

AALL Members Say ...

68% feel compensation of law librarians is low compared to other professionals with the same or similar levels of education.

85.6% are not satisfied with the current levels of compensation in the law librarian profession given the amount of training required.

84% indicate that the current levels of compensation inhibit some individuals from seeking necessary education to enter the profession.

93% say that compensation is an important issue of concern to the profession (56.5% listed it as a **very important concern**; 36.1% ranked compensation as **somewhat important**).

66.7% believe that the legal profession's failure to recognize the value of librarians and library services is the single most significant barrier to increased compensation for law librarians.

Source: Altman Weil 2003 survey of AALL membership. (www.aallnet.org/committee/comp_survey.pdf).

Principles Governing Compensation of Law Firm Librarians

Law Librarians' Education Levels, Contributions not Equal to Salaries

by Virginia Grant and Luis Acosta

As the legal information environment becomes increasingly complex, the need for trained intermediaries with expertise in managing and navigating information resources in law firms is growing. As information resources have shifted from print to mostly electronic formats, firm librarians have played changing, but critical, roles in helping firms maintain their competitive edge. But while their importance grows, a shortage of law librarians looms, and low salaries inhibit new entry into the librarian profession. The partners, managers, and human resources directors of the nation's law firms should be concerned, because this looming shortage threatens their firms' productivity and competitiveness.

Law librarians serve an array of functions that are essential to law firms' competitiveness, including:

- ensuring the comprehensiveness of information resources available within the firm;
- ensuring the accuracy of library users' information;
- reducing the costs and time associated with library users' information retrieval;
- budgeting expenditures on information resources;
- maintaining the currency of information resources;
- maintaining and resolving problems associated with information technology;
- providing instruction on the efficient use of information resources;
- organizing and classifying information resources to assure accessibility and ease of use;
- facilitating resource sharing with other libraries and institutions; and
- planning and managing projects relating to information resources and library facilities.

These roles are essential to the proper functioning of law firms, and they must be performed by educated professionals. Law librarians generally are required to have a master's degree in library science and also must possess substantive legal knowledge to perform their profession effectively; law librarians frequently hold juris doctor degrees

in addition to MLSs. Yet, despite the substantial education required, law firms sometimes compensate their librarians at levels similar to those of nonprofessional staff whose positions do not require extensive education.

In its 2003 *Biennial Salary Survey* of its membership, AALL found that the median annual salary for reference/research law librarians at private law firms and corporate law departments in the United States with two to five years experience was \$50,000. The median salary for all reference/research law librarians in private settings was \$52,000. The median salary for reference/research law librarians with both JDs and MLSs at law firms was \$55,000. The median salary for law library directors/chief librarians in the private sector was \$75,000.

In 2003, Altman Weil Inc., in conjunction with AALL, conducted a separate survey of AALL's membership focusing on law librarians' attitudes concerning compensation within their profession. More than 68 percent of survey respondents felt that the compensation of law librarians was low relative to that of other professionals with the same or similar levels of education. When asked if the current levels of compensation in the law librarian profession were satisfactory given the amount of training required, 85.6 percent said no.

Nearly 84 percent of survey respondents indicated that the current levels of compensation inhibited some individuals from seeking the education necessary to enter the profession. About 93 percent of survey respondents answered that compensation was an important issue of concern to the profession (56.5 percent listed it as a "very important" concern; 36.1 percent ranked compensation as "somewhat important"). When asked what they felt was the single most significant barrier to increased compensation for law librarians, 66.7 percent of survey respondents answered that it was the legal profession's failure to recognize the value of librarians and library services. The complete results of the AALL/Altman Weil Inc. Compensation Satisfaction Survey are available at www.aallnet.org/committee/comp_survey.pdf.

An HR Crisis in the Making

The discrepancy between the substantial education required for librarianship and its economic rewards is creating a potential future human resources crisis. Anecdotal evidence confirms what common sense would predict—the current pay of law librarians fails to provide incentives for many

talented people to undertake the significant investment in education necessary to enter this profession.

Statistics from recent AALL Annual Meetings show that the number of position openings advertised at the placement center has exceeded the number of resumes submitted. Statistics compiled by the American Library Association indicate that an insufficient number of persons are entering master's degree programs to replace librarians who will retire in coming years. The graying of the library profession generally is illustrated by the fact that 42 percent of librarians at the Library of Congress will be eligible for retirement by the end of fiscal year 2008.

Without adequate incoming librarians with proper education to replace those who leave the profession, law firms' information pipelines will suffer. The threatened law librarian shortage could directly affect firms' bottom lines, if roles best performed by librarians come to be played by persons without the appropriate training or if attorney and paralegal billable hours come to be spent on work more efficiently performed by librarians.

Principals of Compensation for Professional Staff

The inadequacy of law librarian salaries reflects the failure of law firms to fully integrate their professional staff compensation strategies into their overall value system. The salaries of law librarians in particular appear to be out of sync with the important role played by librarians in the knowledge-based law firm environment. Librarians play essential, but largely hidden, roles in maintaining firm productivity, and law firms too often fail to recognize the value of their librarians to their bottom line.

The principles governing compensation for law librarians, like those governing the compensation of professional staff within a legal organization, generally should:

- be premised on fairness and equity;
- allow law firms to attract and retain persons of high quality;
- be based on the librarian's contribution to the firm's overall strategic mission; and
- be aligned with the market reality for skills and experience in a particular geographic location.

Law firms should recognize that librarians deserve to be remunerated at levels that reflect the substantial education, knowledge, and hard work required to effectively perform the role entrusted to them. Remuneration should be based not

on job titles but on the value of the actual duties and responsibilities performed. In recent years, as information resources have migrated from print to electronic formats, librarians' duties and responsibilities have shifted. For many law librarian positions, duties have increased in breadth and complexity without corresponding increases in compensation.

Compensation should be set at levels that allow firms to attract and retain high quality librarians. As information formats proliferate and law firm practice expands globally and across areas of specialization, the knowledge required of law firm librarians

Median Annual Salary for Reference/Research Law Librarians in Private Settings

Librarian	Salary
All	\$52,000
With 2-5 Years Experience	\$50,000
With JD and MLS	\$55,000
Directors/Chief Librarians	\$75,000

Source: AALL Biennial Salary Survey and Organizational Characteristics 2003

has correspondingly increased. As attorneys have become more specialized, librarians have become responsible for researching and organizing the knowledge of disparate sub-disciplines within the law and of non-legal disciplines. To stay competitive in a difficult information environment, law firms need to attract persons of high intellectual caliber to serve this role, and that requires suitable compensation.

Law firm management and administration need to be mindful of how librarians contribute to the firm's overall strategic mission. Librarians should be recognized as vital parts of the legal services delivery team. In addition to continuing to provide the information that supports the firm's substantive practice of law, librarians are well suited to research the needs of existing and potential new clients and conduct competitive intelligence research. Librarians should be fully utilized in providing training to attorneys and other personnel in the most effective use of print and electronic materials. Librarians are well-suited to play a role in knowledge management, IT, and the management of client and case databases. Administrators also should consider how librarians could be used in their firms' strategic planning, financial planning, Web site development, and firm publications. Firms should explore non-traditional means of integrating information

professionals into the provision of value-added services to clients, and the improvement of client service.

Factors such as firm size, firm profitability, and geographic location must be taken into account in determining compensation levels of legal information professionals. Firms in more expensive areas of the country must pay their attorneys more to attract top talent; law librarians in more expensive regions of the country should be compensated in a corresponding manner.

For their part, law firm librarians should be alert for opportunities to make their contribution more visible and ways they can make firm management aware of their contributions. Librarians in firms where information professionals are underutilized should encourage firm management to explore new roles for librarians as part of the legal services delivery team. Effective law firms utilize information professionals in knowledge management, competitive intelligence, evolving client needs monitoring, personnel training, and incorporation of information technology in legal practice and firm administration; law firms that fail to utilize librarians in these ways will suffer in the marketplace. Lastly, librarians should recognize that they have a duty to their profession to develop negotiating skills and to demand improved compensation for themselves and their colleagues.

The Bottom Line

While this article has focused on law firm competitiveness, the points made here apply with equal force to law schools, government agencies, and court systems, all of which rely heavily on law librarians in meeting the missions of their institutions.

To maintain competitiveness in an increasingly knowledge-driven law firm environment, law firm managers and administrators need to recognize the value of law librarians and must take action to ensure they are compensated accordingly.

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