

THE LIBRARY TECHNICAL ASSISTANT PROGRAM AT CALDWELL TECHNICAL INSTITUTE

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A library technical assistant is envisioned as a middle level employee between the professional librarian and the clerk that would relieve the professional from many clerical tasks that he now performs. These assistants can be trained either on the job or through a course of instruction at some educational institution.¹ With the growth of community colleges in recent years and the proliferation at these colleges of library courses, the debate over the value and use of graduates of such courses has grown fierce. To furnish North Carolina librarians with material to resolve what questions they have about implementing a library assistant program in the state, the library assistant program at Caldwell Technical Institute in Lenoir was examined through an interview with Mrs. Rosalind Campbell, director of the program, and a study of her lesson plans. The market potential for the graduates was ascertained by a questionnaire sent to a sample of public, academic and school librarians. As an additional test, a questionnaire was sent to the five graduates of the program and their employers.

The library assistant program at Caldwell Technical Institute was initiated in 1966 by Mrs. Rosalind Campbell, who was soon assisted by Mrs. Esther Hoyle. Mrs. Campbell received her M. A. in library science from Appalachian State University and worked in various libraries before heading this program. Mrs. Hoyle received her M. A. in English, with 27 quarter hours in library science, and had three years of library experience before coming to her present position. They both had many years of teaching experience before attempting to teach these library assistant courses. In addition, they are active members of the American Library Association, the North Carolina Library Association and the American Association of Junior Colleges, through which they update their knowledge of teaching and library procedures.² They both seem qualified to administer this program, because of their wide teaching and library experience, but Mrs. Campbell's degree is not from an accredited library school, as the American Library Association guidelines for such programs suggests.³

The American Library Association guidelines make three other suggestions concerning the operation of library assistant programs. First, any such program should have at least one full-time faculty member besides the director.⁴ This is not the case at Caldwell Technical Institute, since both women also share their time with the Institute's library.⁵ Second, the program would have a local advisory board composed of a representative of the state library, the director of a major local library, a school library supervisor, the librarian of a local academic institution, and the head of a local special library. This board should be established before the program is initiated to determine its necessity and guide its every step.⁶ The board that advises Mrs. Campbell meets the guideline for composition, but it was not started until after the program's inception. Mrs. Campbell regrets that it was not, and strongly advises other interested parties to have such a board even in the planning stages.⁷ Third, the finances of the program should come from the instructional

budget and be separate from the library budget.⁸ The school attempts to separate the finances of the library and the technical assistant program by paying for all instructional materials and half of Mrs. Campbell's salary out of the instructional budget.⁹

Regarding courses of instruction, the most important part of such programs, the guidelines suggest that the various courses of the curriculum should be distributed among three areas: courses in general education, library technician courses, and related courses. Courses in general education should comprise 50 percent of the program. Included in this area should be courses in communication skills, humanities, social sciences, and physical sciences. Library technician courses should constitute 25 percent of the total and include such subjects as introduction to libraries and library services, operations in support of readers' services and technical services, handling of audio-visual equipment and media production, and practical experience in other libraries of the locality in addition to the library of the educational institution. Related courses in the field of business skills should make up the other 25 percent of the total.¹⁰ The curriculum designed for the Caldwell program fits the guidelines almost exactly: fifteen courses in general education, eight library technician courses, and eight related courses. Courses in the area of general education include grammar, composition, report writing, and oral communication; surveys of the physical sciences, western civilization, American literature, and social science; and three electives. Library technician courses cover such subjects as introduction to library services, book selection tools and order procedures, reference, cataloging and classification, circulation routines, and two library practice courses fulfilled by working six hours a week in a library other than that of the Institute. The related courses consist of business mathematics, accounting, typing (if needed), office machines, and an introduction to data processing. In addition, some instruction in good grooming and deportment is given to all students by the teacher of the beautician courses at Caldwell Technical Institute, and instruction in good telephone manners is given by a local telephone operator. Mrs. Campbell plans to offer, in the future, a greater variety of courses that are related to the work of the library technician in order to train more effective audio-visual equipment specialists and medical library technicians.¹¹

When assessing the content of this course of study, it is also important to ascertain whether the students are being taught to perform any tasks that should properly be done by a professional librarian and whether, through the actions of the teachers or the subject matter taught, they are given the impression that they will be trained librarians when they graduate. There was no evidence that the students at Caldwell Technical Institute are being taught to perform professional tasks or to believe they are going to be professionals when they graduate. Quite the contrary: Whenever professional matters are discussed, such as the principles of book selection, cataloging, or reference, they are done so only to explain the various processes of a library, to give the students an appreciation of professional activities, and to show them the nature of the position which they will eventually occupy in the library. For example, when the principles of book selection are taught, they are designed to give insight into the problems and qualifications of the book selector and to cause the student to realize that book selection is not a haphazard process. The rest of the time (approximately 90 percent) is spent acquainting the students with the tools used and the techniques followed in the bibliographic searching pro-

cess before a book is ordered, the techniques used in typing orders and in keeping the appropriate records on the orders.

A similar situation exists in the cataloging course, where principles of cataloging and classification are explained solely to give the students an understanding of the purpose of the catalog card, and how the catalog cards are grouped to achieve this purpose; all remaining time is used for teaching card preparation and catalog maintenance. Even in the reference course, the duties of the professional are not infringed upon, although the use of simple tools, such as basic language dictionaries, general encyclopedias, yearbooks, popular indexes and bibliographies, is taught.¹² The employment of these tools to answer fact questions and locate simple bibliographic information is considered, according to the afore-mentioned the appropriate records on the orders.

When considering the possible utility and value of any library assistant program, it is also important to examine the market potential and career opportunities for the graduates of the program. From the questionnaire sent to North Carolina librarians, the following results were obtained. Forty-two out of the fifty-one replies indicated that they would hire a graduate of a library assistant program; two replied that they would not, because there was no need for them or their library was too small to use these graduates. Seven questionnaires had no reply to this question. Within the forty-two favorable responses, however, many reservations were expressed. Seven librarians replied that they did not have the authority to hire anyone, and three librarians preferred employees with a great deal of general academic education. Eighteen of the twenty-eight school librarians do not now have any other regular employees.

In answer to the question whether they would give any preference to a library technician over a high school graduate, four of the forty-two indicated that they would not for the following reasons: "Their education isn't worth that much," "the important prerequisite for the library assistant in this library is not proficiency in technical skills which can be learned on the job, but rather that he have sufficient liberal educational background and intelligence . . .," and "We would still have to train them to perform their duties in accordance with our procedures." It should be noted that two of the librarians who expressed these opinions employ thirty-two and eleven non-professionals (the first and third largest number of employed non-professionals encountered in this survey). Thirty-five out of the remaining thirty-eight made some attempt to state how they would give a preference to a library technician. Six librarians stated they would give the graduate a higher salary and greater responsibility than a high school graduate with no training; three would give the graduates higher salaries only, while the same number would give him greater responsibility only. The remainder of the thirty-five did not mention how they would demonstrate this preference, stating merely that they had more and better education than the high school graduate, they would be more valuable employees, or they would occasion more respect from students and teachers.

The next consideration is the salary that can be expected by the graduates when they are first employed. Some knowledge of this can be derived from the salaries of the graduates of Caldwell Technical Institute as reported by their employers and corroborated by the employees themselves. The two graduates working in school libraries earn below \$3600 a year; two of the three graduates working in community colleges or technical institutes are earning from \$4200 to \$4499, and

the other, \$5100 or above. Further insight into the salaries that might be earned by these graduates can be gained by inspecting the position classification of the responding libraries. Only sixteen libraries out of fifty-one described their schemes. Whenever possible, the salary to be paid was the one designated by the library; yet, when one was not designated, the author chose an appropriate one after considering the work described by the classification scheme and the work performed by graduates of the program. The salary range resulting from this process was from \$2500 to \$4584, with an average of \$3747.

The final consideration is the possibility for the graduate to advance in salary and degree of responsibility within the ranks of a non-professional worker. This is very important, for the library technician program is considered to be a terminal one. As examples the New York Public Library has three levels of advancement for the library assistant with five salary increments for each level; the Los Angeles County Library has two levels with five salary increments for each level;¹⁴ and the Federal Government has four levels with ten salary increments for each level.¹⁵

Although the classification schemes found in North Carolina may not provide for as much advancement as these, some room for advancement is provided. The college library with the most employees had two levels for library assistants with five salary increments for each level. The person occupying the position of "Library Assistant One" supervises the services at the circulation, reserve and reference desks, supervises the shelving of books, and maintains the serial and periodical files. The two people with the "Library Assistant Two" title supervise the ordering of books, the bibliographic searching for order information, the unpacking of books, the cataloging of books for which cards are available, the filing of cards, the preparation of new books for circulation, and even assist in original cataloging. Yet it seems that a graduate of Caldwell Institute could perform competently the work of a person occupying a "Library Assistant Two" position. The largest special library has three levels for Library Assistants but did not, in its questionnaire, differentiate the work performed in these levels. The public library that employed the greatest number of non-professionals gave no description of work done at the different levels; however, a smaller one had two levels for its desk assistant, bookmobile assistant, and branch assistant. The only difference between the levels is one of money, for the work is the same. Even here, a graduate technician might be admitted to the top level, for the entrance requirement is two years of college. However, it is important to keep in mind when considering the advancement possibilities of library assistants that thirty-three of the forty-six answering indicated that they had either one or no full-time, non-professional employees.

Increase in earnings should be discussed in addition to the advancement in responsibility. Three of the five libraries employing graduates of Caldwell reported the maximum for technicians as under \$6000; two listed it as between \$6000 and \$7000. The maximum salary for non-professionals indicated by North Carolina librarians ranged from \$2500 to \$8090, with an average of \$4455.

In conclusion, it was found that the library assistant program at Caldwell Institute measures up well against the established guidelines. It has a local advisory board to aid it, a sufficient quantity of teachers, although they are not full-time teachers, separate funding for the program, and most importantly, a curriculum that meets every specification. In addition, the teachers are thoroughly imparting the knowledge of library techniques embodied in this curriculum to the students

and are in no way imparting any knowledge that the students do not need. All fears that this program is trying to produce professional librarians from high school graduates or that the teachers are giving this impression to their students should be allayed.

Although in-service training can prepare technicians, especially in the larger library systems that can reserve sufficient resources to train them properly, there are compelling reasons to prefer the institutionally-trained in North Carolina. According to *Resources of North Carolina Libraries*, edited by Robert B. Downs, North Carolina has insufficient finances and personnel to provide adequate service.¹⁶ Therefore, it would be unfortunate for North Carolina libraries to expend a considerable amount of funds and time training technicians who could be suitably trained outside the library. The libraries could well apply these released resources to directly serving the public.

However, the prospects are not good for technicians in North Carolina. The salaries that technicians can expect are not appealing when compared with the beginning salary of \$5145 that a library technician could earn working in U. S. Government libraries.¹⁷ Even when this figure is adjusted to reflect the conditions in North Carolina (North Carolina's hourly wage being 29 percent below the national average¹⁸) to \$3653, the salaries of two of the graduates presently employed and the average expected salary from North Carolina libraries do not meet this figure. The picture becomes even more dismal when the maximum salary of a library technician in North Carolina is compared with one which a technician can achieve by working for U. S. Government libraries. When \$9078¹⁹ is adjusted to \$7446, the maximum salaries that graduates can expect are totally inadequate, except for the salary of \$8092 offered by only one special library. A re-examination of pay scales for experienced workers is most urgent, for it seems that most libraries do not plan for long-term employees. The prospects for technicians to advance in positions of responsibility seem to be as bleak as their prospects for a reasonable advance in salary. Even the largest library systems encountered in the survey can supply, at most two technician categories. Yet the fact that is most discouraging is that a majority of libraries responding have only one or no full-time, non-professional employee. When libraries are so small, there is no room for advancement even if a technician is employed. The one real hope for creating good employment opportunities and good potential for career advancement lies in the slow process of the creation of larger library systems. Meanwhile, all libraries should re-examine their position classification schemes in light of this emerging new library worker, so that they may take full advantage of his appearance.

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- ⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁵ Campbell, interview.

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