The Evolving Responsibilities, Roles and Competencies of East Asian Studies Librarians: A Content Analysis of Job Postings from 2008-2019

Tang Li and Xiang Li
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ABSTRACT

This study examines job postings for East Asian studies librarians to investigate changes and identify trends in the profession. A collection of 62 job postings from academic libraries in the U.S. and Canada from 2008-2019 was analyzed to identify characteristics and changes in the job responsibilities and qualifications. The findings demonstrate that major responsibilities for East Asian studies librarians have expanded to include collection development, reference & research assistance, instruction, liaison work and outreach. Relation building and collaboration are emerging roles for East Asian studies librarians. The study also reveals that skills and abilities have been progressively required more than knowledge and experience for East Asian studies librarian positions. In addition, top frequently required abilities and skills are generic and behavioral. The results of this research are of practical relevance to subject specialists in other subject areas.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

• What job responsibilities have been assigned to East Asian studies librarians from 2008-2019?
• What knowledge, experience, skills and abilities have academic libraries been seeking from East Asian studies librarians over the decade?
• What would be the trends for East Asian studies librarian roles in the new digital age?

METHODLOGY

Definition
East Asian studies librarian is defined as a subject specialist librarian who has East Asian studies as a subject responsibility. “Subject specialist” and “East Asian studies” are the two key factors that set the scope of this study.

Data Collection
The job postings were primarily acquired from two sources:
• Council on East Asian Libraries’ job blog
• Archive of Eastlib, the East Asian studies librarians’ email list

The study eliminated job postings for temporary, part-time, and re-opened positions.

A total of 62 full text of job postings were retrieved.

Data Analysis
• Job descriptions: Human coding
• Qualifications: Machine learning

FINDINGS: RESPONSIBILITIES

• East Asian studies librarians have been gradually taking on an increasing number of job responsibilities over the decade.

FINDINGS: RESOURCES

• Major job responsibilities are collection development, reference & research assistance, instruction, liaison work, and outreach.

FINDINGS: QUALIFICATIONS

• Advanced degrees in East Asian studies are being treated equally important with MLS degrees in library sciences.

95% of the job postings require MLS degrees in library science.

62% of the job postings list advanced degrees (MA or Ph.D.) in East Asian studies as the required equivalent/alternative of MLS degrees in East Asian studies.

61% of the job postings prefer advanced degrees (MA or Ph.D.) in East Asian studies.

Skills and abilities have been progressively occupying a larger proportion in the required qualifications section than knowledge and experience over the years.

54% of the job postings require professional experiences anywhere in the qualifications.

DISCUSSION

Evolving Responsibilities, Roles and Competencies

• From passive information curator to active information service provider
• Increasing interaction with library users
• Greater and deeper engagement with general public
• From static and specialized silos to a changing and networked environment
• Emerging focus on collaboration with constituents in and out of the library
• Progressive requirements on behavioral skills

Indistinct Core Competencies

• Three required sets of competencies
• Knowledge in information sciences - MLS degree
• Subject knowledge - advanced degree in East Asian studies
• Generic and behavioral skills

• Ideal candidates VS Expected pool of applicants
• Compromise of knowledge in information sciences and professional experiences
• Lack of professional standards for appropriate qualifications for East Asian studies librarians

SUGGESTIONS

• CEAL
  • Create guidelines and statements to define knowledge and competencies to be possessed by East Asian librarians in the new digital age
  • Develop training opportunities for East Asian librarians to improve and advance professionalism in East Asian librarianship.

• AAL
  • Update the Core Competencies of Librarianship to include more proper generic and behavioral skills

• MLS programs
  • Develop and enhance curriculum relevant to area studies librarianship

CONTACT

Tang Li
Chinese Studies Librarian
University of Southern California
tang@usc.edu

Xiang Li
Chinese & Asian Studies Librarian
University of Colorado Boulder
xiang.li@colorado.edu