more elements of job descriptions changed from year to year. Moreover, considering the latter period of this research, doing a breakout study solely focused on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic could be useful. While this study begins to point toward the potential impact on numbers of positions, the authors did not assess how the pandemic may have affected other areas of job ads.

Ultimately, this particular study provides a broad overview of the many major elements of job descriptions on a well-known professional site in the United States in recent years. These results might inform job seekers about the kinds of jobs they are likely to see in the field, while also informing institutions and hiring managers of trends and potential pitfalls in job descriptions and advertisements.

Acknowledgments

26.   See, for example: Xiang Li, and Tang Li, "The Evolving Responsibilities, Roles, and Competencies of East Asian Studies Librarians: A Content Analysis of Job Postings from 2008 to 2019," *College & Research Libraries* 82, no. 4 (June 1, 2021): 474–489. https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.82.4.474; John J. Meier, "Are Today's Science and Technology Librarians Being Overtasked? An Analysis of Job Responsibilities in Recent Advertisements on the ALA JobLIST Web Site," *Science & Technology Libraries* 29, no. 1/2 (January 1, 2010): 165–175. https://doi.org/10.1080/01942620903579443; Amanda McCormick, "The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Tenure-Track Librarians," *Portal: Libraries & the Academy* 22, no. 4 (October 1, 2022): 879–917. https://doi.org/10.1353/pla.2022.0046.

27.   Kellee E. Warren and Jung Mi Scoulas, "Excessive Workload in Special Collections Public Services Librarianship: Challenges, Feelings, and Impact," *Journal of Library Administration* 61, no. 3 (February 2021): 312–331. https://doi.org/10.1080/01930826.2021.1883369.

28.   Zhang et al. act as one example in their research into digital-humanities positions, analyzing the number of jobs posted per institution, among other categories of data. Yin Zhang et al., "A Content Analysis of Job Advertisements for Digital Humanities-Related Positions in Academic Libraries," *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 47, no. 1 (January 2021), https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2020.102275.