

Resignations in Two University Libraries

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THIS IS A REPORT of some of the findings from a study which was made to investigate to what extent employee turnover in university libraries is caused by resignations due to low salaries and the lack of chances for advancement. The material was collected early in 1948 from field visits and from mail questionnaires which were sent to employees who had resigned. Of 313 questionnaires, 175 (56 per cent) were returned. Although the sample is not entirely representative of the total group of resigners, it is representative of the professional and nonprofessional employees.

This study is limited to two university libraries—the University of Illinois Library and the University of Minnesota Library. It is further limited to the personnel on the Urbana campus of the University of Illinois and to the main library at the University of Minnesota. Only full-time employees have been included. The period of the study is for the five calendar years, 1943-1947.

These librarians were chosen for this study, not because of their representativeness, but because they were considered to have above average provisions for the organization and welfare of their personnel. It was felt that these librarians would have better than average methods for combatting turnover, and as a consequence, there would be fewer resignations than in other libraries. The conclusions of the study apply only to

the libraries studied, or at most to those that are similar. This investigation attempts to answer the question: Is it true that employees resigned from these two university libraries because of low salaries and lack of chances for advancement?

Definitions

Turnover in this report will be expressed by the separation rate, unless otherwise indicated. The method of computing turnover used by the U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics is preferred:

1. Find the average number of employees. (Add the number on the payroll on the first and last of the month and divide by two.)
2. Divide the total number of employees separated from the payroll by the average number of employees.
3. Multiply the result by 100 to get the rate per 100 employees.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics method for computing the turnover rate could not be completely followed in this study because it was difficult to obtain all of the library payrolls for the five-year period. The figures given in the annual reports to the American Library Association were substituted for the "average number of employees."

Resignations are considered separations initiated by employees because of dissatisfaction with job conditions or for personal reasons.¹

¹ Dahl, Mary B. *The ABC of Absenteeism and Labor Turnover*. Washington, Government Printing Office, 1944, p. 2.

Size of Turnover

Writers agree that a certain amount of turnover is inevitable and desirable. A high rate of turnover is more generally the cause for alarm, but a very low rate may also indicate that personnel practices need to be examined. Just as a high turnover rate indicates instability, a low rate warns of stagnation.

Norms are not available to show what constitutes "high" or "low" turnover for libraries. "An annual rate of about 15 per cent, spread more or less evenly over the whole staff" was considered optimum in a

When the total number of employees and the total number of separations, or resignations, could be found, the rate was computed. When the actual rate was given it was used. Rates were computed or found for 21 libraries. However, not all of the libraries reported for all of the five years, 1943-47. The rates ranged from 150 per cent in 1943 to 10 per cent in 1944. Table I shows that the turnover rates of the two libraries studied range from 47 per cent in 1945 (University of Illinois) to 11 per cent in 1944 (University of Minnesota).

These data are only rough computations.

Table I
Turnover Rates for Two University Libraries, 1943-47

Year	Average Number of Workers		Separations			
			Number		Per Cent	
	Minnesota	Illinois	Minnesota	Illinois	Minnesota	Illinois
1943	88	114	21	36	24	31
1944	91	119	10	51	11	42
1945	76	123	13	58	17	47
1946	77	124	20	37	26	30
1947	77	134	32	39	42	29
Total Average	82	123	19	44	23	36

study of six American public libraries.² An English writer stated that he "once calculated that in large systems before the war, the average annual intake due to staff leaving for various reasons was 10 per cent."³ In 1926 the rate of turnover for libraries in the United States federal field service was six per cent.⁴

Library literature and approximately 200 annual reports of individual libraries were searched for statements of rates of turnover. Very few reports contained such data.

² Goldhor, Herbert. "The Selection of Employees in Large Civil Service and Non-Civil Service Public Libraries." Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Graduate Library School, University of Chicago, 1942, p. 29.

³ Hutchings, F. G. B. "The Education of Future Entrants to the Library Profession." In *Papers and Summaries of Discussions at the Brighton Conference*. London, The Library Association, 1947, p. 74.

⁴ Mosher, W., and Kingsley, J. D. *Public Personnel Administration*. Rev. ed. New York, Harper & Bros., 1941, p. 42.

The figures are too meager and the sources are not reliable enough for accurate measurement. No attempt is made to determine whether either of the two university libraries has a high or low turnover rate. It would seem that the separation rates for the two libraries are not higher than the average for the other libraries. This supports the earlier assumption upon which the choice of these two libraries was based. Since little has been published concerning attempts to control turnover in libraries, it is not known whether this is an adequate criterion.

Causes of Turnover

The causes cited most often in studies of turnover are (1) dissatisfaction with

Table 2
Reasons for Resigning
(Arranged in the Order of Frequency)

	Number of Times Cited	Per Cent of Times Cited
Marriage, or following husband	48	19
Chances for advancement	41	16
Better opportunities elsewhere		
Limited chances here		
Lack of responsibility and challenge		
Dissatisfaction with rank		
Salaries	38	15
Type of work	22	9
Disliked work or preferred new work		
Monotony of work		
Wanted to do war work		
Working relations	20	8
Unsatisfactory supervision		
"Unfriendly atmosphere"		
Temporary work	18	7
Motherhood	14	5
For self-improvement	14	5
To attend school		
To broaden experience		
Locality or climate	9	
Wished to travel	4	
Home responsibilities	4	
Health	4	
Wanted to be at or nearer home	4	
Wanted a change	3	
Trained in, and preferred another field	2	
Physical working conditions	2	
Nepotism rule	2	
Loneliness	2	
Following family	1	
Working hours or days	1	
Housing	1	
Transportation	1	16
Total	255	100

salaries, with the nature of the job or working conditions, with the hours or type of work, or with the personnel policies; (2) better opportunities elsewhere; and (3) conditions not directly related to the job, such as housing, child care, marriage, and death.

The causes that have been given in the literature for high turnover in libraries include low salaries and too few increases, monotony of too much routine work, not enough scope for initiative and development, and lack of promotion.⁵ "Marriage and family life have taken a heavy toll of

young women in the profession."⁶ In the present study, 22 reasons for leaving were given by the 175 resigners who answered the questionnaire. These 22 reasons were cited 255 times. Table 2 shows that the resigners from these two libraries cited the following reasons most frequently: marriage, chances for advancement, salaries, the type of work, and working relations.

This general survey of the causes of resignations in the two libraries is superficial, and it should be only a preliminary step to a more intensive analysis. The determination of the causes of resignations, because

⁵ Nourse, L. M. "Speaking for the Dissatisfied Young Assistant." *A.L.A. Bulletin*, 31:629, Oct. 1, 1937.

⁶ Ulveling, R. A. "Personnel Planning for the Post-war Period." *A.L.A. Bulletin*, 38:59, February 1944.

of their complex nature and the large number of factors to be considered, would necessitate an inquiry of magnitude quite beyond the scope of this study. The main objective is to isolate and measure the resignations due to low salaries and lack of chances for advancement.

positions? (6) To what extent did the resigners take positions of a higher grade than their former positions?

The combined data for the two libraries show that: (1) The median annual salary of the employees who remained is significantly greater than the median annual

Table 3
The Importance of "Salaries" and "The Chance for Advancement" as Shown
by the Number of Resigners Who Cited These Reasons in
Two University Libraries, 1943-47

	University of Illinois Library				University of Minnesota Library			
	Professional Employees		Non-Professional Employees		Professional Employees		Non-Professional Employees	
	Male Employees	Female Employees	Male Employees	Female Employees	Male Employees	Female Employees	Male Employees	Female Employees
Proportion of resigners from the two university libraries who cited salaries and the chance for advancement as reasons for leaving.	83% (10)	62% (23)	0 ..	13% (6)	100% (1)	19% (3)	100% (5)	26% (5)
Proportion of resigners from the two university libraries who did not cite salaries and the chance for advancement as reason for leaving.	17% (2)	38% (38)	0 ..	87% (41)	0 ..	81% (13)	1 ..	74% (14)
Total	100%	100%	0	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

(The number of employees is given in parenthesis.)

The Importance of Salaries and Chances for Advancement

The following questions were considered: (1) Do the average annual salaries of the resigners and the average annual salaries of the employees who remained differ significantly? (2) As the median annual salaries of the resigners increased, did the annual resignation rates decrease? (3) What proportion of the resigners received higher salaries in their new positions? (4) What proportion of the resigners cited low salaries and the lack of chances for advancement as reasons for leaving? (5) What proportion of the resigners expected better chances for advancement in the new

salary of the employees who resigned. (2) The negative relationship between the annual resignation rates and the median annual salaries of the resigners is too slight (-.10 Spearman) to give a definite answer in regard to the trend in this area for these two libraries. Resignation rates increased in 1945 and in 1947 at the same time that salaries increased. (3) Fifty-six per cent of the resigners did not receive higher salaries in their new positions than they had been receiving in the libraries studied. (4) Salaries and the chance for advancement were cited 33 per cent of the time as reasons for leaving. (5) Thirty-seven per cent of the resigners, in the two libraries studied, did not ex-

pect a better chance for advancement in their new positions. (6) Thirty-nine per cent of the resigners did not receive a higher rank in their new positions.

These data were further analyzed by class of worker, sex, and institution (see Table 3).

The analysis indicates: (1) That there were years when the salaries of those who remained were not significantly greater than the salaries of the resigners among the professional and nonprofessional workers and in the two libraries; (2) that the proportion of resignations did not decrease as the median annual salaries for resigners increased for nonprofessional employees, and for employees at the University of Minnesota Library; (3) that the proportion of times that salaries and the chance for advancement were cited is greater than all of the other reasons for men only. Men constitute merely 9 per cent of the resigners.

For the five years studied, the resignation rate is largest for the University of Minnesota Library in 1947. For the first time in the five-year period, there is no significant difference between the median annual salary of the employees who remained and the median annual salary of the employees who resigned from the University of Illinois Library in 1947. This leads one to question whether low salaries and the lack of chances for advancement can wisely be adjudged the only important reasons why employees resigned from these two libraries.

Conclusions

The available evidence tends to show that although salaries and chances for advancement are very important reasons why library employees resign, these are not the only important reasons. Comparison of the salaries of the employees who remained with the salaries of the employees who resigned; study of the relationship between salaries and resignation rates; and analysis

of the responses to the questionnaire all seem to show that low salaries and lack of chances for advancement have not been the only important reasons why employees have resigned from these two libraries.

The conclusions of this study are confined to these two university libraries. Due to lack of comparative material, and due to the unrefined state of most of the data, caution must be observed in interpreting the results. However, these conclusions may provide a sounder basis for practice in analyzing turnover than do opinions unchecked by evidence.

Some conclusions may be drawn in regard to the study of turnover in libraries. This phase of personnel administration has been neglected. This is a serious fault since the problem of maintaining adequate library personnel is acute. No reports of intensive studies of turnover in libraries were found. In library literature many of the references to the turnover situation were vague and general in nature. Specific, clear-cut analyses and statistics on turnover were seldom found in library reports.

Next Steps

For the librarian—There should be a monthly count of separations, and a turnover report should be made at least once a year. The turnover report should show what the condition of turnover is for each department and for each type of employee in the library. There should always be exit interviews, and records and analyses of them should be maintained.

For further study—More studies of turnover in individual libraries should be made available. Large studies that are representative of types of libraries should be made. It is important to know at what point turnover in libraries becomes desirable. There is a need for more studies of the reasons why employees resign. A turnover index would be a valuable guide

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to evaluate the amount of satisfaction in cataloging with reference to any other form of library work. It does seem, however, that it would be of value to explore methods to increase the percentage of those thoroughly satisfied with this work. From the data presented here through the expressions of catalogers themselves, it is apparent that considerable progress needs to be made in increasing the efficiency and comfort of physical working conditions. It is also apparent that more care might be exercised in the appointments of cataloging administrators with a view to increasing the level of staff morale and interest.

A cataloger in one of the eastern women's colleges writes as follows:

"I believe there is something fundamentally wrong in the present situation which makes librarians reluctant to go into cataloging, and often anxious to leave it. I can best describe this situation perhaps, by listing the following factors which I believe . . . account in large part for the intangible psychological atmosphere found in this field. 1. Isolation from the rest of the library staff. 2. Lack of adequate leadership. All sorts of remedies have been suggested . . . from subject specialists to hours for working with the public . . . I believe a feasible solution depends on the ability of the head librarian and the head cataloger to bring

the catalogers into the main stream of the library's activities."

A university cataloger describes a job situation which seems to reflect inefficient administrative planning and possibly poor job classification: "Order and cataloging were combined as 'Technical Processes' . . . I am still called 'Head Cataloger' . . . but actually I have no authority whatever. . ."

Another university cataloger refers indirectly to a type of situation that might be influential in forming work attitudes: "In my own mind I have a study to be incorporated in an article on the social status of library staff members in a college community as compared with the teaching faculty."

A former cataloger of distinction, now a college librarian, writes that he feels the catalogers' expressions of preferences for administrative work do not reflect merely a desire to get away from requirements of certain mechanical routines. He believes that the over-all rigidity of work patterns of cataloging departments in the past has tended to destroy or send elsewhere the initiative so badly needed if real progress and constructive thinking in this field are to be achieved.

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for library administrators. The characteristics of the resigners should be extensively analyzed. More information is needed in regard to the best methods for controlling turnover in libraries. Cost analyses of turnover should be made in order to determine whether librarians are justified in making efforts to control turnover. A

more narrow definition of the factors influencing the rate of turnover should be made.

Knowledge of the turnover situation is an important step toward gaining control of the personnel problem in libraries. It is a challenge to scholars to make contributions in such a vital, yet relatively unexplored area.