

# The Presence of the Doctorate among Small College Library Directors

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Although a doctorate provides a library director with little practical assistance toward fulfilling his or her job, many college and university administrators seem to expect library directors to have one. The presence of the doctorate has been studied extensively within ARL institutions, but not within small colleges. This article explores the presence of the doctorate among small college library directors, considering gender and tenure in addition to size of the library, the college, and the library staff. This research finds that 20 percent of library directors at Baccalaureate I institutions have doctorates, and 40 percent have second master's degrees. Librarians with doctorates do not direct larger institutions than those without Ph.D.s. The value of the doctorate, and its future among female directors in particular, is considered.



ibrarians expend much energy, both informally and in journal articles and books, discussing the importance of the doctorate in librarianship. About half the country's colleges and universities offer librarians faculty status, but unlike their teaching colleagues, very few of these librarians hold doctorates.<sup>1</sup> A master's degree in library science is considered a terminal degree, and unlike in classroom teaching settings, a doctorate is not a requirement for employment. Nevertheless, the advanced degree often provides a certain distinction that administrators and teaching faculty find irresistible. Although a doctorate is not required for most librarian positions, and despite its lack of relevance to the administrative work of a library director, most institutions desire, and some require, that the director hold a doctorate.<sup>2</sup>

Through the years, researchers have explored the educational background of directors at ARL libraries, and many conclusions can be drawn from these results. A few studies have attempted to compare ARL and non-ARL institutions, but problems in methodology have prevented comparable results. Smaller research projects have described the backgrounds of library directors in regional settings, and other authors have analyzed the nature of the library director's work environment in small college libraries, particularly in relation to large research institutions.<sup>3,4</sup> Julie O'Keeffe's recent study looked at the first directorship held by small college directors in the midwest.<sup>5</sup> However, 75 percent of her respondents were from less-selective Baccalaureate II institutions. Few researchers have explored the presence of the doctorate among directors at small, selective col-

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leges. This study aims to fill that void and to shed light on the presence and impact of the doctorate among small college librarians.

This research found that 20 percent of library directors at small colleges hold doctorates, and an additional 40 percent hold second master's degrees. Librarians holding doctorates do not direct significantly larger libraries in terms of either volumes of books or size of budget. Complete comparisons, based on Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) data and biographical data for librarians, contrast these numbers by gender, educational background, and school data.

#### Review of the Literature

About half a dozen articles on the changes in ARL library directorships have been published in the past two decades. However, none have studied these changes in small college libraries; only one compared ARL statistics directly with non-ARL universities. John Caldwell's 1962 study of library directors by library size found that even among the smallest libraries, some directors possessed doctorates, although most were in subjects other than library science.<sup>6</sup>

Arthur M. McAnally and Robert B. Downs's seminal article on the demands of librarianship on directors first identified many of the changes that were taking place.<sup>7</sup> One item most commonly noted was the expected shortening of tenure for library directors, primarily due to the expansion of pressures on the director. In comparisons among like-sized institutions, McAnally and Downs determined that "oddly, the chief librarians of colleges and junior colleges do not appear to be affected" by these dramatic changes in tenure lengths. This topic has been debated by others and interpreted in several different ways in follow-up surveys.

William L. Cohn also cited the "apparently rapid turnover in leadership at our largest and most prestigious academic libraries," but his hypothesis has yet to be applied systematically to, or analyzed in,

small college settings.<sup>8</sup> Cohn compiled a series of complex tables reflecting the degrees held by ARL directors between 1933 and 1973. By selecting institutions that were ARL members in 1973 and comparing their library directors over the previous four decades, he determined that there was no dramatic increase in the number of doctorates held by these directors between 1933 and 1973. This result is particularly interesting in light of the fact that only forty-three of the seventy-four institutions he studied were members of ARL through that entire time period. University administrators presumably had an interest in increasing institutional respect through achievements such as ARL membership, and the evidence suggests that they felt a doctorate was not a necessary requirement for the directors they selected to take them to those higher plateaus.

However, Cohn did show that some form of "professional" training became one requirement for these newly appointed directors. In 1933, more than 60 percent of the library directors did not have professional degrees, but by 1973, that percentage was cut in half and was held there primarily due to a number of incumbents who had received directorships without professional degrees years before. Perhaps the most surprising result in Cohn's study is that, despite a doubling of the number of Ph.D.s granted in library science between 1968 and 1972, the number of ARL directors with the degree actually declined slightly between 1933 and 1973. This also was the case for Ph.D.s in fields other than library science. In all likelihood, those having recently completed the degrees were not yet in positions to compete for ARL directorships, but in fact other studies have shown that this trend has continued.

Jerry L. Parsons analyzed the differences in educational backgrounds between directors of ARL institutions in 1958 and 1973.<sup>9</sup> He found that in 1958, more than half the directors held Ph.D.s, although only twelve of the degrees, or less than half, were in library science. In

1973, about 30 percent of the directors held Ph.D.s and, again, less than half of the degrees (eleven in all) were in library science. The number of institutions in each year's study grew from forty-two in 1958 to seventy-eight in 1973. Parsons was surprised to discover that of the thirty-eight directors in 1973 who held a master's degree in library science, only six held a second master's degree.

Ronald Dale Karr compared another fifteen-year span in ARL directors and found an even greater development of professionalism. In 1966, 15 percent of the directors did not have library degrees, but "by 1981 every ARL director was a graduate of a certified graduate library program."<sup>10</sup> In contrast, Karr identified a surprising drop in the number of directors with doctorates—from nearly half of the directors holding some form of doctorate in 1966 to only a third in 1981. He theorized that "a second master's degree in a subject area had become an acceptable substitution for the doctorate."<sup>11</sup> A more accurate representation may be that, for reasons other than level of education, library directors with second master's degrees are the more qualified individuals, rather than actually "acceptable substitutes." Perhaps the library directors of 1966 were trained in academic subjects and drawn from the institution's teaching faculty, whereas those of 1981 received training in library science and were drawn from other professional positions in librarianship. Another interesting statistic identified by Karr is that nine of the eighty-three ARL directors in 1966, or 11 percent, had received bachelor's degrees from the institutions they were then directing. One might expect this statistic to be significantly more pronounced among small colleges.

William S. Wong and David S. Zubatsky were the first to compare ARL tenure statistics with those in non-ARL doctorate-granting colleges and universities.<sup>12</sup> Using a two-page questionnaire and some published library statistics, Wong and Zubatsky attempted to ascertain specific statistics in non-ARL univer-

sities and then compare them with ARL universities. Their questions on the educational degrees held by directors contained what they termed "a slight ambiguity," which led to some respondents indicating only their highest degree received, rather than all degrees earned to date. The result was that only half of the directors stated that they held an MLS, raising questions about the results on this section of their survey.

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More recently, Marcia J. Myers and Paula T. Kaufman compared changes among ARL directors between 1970 and 1989.<sup>13</sup> Myers and Kaufman believe that their data supports Karr's suggestion of a second master's degree being an acceptable substitute for the doctorate. Again, the lack of doctorates among this group does not confirm this hypothesis. A study analyzing educational backgrounds of final candidates for directorships, comparing the backgrounds of those offered a position with those not offered a position, may begin to answer this question. However, without knowing the pool from which candidates were chosen and the reasons for those selections, one cannot determine whether the second master's was actually an "acceptable substitute."

Myers and Kaufman determined that 38.3 percent of the ARL directors in 1989 held a Ph.D. in library science or another subject field, a decline from 43.9 percent of the population in 1970. About 22 percent of the group held a second master's degree, up from 18 percent in 1970. The number of ARL directors with Ph.D.s may have increased dramatically in the past decade, so it is important to note that a greater differential between the two groups may exist currently than in 1989.

O'Keefe's 1998 study of directors at midwestern colleges focused on directors'

experiences in obtaining their first position.<sup>14</sup> Some specific items, such as data on alumni versus nonalumni directors, are particularly interesting, as is her finding on the very short time that elapsed before some directors received their first directorship. "The only alarming data from the survey," she writes,

were that almost 20 percent of first-time directors had one year of professional library experience or less when they assumed their position and that 14 percent had not held any professional jobs when they assumed their first director's position. It is difficult to imagine that these individuals would possess the knowledge and skills necessary to perform well.<sup>15</sup>

O'Keeffe's study found that, on average, directors have held their current positions (not necessarily their first position) for 11.5 years. The gender differences, particularly among those with Ph.D.s or second master's degrees, were particularly notable. O'Keeffe did not explore the length of time people held their first position. Because some of her respondents were still in their first position and others had moved on and completed their first tenure as a library director, such a comparison would have been inappropriate. Seventy-five percent of the respondents in O'Keeffe's survey work at Baccalaureate II schools, whereas all of the subjects in this survey work at Baccalaureate I schools.

All of the research of the past several decades makes it clear that the individuals of interest in most studies are those directing large academic research libraries. However, the number of individuals holding such positions is relatively small. A larger group of equally important library directors exists, and members of this group have rarely been the subjects of research designed to learn anything about their characteristics or backgrounds. This survey attempts to initiate a response to this neglect.

### Methodology

The author sought information on the educational background of directors at selective liberal arts colleges in 1998. The study considered the number and type of educational degrees the directors held, as well as their tenures as director in each institution. Statistical information on their library and their institution, specifically on the size in volumes and budget reported by the institution, the number of professionals and FTE staff in the library, and the number of students at the institution, was used to compare libraries.

The author used the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education as a sampling frame and selected every second institution included in the Baccalaureate (Liberal Arts) Colleges I listing, a group of 166 institutions.<sup>16</sup> Because the primary goal of the research was the study of the doctorate among college librarians and the size of these librarians' libraries, institutions with acting directors, rotating deans of the library, or libraries that served more than one discrete institution were replaced with institutions not under such limitations. Directors at eighty-three institutions were selected, and information on each director's educational background and tenure as director was gathered from standard biographical sources, college catalogs, and college, library, or personal Web pages. Much of this information then was confirmed through an e-mail message to each director for whom a valid e-mail address could be found; 79 percent replied to the message. The 1996 preliminary IPEDS database, downloaded from the U.S. Department of Education's Web site, provided statistical data on each institution. Information on the number of students at an institution was gathered from the 1998 *Barron's Profiles of American Colleges*.<sup>17</sup>

### Results

Among eighty librarians for whom sufficient information could be found, forty-seven were men (59%) and thirty-three were women (41%). One-fifth held doctorates, two-fifths held second master's

**TABLE 1**  
**Directors of Small College Libraries,**  
**Divided by Gender and Education Level**

	Librarians with a Ph.D.	Librarians with a 2nd Master's	Librarians with an MLS Only	Librarians with No MLS	Totals
Women	5	11	17	0	33
Men	11	20	15	1	47
<b>Totals</b>	16	31	32	1	80

degrees, two-fifths held an MLS only, and one did not hold the MLS. These results compare closely with those found in O'Keeffe's 1996 survey of midwestern Baccalaureate I and II schools. She noted a closer parity in gender, with about 53 percent of her respondents being male, compared to 59 percent of the subjects in this study. Moreover, she found that 14 percent of her respondents held doctorates and 38 percent held a second master's degree. This study found that 20 percent of the subjects for whom information could be found held a doctorate, and an additional 40 percent held a second master's (see table 1).

Among the sixteen directors with Ph.D.s, only six were in information science, library science, or information and library science. Of the remaining ten, only the fields of anthropology and German each appeared twice; all doctorates are in the liberal arts.<sup>18</sup> Myers and Kaufman showed that nearly 40 percent of library directors in ARL libraries held doctorates in 1989, twice the percentage of librarians in small college libraries.

Among small college librarians, results from this survey show clearly that librarians with Ph.D.s did not, on average, direct libraries with significantly more students, volumes, librarians, staff, or budgets. Differences are minimal, at best. Tables 2 and 3 show the mean and median averages for library directors for whom information could be found, sorted by gender and level of education attained. One male subject, who apparently did not hold an MLS, was not included in these

computations. Overall, libraries directed by men have slightly larger volume counts (5.5% larger), slightly larger budgets (3.8%), more students (16.3%), and nearly identical FTE library employees (0.7% less) compared with those directed by women.

Among the seventy-five directors for whom information was available on where they received their undergraduate degrees, seven are directing libraries at their alma maters. Karr noted that 11 percent of ARL directors in 1966 had received bachelor's degrees from their employers, compared with 10.7 percent of the subjects in this study.

Perhaps the most surprising result in the study is the length of time that individuals have held their tenure as library director. Table 4 shows that among the seventy-five individuals for whom tenure information could be found (60% men, 40% women), men have held their positions much longer than women, and the difference is particularly notable among those with a Ph.D. The comparisons only approach parity among directors with an MLS degree only. One female director, responding to the author's e-mail confirmation survey, argued that the push to increase the number of women in administrative positions might decrease the number of female library directors holding doctorates. Results bear this out and also show a great disparity in the length of time that women and men with doctorates have held their directorships.

Not only was the average time as director greater among men, but the range

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P	.	F	M	1	2	228	21	226	26	67	5
M	's	F	M	1	2	228	21	226	26	67	5
M	y	F	M	1	6	6	6	5	\$1	66	6, 64
Tota	Aver	F	M	1	5	3	3	0	\$1	11,48	8
	s	F	M	1	2	2	2	6	\$1	8	9
		F	M	1	4	3	3	9	\$	9	0
		F	M	1	0	3	4	\$	4	0	0

also was much greater. In this study, no woman with a doctorate has held her current position for more than six years and no woman with a second master's for more than twenty years. In contrast, more than half of the male directors with a Ph.D. have held their position for more than ten years; only two of the eleven have held their position for less than six years. Looking at the results in this fash-

ion, among library directors with Ph.D.s and appointed in the past six years, five have been women and two have been men. If this is a trend that continues, library directorship can expect to achieve gender parity, although it will take several retirements and many years. Obviously, achieving gender equivalency, where the percentage of female library directors accurately reflects the percentage of female librarians, will take much longer.

An even more marked trend can be seen among directors holding a second master's degree. This study found that of the ten directors holding a second master's and appointed in the past seven years, eight have been women and just two have been men.

### Discussion

Many college and university administrators argue that the library director should hold a doctorate; indeed, 23 percent of academic directorship advertisements in *College & Research Libraries News* in 1998 and 1999 either required or preferred a doctorate, and 21 percent required or preferred a second master's degree or doctorate.<sup>19</sup> Administrators may believe that library directors with doctorates can provide better service to students pursuing a doctorate because they have a better understanding of the process. Of course, this should not be an issue among librarians at Baccalaureate I institutions, which by definition do not grant doctoral degrees. Another argument

may be that because the vast majority of teaching faculty at small and large colleges and universities hold doctorates, the college librarian should as well, perhaps as a form of educational penance.

Librarianship is filled with individuals who, after completing doctoral work in their respective fields, have turned to librarianship for employment. In discussions with the author, some doctorate-

holding library students, perhaps ruing their earlier educational choices, argued that their doctoral degree does not help them in librarianship: they know arcane items of knowledge about their particular topic, but this knowledge does them little good in assisting patrons at a reference desk or in cataloging books in another field. However, these students miss the point of teaching faculties' interest in a librarian with a doctorate: teaching faculty do not seek someone with esoteric knowledge in a given field but, rather, someone with some personal knowledge of the experience and how it affects doctoral students.

However, one wonders about the importance of even that argument. Its relevance in small colleges already has been refuted. Moreover, even in the largest research libraries, methods of researching and writing a doctorate vary so widely among individuals and among fields, and have changed so much over the past few decades and will continue to change in ways we can only guess at, that the argument for personal experience is not as powerful as some faculty suggest.

At the same time, the process of obtaining a doctorate differs dramatically from that of composing a master's paper or a master's thesis. Many of the college librarians in this study have a second master's

degree, so they may have written a master's paper in library school and a master's thesis in their other field, or perhaps even two theses. But a thesis cannot compare to the research and intellectual rigor that goes into a well-argued and well-written dissertation. A master's thesis is often written in one or two semesters, with limited off-campus research, whereas a dissertation usually requires years of research and composition. In many humanities fields, that research must be completed in remote or foreign locations. In the physical sciences, it often involves the use of facilities not available at the student's home campus. With the average dissertation taking several years to research and write, the difference between a dissertation and a thesis is very clear.

The first of James Axtell's "twenty-five reasons to publish" puts a more positive light on the doctorate and its role in the creation of a faculty member: "The great majority of those who have completed the doctorate consider the most valuable and enjoyable part of their doctoral work not the courses nor the language, comprehensive, and oral exams, but the research for and writing of the dissertation, the last act of their lives as dependent students and the first step toward their intellectual independence as professors."<sup>20</sup> Citing Theodore Ziolkowski, a former graduate

**TABLE 3**  
**Institutional Statistics by Director's Education Level**  
 [Mean average / median average]

	Gender	Enrolled Students	Professionals in Library	FTE Library Employees
<b>Ph.D.</b>	Female (n=5)	1,589 / 1,888	6.0 / 6.0	24.7 / 31.4
	Male (n=11)	2,029 / 1,301	8.8 / 6.0	30.0 / 21.6
<b>MLS &amp; 2nd Master's</b>	Female (n=11)	1,461 / 1,842	6.8 / 6.0	25.5 / 24.3
	Male (n=20)	1,613 / 1,293	7.5 / 5.8	25.6 / 24.2
<b>MLS Only</b>	Female (n=17)	1,308 / 1,226	7.8 / 6.3	29.1 / 25.0
	Male (n=15)	1,363 / 1,225	7.4 / 6.0	26.1 / 21.5
<b>Total Averages</b>	Female (n=33)	1,402 / 1,482	7.2 / 6.0	27.2 / 25.0
	Male (n=46)	1,631 / 1,284	7.8 / 6.0	27.0 / 21.5
	Female &			
	Male (n=79)	1,535 / 1,320	7.5 / 6.0	27.1 / 21.6

**TABLE 4**  
**Mean and Median Tenure, in Years, of Small College Directors for Whom Data Were Available, Versus Gender and Level of Education**

	Gender	Tenure as Director
Ph.D.	Female (n=5)	3.2 / 2.0
	Male (n=11)	13.6 / 13.0
MLS & 2nd master's	Female (n=11)	5.9 / 5.0
	Male (n=19)	14.8 / 14.0
MLS Only	Female (n=14)	11.3 / 9.5
	Male (n=15)	12.7 / 13.0
Total Averages	Female (n=30)	8.0 / 6.0
	Male (n=45)	13.8 / 13.0
	Female & Male (n=75)	11.5 / 10.0

dean at Princeton, Axtell asserted that the dissertation shows the new Ph.D. how to organize a course and write a good book. Ironically, it is more likely that library directors at non-doctorate-granting colleges are teaching courses more than library directors at doctorate-granting universities.

As stated previously, one female director, responding to the e-mail request for confirmation of data, proposed that the push for increasing the number of women in administrative and directorial positions may have led to an increase in the promotion of women without doctorates. The implication is that few qualified female candidates hold doctorates. This survey's results do show that twice as many male as female directors hold doctorates, whereas just over 40 percent of the positions are currently held by women. However, there should be no lack of women with doctorates: in 1996, 47 percent of U.S. citizens receiving doctorates at American universities were women. In the same year, forty of the forty-nine doctorates granted in library science were earned by women.<sup>21</sup>

**Conclusion**

The role of the doctorate among library directors is one that clearly raises concern at many institutions. It almost seems as if a reverse correlation exists between an institution's view of its own reputation and

the administration's fervent desire that the library director hold an earned doctorate. Such libraries expect directorship candidates to hold a doctorate, though the field in which the doctorate was obtained is irrelevant. Various ARL schools have recently hired library directors who do not hold doctorates, an act that has had little or no negative effect on the institution's or its library's reputation. A

doctorate in and of itself does not make a library director a success. One could argue that the doctorate may better prepare a librarian for dealing with students doing doctoral-level research, but that does not happen at Baccalaureate I institutions.

Among the directors of selective small colleges, this study found that only 20 percent hold doctorates, and most of those are not in library or information science. Forty percent of these directors hold a second master's degree, and just less than 40 percent hold an MLS only. It would appear that small college libraries are not hiring directors with doctorates. There is no significant difference between the size of libraries for those with a doctorate and those without.

Although administrators, teaching faculty, and others may continue to call for library directors with doctorates, it is not the doctorate that makes a college librarian a successful administrator and library director. Completing a doctorate does not prepare one for work in college library administration. Though completing a doctorate is an enormous achievement (several directors had done extensive upper-level graduate work or everything but the dissertation but had not completed the degree), it should not be seen as a requirement for directorship in small or large college libraries.



A Ph.D. is a valuable contribution to the library director's role and should be a source of celebration and pride, but it cannot replace administrative ability, creativity, and knowledge in a successful college or university library director.

### Notes

1. W. Bede Mitchell and Mary Reichel, "Publish or Perish: A Dilemma for Academic Librarians?" *College & Research Libraries* 60 (May 1999): 232-43. Mitchell and Reichel studied scholarship at institutions classified by the Carnegie Foundation as Research I or II, Doctoral I or II, and Master's I or II. The current research focuses, instead, on Baccalaureate I institutions.
2. A cursory study of all directorship advertisements in *College & Research Libraries News* for 1998 and 1999 found that of ninety-two unique ads for directors of American academic libraries of any size, two required applicants to hold a Ph.D., seventeen stated that a Ph.D. was "desired" or "preferred," twelve required a second master's degree (after the MLS) or a Ph.D., seven preferred a second master's or a Ph.D., and twenty-six preferred candidates with an advanced degree after the MLS. Twenty-six did not mention additional educational requirements, and two sought candidates with either an MLS or a Ph.D.
3. Judith Tierney and Terry Mech, "Directors of Small College Libraries in the Northeast: Who Are They?" *Technicalities* 5 (Jan. 1985): 7-9.
4. Joel Clemmer, "The Liberal Arts College Library Director and the Collegiate Myth," *Journal of Library Administration* 24, no. 3 (1997): 73-88.
5. Julie O'Keeffe, "Small College Library Directors: Getting in the Door and Surviving on the Job," *College & Research Libraries* 59 (Mar. 1998): 140-53.
6. John Caldwell, "Degrees Held by Head Librarians of Colleges and Universities," *College & Research Libraries* 23 (May 1962): 227-28, 260.
7. Arthur M. McAnally and Robert B. Downs, "The Changing Role of Directors in University Libraries," *College & Research Libraries* 34 (Mar. 1973): 103-25.
8. William L. Cohn, "An Overview of ARL Directors, 1933-1973," *College & Research Libraries* 37 (Mar. 1976): 137.
9. Jerry L. Parsons, "Characteristics of Research Library Directors, 1958 and 1973," *Wilson Library Bulletin* 50 (Apr. 1976): 613-17.
10. Ronald Dale Karr, "The Changing Profile of University Library Directors, 1966-1981," *College & Research Libraries* 45 (July 1984): 283.
11. *Ibid.*, 284.
12. William S. Wong and David S. Zubatsky, "The Tenure Rate of University Library Directors: A 1983 Survey," *College & Research Libraries* 46 (Jan. 1985): 69-77.
13. Marcia J. Myers and Paula T. Kaufman, "ARL Directors: Two Decades of Change," *College & Research Libraries* 52 (May 1991): 241-54.
14. O'Keeffe, "Small College Library Directors."
15. *Ibid.*, 151.
16. Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, *A Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, 1994 Edition* (Princeton, N.J.: Carnegie Foundation, 1994).
17. National Center for Education Statistics, *Preliminary 1996 Academic Library Data* [subset of *Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System*] (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, 1997). Available online at: <http://nces.ed.gov/Ipeds/aclib96.html>. *Barron's Profiles of American Colleges*, 22nd ed. (Hauppauge, N.Y.: Barron's, 1997).
18. The other fields in which doctorates were earned are American studies, history, classical philology, religion, philosophy, and English and American literature.
19. See note 2, above, for specific results data.
20. James Axtell, "Twenty-five Reasons to Publish," *Journal of Scholarly Publishing* 29 (Oct. 1997): 6.
21. Peter H. Henderson, Julie E. Clarke, and Cynthia Woods, *Summary Report 1996: Doctorate Recipients from United States Universities* (Washington, D.C.: National Academy Pr., 1998), 67.