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What is a Professional Cataloger? Perception Differences between Professionals and Paraprofessionals

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What is a Professional Cataloger?

Perception Differences between Professionals and Paraprofessionals

By Elizabeth J. Cox and Ann K. D. Myers

This paper examines the roles of professional and paraprofessional catalogers as they are perceived within the cataloging community. A survey was sent to all catalogers in member libraries of the Association of Research Libraries. In presenting these results, the authors consider whether a difference still exists between professional and paraprofessional catalogers beyond the master of library and information science degree and, if so, the nature of any such difference. In the process, the authors also examine issues such as whether catalogers feel that their work is valued and how cataloging work is evaluated.

The roles of professionals and paraprofessionals within libraries have been in flux for more than a decade. Advances in technology have streamlined workflows, allowing staff at all levels to engage in higher-level work. Reduced budgets and the reduced staff levels that go along with them have required reshuffling of job duties and shifts in department priorities. Some of these changes have blurred the lines between professional and paraprofessional staff. Despite these shifts, the library profession still defines employees and the work they do in terms of professional librarians, requiring a master of library and information science (MLIS), and paraprofessional staff, who typically hold at least a bachelor's degree.[1]

Perhaps nowhere in the library has the effect of technology on library staff been more pronounced than in technical services. As clerical tasks have increasingly been taken over by automated systems or student workers, paraprofessional staff have been assigned higher-level functions, freeing professional librarians to focus on the big picture of the cataloging department, the library, and the profession. However, these shifts have not occurred uniformly across the profession, leading to disparities in how paraprofessionals' higher-level work is regarded and whether they are compensated adequately for their new roles.

This paper will examine how professional and paraprofessional catalogers view their work, drawing on findings from a survey sent to cataloging department staff in Association of Research Libraries (ARL) member libraries. By looking at performance expectations for these two groups, how their work is evaluated and their productivity measured, and their perceptions of the value assigned to their work, this study provides a snapshot of cataloging and catalogers at this point in time.

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Literature Review

Although many articles and books touch on this topic, little has been written focusing solely on the role of professionals and paraprofessionals in the cataloging department. ODLIS: Online Dictionary for Library and Information Science defines a cataloger (meaning a professional librarian) as "a librarian primarily responsible for preparing bibliographic records to represent the items acquired by a library, including bibliographic description, subject analysis, and classification. Also refers to the librarian responsible for supervising a cataloging department."[2] ODLIS does not define a paraprofessional cataloger, but the general definition for paraprofessional includes a reference to cataloging: "Library paraprofessionals are usually assigned high-level technical support duties, for example, in copy cataloging and serials control."[3]

These high-level technical support duties are due, in part, to technical advances in computing and automation that became widespread in the 1990s. The changing role of paraprofessionals was the primary topic at the January 1996 meeting of the Association for Library Collections and Technical Services (ALCTS) Role of the Professional in Academic Research Technical Services Departments Discussion Group.[4] Discussions noted that paraprofessionals were performing such tasks as material selection, cataloging (both original and complex copy), and day-to-day supervision, which used to be solely professional duties. Participants further observed that changes in paraprofessionals' activities led to changes in professionals' roles, with professionals becoming more involved in strategic decision making, goal setting, and focusing on managing change.

Smith's 2009 qualitative analysis of staffing trends in technical services indicated that paraprofessionals are now given an increased role in technical services departments, with more responsibility and involvement in department concerns, while low-level work is increasingly outsourced or stopped altogether.[5] Meanwhile the role of professionals is increasingly removed from the day-to-day operations of technical services in favor of supervisory work, staff training, and higher-level work related to the "big picture" of the library profession.[6] Intner and Johnson pointed out that even with these changes in staffing, trends in job duties remain the same: professional librarians manage the cataloging department and do original cataloging, while paraprofessionals may serve as assistant managers and do copy cataloging.[7] However, the authors noted some important differences in this arrangement—paraprofessionals are now often unit supervisors within the department and, increasingly, a few professional catalogers and several paraprofessional or clerical copy catalogers do all the in-house cataloging.

Wakimoto and Hsiung's 2003 study of the cataloging department at California State University Northridge (CSUN) showed the effects of technology on professional and paraprofessional job duties.[8] CSUN's adoption of networked workstations and the resulting job restructuring happened much faster than at other institutions when the 1994 earthquake forced them to rebuild from the ground up.[9] Staff at all levels reported better morale and increased job satisfaction. Paraprofessionals appreciated having more freedom to exercise their judgment and solve cataloging problems on their own, while professionals had more time to pursue professional activities such as conducting training sessions for the paraprofessional staff and collection development.

Highlighting another cause of this shift in responsibilities, Wells in 2003 looked at how technical services departments adjust to hard financial times.[10] She noted that more than half of the departments that choose to reorganize after losing positions transfer work from professionals to paraprofessionals. She also noted that professionals were often called on to assist in other departments, such as reference or collection development, thereby hastening this type of transfer. Ivey also considered changes related to financial constraints, including having paraprofessional staff perform complex copy or original cataloging.[11] He noted that although there has been much discussion, and perhaps some controversy, on this topic, "this practice . . . is now nearly universal."[12]

In a 1997 article, Mohr and Schuneman presented both advantages and disadvantages to paraprofessionals performing original cataloging, which was a relatively new practice at the time.[13] Advantages included freeing professional catalogers for more complex cataloging, management duties, professional duties, and other activities such as collection development, along with better staff morale, better understanding by the paraprofessionals of cataloging issues, greater productivity, a reduced backlog, and improved efficiency. Disadvantages included the time and resources required to train and supervise the paraprofessionals in their new duties, ongoing quality control, supervisors not wanting to exploit paraprofessional staff, paraprofessionals lacking theoretical and educational background in cataloging issues and trends, and institutional rules or union contracts limiting what paraprofessionals may do.

The increased need for education and training of paraprofessionals has become more widely recognized and supported by the library profession as a whole. In 2001 Kao noted, "Many professionals in the field have suggested that some kind of certification for library technicians be established as an educational standard, so that the claims that library technicians are professional workers can be justified."[14] At the time of this writing, the Council on Library/Media Technicians (COLT) website listed fifty-four library technician programs in the United States, including institutions offering certificates, associate degrees, and

bachelor's degrees.[15] The American Library Association-Allied Professional Association (ALA-APA) has a partial list of state and regional certification programs on their website.[16] The ALA-APA also has created its own program, Library Support Staff Certification (LSSC).[17]

Regarding evaluation, Foster described his desired characteristics for a professional in terms of what department heads should look for when evaluating staff. For example, the supervisor should determine if the cataloger is performing professional-level work and making professional decisions. Foster then noted that statistics alone do not give a supervisor the necessary information on which to judge an individual's work and suggested that other activities such as bibliographic control and work outside the department should also be considered.[18]

As the level of paraprofessional work has increased, the role of professional catalogers has expanded outside of day-to-day cataloging activities, particularly in their role as faculty. In 2002, Ferris addressed the issue of cataloging librarians seeking tenure and presented ways that tenure benefits catalogers.[19] These benefits include encouraging catalogers to work at a level of expertise beyond simple cataloging functions, dealing with complex cataloging problems, and publishing their research into these problems, which ultimately contributes to the advancement of cataloging knowledge. Networking with other professionals both locally and nationally can lead to collaboration between libraries. Ferris concluded by arguing that tenure is the ultimate challenge for a professional catalog librarian and that along the way, the librarian will vastly improve his or her cataloging expertise, contribute to the educational function of librarianship, and advance the profession as a whole as well as the goals of his or her particular institution.

On the differences between professional and paraprofessional catalogers, Benaud wrote, "The difference was once obvious: professionals did the intellectual work. . . . Reality is somewhat different from what is expressed in the literature." Benaud went on to say that she believes that paraprofessionals now understand the theory (the "why") in addition to the practical (the "how").[20] But as she noted, this opinion was and is not always the case. Seven years later, Benaud, Bordeianu, and Hanson described how the profession had changed, stating that professional catalogers are more likely to be involved in the rules and management of cataloging such as the Name Authority Cooperative Program (NACO) and the Cooperative Online Serials Program (CONSER).[21] They observed that "the more 'core' cataloging a task is, the more likely it is to be performed by professionals."[22]

One might assume that these changes to catalogers' roles and responsibilities could lead to work-related stress. Leysen and Boydston's 2007 study on job satisfaction did not find this, however.[23] When they looked at the effect of changing roles and responsibilities for catalog librarians, they found that most catalog librarians were comfortable with these changes, felt that their duties were clearly defined, and accepted the fact that their duties are expanding beyond just cataloging. The study found some lingering concern among catalog librarians over the deprofessionalization of cataloging activities, but Leysen and Boydston concluded that most of this concern is diminishing.

The amount of discussion in the literature on the changing roles of both professional and paraprofessional catalogers suggests that these changes are here to stay. Professional catalogers are more involved in strategic planning and managing change, and those that have faculty positions are encouraged to broaden their expertise through research and collaboration with colleagues. Paraprofessional catalogers have more freedom to exercise their judgment on cataloging problems and are given more complex cataloging tasks. Concerns regarding the time and resources required to train paraprofessionals for more complex cataloging are diminishing, and profession-wide support for increased education and training of paraprofessional catalogers is apparent. While these changes are clearly reflected in the literature, the question remains: how are the differences between professional and paraprofessional catalogers perceived by the catalogers themselves?

Research Questions

The authors undertook this study to answer two questions. First, do performance expectations differ for professional and paraprofessional catalogers? In addition, do research and publication expectations and service expectations differ? Another aspect of understanding performance expectations is examining the manner and extent to which work is evaluated and how productivity is measured. The authors asked the respondents about how work evaluation and productivity are handled at their institution. Second, do professional and paraprofessional catalogers view their work and its value differently? To answer this question, the authors asked a set of questions that explored perceptions of value of work, nature and level of work, and level of responsibility.

Research Method

The authors created a survey using a standard Web-based input form, including radio buttons, check boxes, and text blocks. Responses were gathered in the Southern Illinois University Instructional Support Services' survey generator, provided under open-source licensing by Virginia Tech

University.[24] Four library colleagues (two catalogers and two administrators with previous cataloging experience) reviewed the survey questions. In compliance with the requirements of the authors' university, the survey was vetted by the Human Subjects Committee and approved on September 24, 2008. The survey questions can be found in appendix A. Question 14 addressed perceptions about work and is the only question that provided the opportunity to add comments. These comments are referenced in the survey results.

In October 2008, the authors contacted staff in ARL member libraries via e-mail with a request to participate in the survey. The authors chose to focus on ARL libraries to limit responses to institutions that share characteristics similar to the authors' institution and because the authors lacked the resources to survey more widely. The e-mail message, with a link to the survey, was distributed to 122 individuals representing the 124 ARL member libraries; contact information was not available online for two of the institutions. The individuals who received the e-mail held one of the following titles (identified on each institution's website): head (or equivalent) of the cataloging department, head (or equivalent) of the technical services department, or applicable library administrator. The individuals were strongly encouraged to distribute the survey request to all professionals and paraprofessionals in their cataloging departments. The survey was open from October 14 through November 15, 2008. The authors sent a reminder on November 5, 2008.

Survey Results and Discussion

Demographics

A total of 279 individuals responded to the survey; 237 of the responses were valid. Not all respondents answered all questions, thus the totals for some question responses do not agree with the total number of valid survey responses. The universe of possible respondents cannot be determined. Not all ARL institutions list their staffs on their websites. Of those that do, some do not distinguish between professionals and paraprofessionals, while others do not distinguish staff members by functional units within technical services. Of survey respondents, 108 (45.6 percent) were professional librarians, 117 (49.4 percent) were in paraprofessional positions, and 12 (5.1 percent) were in administrative/professional (A/P) positions. In collating the data, the authors chose to combine responses by professionals and A/P under the professional heading, resulting in a total of 120. This allowed for smoother comparison between professionals and paraprofessionals.

Of the 236 respondents, 145 (61.4 percent) have their MLIS degree or are currently working toward it (table 1). Of the 120 professionals, 113 have an MLIS and 1 is working toward it. Of the paraprofessionals, 23 have an MLIS and 8 are working toward it. More than half of both professionals and paraprofessionals with an MLIS earned their degree sixteen years ago or more (table 2).

A number of respondent comments touched on the relative value of an MLIS, with the majority seeing little correlation between possession of an MLIS and cataloging expertise or ability. Many pointed out the lack of cataloging training in library school and that most catalogers learn on the job. One individual wrote, "I have trained many catalogers, both with and without the MLS and do not believe that the MLS is a determining factor to success in the job," and another commented, "I find most of the distinctions between the 2 categories [i.e., professional and

Table 1. Degree Status

	Have MLIS		Working on MLIS		Do Not Have MLIS		Total
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.
Professionals	113	94.2	1	0.8	6	5.0	120
Paraprofessionals	23	19.8	8	6.9	85	73.3	116*
Total	136		9		91		236

* One paraprofessional did not answer.

Table 2. Length of Time Since Earning MLIS

	0–3 Years		4–6 Years		7–10 Years		11–15 Years		16–20 Years		21+ Years		Total
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.
Professionals	14	12.4	7	6.2	14	12.4	13	11.5	25	22.1	40	35.4	113
Paraprofessionals	5	21.7	2	8.7	1	4.3	3	13.0	5	21.7	7	30.4	23
Total	19		9		15		16		30		47		136

paraprofessional] to be arbitrary and archaic. I could teach any of the staff to do what I do and they wouldn't need an MLS." Many respondents felt that having an MLIS degree led to management or administrative roles and regional or national committee work, rather than cataloging at the institution level.

Data on respondents' age and years working in the field of librarianship are presented in table 3. Seventy-nine (33.0 percent) were between 25 and 44 years old; 149 (63.0 percent) were between 45 and 64, and 9 (4.0 percent) were 65 or older. The range of experience varied, with 125 (53.0 percent) working more than twenty years in the library profession.

Of the respondents, 222 (93.7 percent) spent more than half of their work time in technical services, and 233 (98.3 percent) had cataloging as part of their current job duties (table 4). The 15 respondents (6.2 percent) who primarily worked outside of technical services were split between public services and special collections. Job duties in addition to cataloging included supervision (34.2 percent), serials/electronic resources (29.9 percent), special collections (16.8 percent), and acquisitions (15.2 percent). Thirty-one (13.1 percent) responded with "other," reporting such responsibilities as database management and metadata.

Evaluation of Cataloging and Measurement of Productivity

Respondents were asked how their work as a cataloger is evaluated (see table 5). Eighty-five (36.0 percent) of 236 total respondents reported that none of their records are checked. Seventy-three (30.9 percent) responded that their records are checked only when questions arise. The remaining responses were split between all records checked by supervisor (1.3 percent), original records checked by supervisor (6.4 percent), original records checked by peer (7.2 percent), records checked randomly (6.8 percent), and other (11.4 percent). Of the latter, 8 (3.4 percent) were department heads or supervisors who do not catalog. Another 4 (1.7 percent) noted that their records were checked only during the training or review periods. Responses varied further depending on whether the individual was a professional or paraprofessional cataloger. Sixty-one (50.8 percent) of 120 professional respondents replied that none of their records were checked, and 23 (9.7 percent) of professional respondents replied that records were only checked when questions arose. Among paraprofessionals, the responses were almost the opposite, with 24 (10.2 percent) having no records checked and 50 (21.2) having records checked with questions.

Respondents were asked how their productivity is measured (see table 6). Ninety-five (40.6 percent) of 234 total respondents noted that productivity was based on the

Table 3. Number of Respondents by Age and Years Working in Librarianship

Respondents' Age	No.	%
24 or younger	0	0.0
25–34	24	10.1
35–44	55	23.2
45–54	73	30.8
55–64	76	32.1
65 or older	9	3.8
Total	237	100.0
Years in Librarianship	**No.**	**%**
0–3	12	5.1
4–6	12	5.1
7–10	22	9.4
11–15	31	13.2
16–20	33	14.0
21 or more	125	53.2
Total	235	100.0

Table 4. Work Responsibilities

Respondents' Primary Work Area (More than 50% of time)	No.	%
Technical services	222	93.7
Public services	7	2.9
Special collections	7	2.9
Administration/business	1	0.4
Total	237	99.9*
Respondents' Current Job Duties (Multiple answers possible)	**No.**	**%**
Cataloging	233	98.3
Acquisitions	36	15.2
Preservation	9	3.8
Serials/electronic resources	71	29.9
Circulation/reserves	7	2.9
Interlibrary loan	0	0.0
Reference	20	8.4
Collection development/liaison work	22	9.3
Special collections	40	16.8
Supervision	81	34.2
Library administration	22	9.3
Other	31	13.1

*Total does not equal 100 because of rounding.

number of records completed in a given time period; 114 (48.7 percent) respondents said that their work was not measured quantitatively. Of the 118 professionals responding, 65 (55.1 percent) did not have their work measured

Table 5. Evaluation of Cataloging

	No.	%
All records checked by supervisor		
Professionals	2	0.8
Paraprofessionals	1	0.4
Total	3	1.3
All records checked by peer		
Professionals	0	0.0
Paraprofessionals	0	0.0
Total	0	0.0
Original records only checked by supervisor		
Professionals	2	0.8
Paraprofessionals	13	5.5
Total	15	6.4
Original records only checked by peer		
Professionals	8	3.4
Paraprofessionals	9	3.8
Total	17	7.2
Records checked only when I have question		
Professionals	23	9.7
Paraprofessionals	50	21.2
Total	73	30.9
Records checked randomly		
Professionals	4	1.7
Paraprofessionals	12	5.1
Total	16	6.8
No records checked		
Professionals	61	25.8
Paraprofessionals	24	10.2
Total	85	36.0
Other		
Professionals	20	8.5
Paraprofessionals	7	3.0
Total	27	11.4
Grand Total	236	100.0

Table 6. Measurement of Productivity

	No.	%
On number of records completed in a given time		
Professionals	38	16.2
Paraprofessionals	57	24.4
Total	95	40.6
On number of errors per record		
Professionals	0	0.0
Paraprofessionals	0	0.0
Total	0	0.0
Not measured quantitatively		
Professionals	65	27.8
Paraprofessionals	49	20.9
Total	114	48.7
Other		
Professionals	15	6.4
Paraprofessionals	10	4.3
Total	25	10.7
Grand Total	234	100.0

reported that any revision ceased with their training.[25] However, one respondent to this survey noted, "There are many instances in which a professional cataloger will seek help and advice from a staff cataloger. [This] is only able to work because the professional catalogers themselves value the staff." Another respondent described how this lack of review could cause problems:

> While staff catalogers at my library have their copy cataloging work revised and evaluated on a near-annual basis, our professional catalogers do not undergo a similarly rigorous revision process on any particular basis—I understand this, given our levels of education. On the other hand, I have frequently encountered cataloging errors (effecting [*sic*] precedent setting for specific subjects) made by professional staff, and have had to request call number changes to correct them. Therefore, I believe it may be helpful if there were some system in place to evaluate the cataloging of professional staff from time to time just to make sure we're all on the same page procedurally—it often feels that we are not, particularly in specific subject areas, some of which are our premier collections (not good!).

In addition to the quality of work, survey respondents also were asked about the quantity of their work or productivity. Some commented that while monthly statistics were

quantitatively, while the majority of paraprofessionals (49.1 percent) did. Of those responding "other," some noted that they do not catalog, some noted that only monthly statistics are tallied, and some responded that their work was evaluated on the basis of a combination of quality and quantity.

A total of 51.0 percent of professional respondents reported that none of their cataloging records were checked or were reviewed only when questions arose. Mohr and Schuneman's 1997 study also found that a majority (72.0 percent) of professionals doing original cataloging

kept, these statistics were not used to judge productivity. Benaud, Bordeianu, and Hanson noted, "Catalogers, who rightly believe that they perform a professional job, might feel that quantifying the output of their work diminishes the work and turns it into a product," or that quantification deprofessionalizes cataloging.[26] However if quantification is necessary, Foster said, "The department head . . . must set specific production goals, [such as] a 10 percent increase . . . but never simply 'more production.'"[27]

Perceptions about Cataloging Work

Question 14 explored professional and paraprofessional catalogers' perceptions about their work. Respondents were asked to use a five-point Likert scale measuring the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with several statements. Responses are provided in appendix B. This question also gave the option of adding comments.

Decision-Making Responsibilities

Two statements considered professionals' freedom in decision making and the extent of their responsibility. Of the 105 professional respondents, 89 respondents (84.8 percent) agreed or strongly agreed that being a professional cataloger allows more freedom in decision making; 93 (88.6 percent) of these 105 agreed or strongly agreed that they are given greater responsibility.

Many respondents, both professional and paraprofessional, commented that while paraprofessional catalogers do not make the kinds of big-picture administrative and policy decisions that professional catalogers do with respect to cataloging work, no difference should exist between the two. Some also indicated that the only difference between paraprofessional and professional catalogers at their institution is that the professional catalogers are asked to do more than just cataloging but the cataloging work done by each group was the same. A few expressed a desire for more blending between paraprofessional and professional catalogers' duties to better reflect the experience and skill of the paraprofessionals in the institution.

Both professional and paraprofessional respondents remarked that professional catalogers either perform administrative roles or are required to serve on committees, attend conferences, and other types of professional service, and therefore no longer do much, if any, actual cataloging. Some saw this as negative, putting a burden without sufficient compensation on the paraprofessional catalogers, and some even expressed frustration that while the professional catalogers at their institution do not participate in the normal cataloging workflow, they make decisions that affect that workflow, often without sufficient information. Others pointed out that while the

professional catalogers might not be doing the same volume of cataloging, part of their role is to represent their library at meetings and to teach both library users and administrators about efficient use of the catalog and to promote the importance of high-quality cataloging.

Level of Cataloging

Survey statements about level of cataloging addressed complex, copy, and original cataloging. One hundred (87.7 percent) of 114 professional respondents agreed or strongly agreed that professional catalogers should handle more complex cataloging. In contrast, 59 (56.2 percent) of 105 paraprofessional respondents agreed or strongly agreed that professional catalogers should handle more complex cataloging. Responses to the statement about whether paraprofessional catalogers should handle less complex cataloging were more divided: 66 (58.4 percent) of 113 professional respondents agreed or strongly agreed, while only 33 (28.7 percent) of 115 paraprofessional respondents agreed or strongly agreed. As to whether paraprofessionals should only handle copy cataloging, 81 (69.2 percent) of 117 professional respondents and 96 (82.1 percent) of 117 paraprofessional respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed; 64 (53.8 percent) of 119 professional respondents and 89 (79.5 percent) of 112 paraprofessional respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that only professional catalogers should handle original cataloging.

A majority of comments on the questions about copy, complex, and original cataloging indicated that paraprofessional catalogers often do complex cataloging, including creating original records, cataloging materials requiring foreign language proficiency, performing authority control, assigning call numbers, cataloging electronic formats, and creating digital metadata. Many indicated that the paraprofessional staff at their institution had more cataloging experience than the professional catalogers, who tended to be recent library school graduates.

Perceptions about Value of Work

Several statements explored perceptions about the value of work—is the work seen as important, undervalued, or overvalued? Both professional and paraprofessional catalogers agreed or strongly agreed that paraprofessional catalogers do important work: 114 (96.6 percent) of 118 professional catalogers agreed or strongly agreed, and 110 (94.0 percent) of 117 paraprofessionals agreed or strongly agreed. Despite a perception that paraprofessionals do important work, both groups felt that paraprofessional catalogers are often undervalued. Ninety-one (77.1 percent) of 118 professional catalogers agreed or strongly agreed that paraprofessionals are often undervalued, and 92 (78.6 percent) of 117

paraprofessionals felt that they were often undervalued.

When considering the importance of professional catalogers' work, 112 (94. 9 percent) of 118 professionals respondents agreed or strongly agreed that professional catalogers do important work, and 98 (89.1 percent) of 110 paraprofessionals agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. Perspectives on whether professional catalogers are undervalued differed in the two groups. Eighty-six (72.9 percent) of 118 professional catalogers agreed or strongly agreed that they are often undervalued, whereas only 36 (33.6 percent) of 107 paraprofessionals agreed or strongly agreed that professional catalogers are often undervalued.

Many paraprofessional respondents commented that their contributions are not rewarded sufficiently. The comments suggested that staff morale is affected as much by the personal relationships and informal culture of their department as by the policies of their institution. Some mentioned departments in which paraprofessional contributions were clearly valued by the professional catalogers, while others commented that they are not given credit for what they feel they are capable of doing. One person said, "Our supervisors appreciate our work, but the administration sees us as cheap alternatives to professionals. We are not properly compensated, and the type of work we do is now undervalued, because professionals no longer do the bulk of it." Others indicated that supervisors' attitude toward copy catalogers is the problem, with one stating, "Copy catalogers have the skills and abilities to work beyond a copy cataloging capacity, but they aren't given the chance. We are expected to just be cogs, push things across our desks quickly, and not think about it."

Several respondents, both professional and paraprofessional, commented that cataloging tends to be undervalued by the library community as a whole. However, the data suggest that close to half (43.5 percent) of the paraprofessional respondents believe that professional catalogers are often overvalued; 47 of 108 paraprofessional respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. Comments expanded on this perception, noting that the work of professional catalogers is overvalued within the cataloging community, the tendency being to view professional work as more valuable than paraprofessional work, even when the tasks are the same.

Individually, paraprofessional respondents felt that their work is valued but believed that cataloging, as a whole, is undervalued. Respondents also pointed out that automation has led to the devaluing of cataloging as a whole, particularly since, as one stated, "systems fail both to display the results of our work in user friendly ways and to function as one might wish."

Research and Service

Respondents were asked about any research and service

requirements for their current position; data are reported in table 7. Among the professional librarians, 51 (42.5 percent) of 120 reported that research and publication are required for advancement. No paraprofessionals reported that research and publication are required for advancement, although 16 (13.7 percent) of 117 paraprofessionals noted that research is encouraged but not required.

Expectations for service were equally diverse across the two respondent groups. Eighty professionals (66.7 percent) of 120 respondents have service as a requirement for advancement and 5 (4.3 percent) of 116 paraprofessionals have a service requirement; 33 (27.5 percent) of 120 professionals reported that service is encouraged, compared to 50 (43.1 percent) of 116 paraprofessionals. For those that have an expectation of service, the type of service varies: 156 (66.1 percent) of 236 total respondents serve on library committees, 60 (25.4 percent) serve on university committees, 48 (20.3 percent) serve on state committees, and 75 (31.8 percent) serve on national committees.

The survey asked about frequency of attending conferences. Sixteen of the 120 professional respondents (13.3 percent) attend no conferences, 62 professionals (51.7 percent) attend one to two conferences, and 42 professionals (35 percent) attend three or more conferences. Among the 116 responding paraprofessionals, the majority (76 or 65.5 percent) attend no conferences, 36 (31.1 percent) attend one to two conferences, and 4 (3.5 percent) attend three or more conferences.

One of the goals of this research was to identify any differences between professional and paraprofessional catalogers. These differences were especially apparent in responses to the questions regarding research and service. As one respondent noted in the comments section, "In our institution, the only difference between the highest level of staff cataloger and professional cataloger is that the professional cataloger is expected to fulfill other requirements associated with librarian tenure and rank."

The findings show that research and service activities are a major difference between professionals and paraprofessionals. However, as noted above, 43.1 percent of paraprofessionals reported that service is encouraged by their institutions. This trend also is reported in the literature; Kao noted that "library technicians are actively involved in professional library activities."[28] This survey noted that 15.1 percent of paraprofessional respondents are active in committees outside of their library. Goodson did not state that service is expected, but she considered it important and noted assisting other departments and attending and contributing in committee meetings are criteria by which a paraprofessional could be evaluated.[29] One respondent noted that despite having an MLIS, he or she preferred to stay in a paraprofessional position "to avoid professional development responsibilities that extend beyond just cataloging."

Problems

As with any project, one finds room for improvement after the fact, especially with a survey instrument. Although this survey was pretested, some confusion was apparent over the meaning of terms. For example, although the authors explained the meaning of "professional" and "paraprofessional" for this survey in its introduction, some respondents still expressed uncertainty about how to respond. More extensive pretesting with a larger test group likely would have identified this and other problems with terms.

Although some questions were geared specifically to professionals or paraprofessionals, the survey instrument was unable to limit who answered which question. This allowed paraprofessionals to answer questions intended for professionals and vice versa. A more effective instrument would automatically direct respondents to those questions directed to their type of employee class. Another approach would be to create a separate survey instrument for each group. Because respondents identified their class, the authors were able to address this problem when compiling and analyzing the data.

Three statements in survey question 14 where respondents were asked to report the extent to which they disagreed (or not) lacked clarity and resulted in unclear and ambiguous results. The problem statements were

- (14.c) Professional catalogers should have more responsibilities.
- (14.d) Staff catalogers should have fewer responsibilities.
- (14.q) I feel that being a staff cataloger allows me to do my job without any greater responsibility.

Responses have not been reported in this paper. The authors' intent in 14.c and 14.d was to determine whether respondents thought professional catalogers should have more responsibilities than paraprofessionals and whether staff (i.e., paraprofessional) catalogers should have fewer responsibilities than professional catalogers. Because this comparison was missing from the statement, the responses were not meaningful. Statement 14.q presented a similar lack of clarity.

Suggestions for Future Research

In addition to areas of improvement, this research could be expanded. This survey reports the perceptions of professional and paraprofessional catalogers in ARL member libraries. Comparing these findings with those gathered from catalogers in different types and sizes of libraries might reveal differences based on the type and size of

Table 7. Research, Publication, and Services Expectations

	Research and Publication Expectations					
	None required		**Encouraged, but not required**		**Required for advancement**	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Professionals *N* = 120	30	25.0	39	32.5	51	42.5
Paraprofessionals *N* = 117	101	86.3	16	13.7	0	0.0
	Service Expectations					
	None required		**Encouraged, but not required**		**Required for advancement**	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Professionals *N* = 120	7	5.8	33	27.5	80	66.7
Paraprofessionals *N* = 116	61	52.6	50	43.1	5	4.3
	If Service Expected, Type of Service (Multiple answers possible)							
	Library committees		**University committees**		**State committees**		**National committees**	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Professionals *N* = 107	103	96.3	42	39.3	42	39.3	73	68.2
Paraprofessionals *N* = 53	53	100.0	18	34.0	6	11.3	2	3.8
	Number of Conferences Attended Annually									
	0		**1**		**2**		**3**		**4 or more**	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Professionals *N* = 120	16	13.3	17	14.2	45	37.5	31	25.8	11	9.2
Paraprofessionals *N* = 116	76	65.5	27	23.3	9	7.8	3	2.6	1	0.9

library. One respondent in particular noted that the disparities between professionals and paraprofessionals can be different depending on the size of the institution and its hierarchy. Second, many respondents commented on outsourcing and its effect on cataloging, especially copy cataloging. This could be another related area for research. Finally, many of this survey's comments from paraprofessionals dealt with salary and compensation, an issue that was not covered in the survey questions. A study comparing salaries across positions, types of libraries, and geographic regions could be useful.

Conclusion

This study investigated how professional and paraprofessional catalogers view their work, how their work is evaluated, and how they perceive the value assigned to their work. With regard to how catalogers view their work, the findings show that the majority of both professional and paraprofessional catalogers feel that paraprofessionals can and should do complex and original cataloging. Comments in the survey also revealed that both groups feel that there is not or should not be any difference in the cataloging work done by professionals and paraprofessionals. Survey results found that the distinction between professional and paraprofessional catalogers arises from the activities beyond cataloging done by professionals, such as administrative work, service on committees, and research.

The majority of professional catalogers reported that their cataloging work is seldom checked after an initial training period, while the majority of paraprofessionals undergo continuous evaluation of their work. Comments in the survey indicate that periodic checking of everyone's work, regardless of position, may be required to ensure consistency across all areas.

With regard to the value of work, the majority of both professional and paraprofessional catalogers felt that paraprofessionals' work is important but that it is undervalued. While both groups felt that professionals' work is also important, a majority of professional catalogers feel that their work is undervalued, while more paraprofessionals feel that professionals' work is overvalued. These data reflect opinions expressed in comments in the survey, which indicate that catalogers feel that their work is undervalued by the library community as a whole, while professionals' work is overvalued within the cataloging community as it is seen as having more value even when the tasks are the same as those performed by paraprofessionals.

This study suggests a need in libraries for clarity in how responsibilities are defined and assigned, and how expectations are articulated, so that professional and paraprofessional catalogers better understand their roles and

value to the organization. The cataloging responsibilities of both groups now widely overlap, and the distinction between professionals and paraprofessionals lies more in the degree to which they participate in activities beyond cataloging. However, as professionals are increasingly pulled into areas outside of cataloging, the degree to which paraprofessionals are recognized for their added cataloging responsibilities and expertise varies from institution to institution.

While not all paraprofessionals engage in more complex cataloging work, those who do can benefit their institutions by helping to reduce backlogs and reduce the cataloging workload of professional catalogers. Paraprofessionals in turn benefit from the opportunity to expand their skills and expertise. As professional catalogers are increasingly called on to perform tasks beyond cataloging, paraprofessional work is becoming especially valuable. Furthermore, as library budgets decrease, libraries may need to have paraprofessionals perform more complex cataloging. The activities of professional catalogers beyond cataloging have become increasingly important. As budgets decrease and administrators look for ways to cut costs, the responsibility falls on the professional catalogers to make the case for cataloging as a necessary function of the library's operations and services and to tie these functions to the library's goal of providing access to information.

The authors suggest that the general perception of both professional and paraprofessional catalogers by noncatalogers needs to be improved through advocacy by all catalogers to promote their purpose and importance. Just as professional catalogers need to advocate for the value of cataloging as a whole, paraprofessionals may need to make a stronger case to their administrators about the value of the important work they do.

The authors recommend that the library profession as a whole reach consensus about the level of work paraprofessionals should do and how they should be compensated. The overlap in cataloging activities between professional and paraprofessional catalogers suggests that regardless of title, catalogers performing complex cataloging should be recognized for their expertise whether through changes in job titles or classifications or more informal means. Furthermore, both groups should be given access to the training and education needed to understand both the theory and the practice of complex and original cataloging. The literature has shown a long-standing increase in the scope and importance of paraprofessional cataloging, and this change has only further increased in an era of tightening budgets. The number of paraprofessionals engaged and interested in higher-level cataloging work makes them vital contributors to the profession as a whole, and they deserve recognition for that contribution. By providing a snapshot of cataloging work in the early twenty-first

century, the authors have provided a baseline from which individual catalogers and the community as a whole can move forward.

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Appendix A. Survey: What is a "Professional" Cataloger?

Thank you for agreeing to participate in our survey. Your participation in this survey is completely voluntary, but we earnestly request and will very much appreciate your assistance.

With the reduction in funding and staff for libraries as a whole, cataloging departments must rely more heavily on staff to perform duties historically held for professional librarians. What then makes a professional cataloger different from a staff cataloger? The information gathered from this survey will be analyzed to assess general perceptions in the profession of the differences between professional and staff catalogers, and the results will be published. All information gathered from this survey will remain confidential, and all subjects remain anonymous.

For the purposes of this survey, "professional" refers to a person holding an MLS degree, working in a position that requires an MLS degree. This position could also be "faculty" or some equivalent. "Staff" refers to an individual working in a library position that does *not* require an MLS. This position could also be "civil service," "support staff," "paraprofessional," etc.

Please contact Beth Cox with any questions about the survey or the research project.

1. What type of library position do you currently hold?
    - ○ Professional librarian or equivalent
    - ○ Staff position or equivalent
    - ○ Administrative Professional (A/P) position
    - ○ Student position
    - ○ Not currently working in a library
2. Have you previously held a professional librarian position or equivalent?
    - ○ Yes
    - ○ No
3. Have you previously held a staff position or equivalent in a library?
    - ○ Yes
    - ○ No
4. Have you previously held an Administrative/Professional (A/P) position in a library?
    - ○ Yes
    - ○ No
5. Have you previously held a student position in a library?
    - ○ Yes
    - ○ No
6. In what area of the library do you primarily work? (over 50% of your time)
    - ○ Technical services
    - ○ Public services
    - ○ Special Collections
    - ○ Administration/Business
7. What do your current job duties include? (Please check all that apply.)
    - ○ Cataloging
    - ○ Acquisitions
    - ○ Preservation
    - ○ Serials/Electronic resources
    - ○ Circulation/Reserves
    - ○ Interlibrary loan
    - ○ Reference
    - ○ Collection development/liaison work
    - ○ Special collections
    - ○ Supervision
    - ○ Library administration
    - ○ Other (please describe):

8. What are the research and publication expectations for your position?
   - ○ None required
   - ○ Encouraged, but not required
   - ○ Required for advancement
9. What are the service expectations for your position?
   - ○ None required
   - ○ Encouraged, but not required
   - ○ Required for advancement
10. If your position does include an expectation of service, what type of service opportunities do you participate in? (Please check all that apply.)
    - ○ Library committees
    - ○ University committees
    - ○ State committees
    - ○ National committees
11. How many conferences do you attend per year?
    - ○ 0
    - ○ 1
    - ○ 2
    - ○ 3
    - ○ 4 or more
12. How is your work as a cataloger evaluated?
    - ○ All records checked by a supervisor
    - ○ All records checked by a peer
    - ○ Original records only checked by supervisor
    - ○ Original records only checked by peer
    - ○ Records checked only when I have questions
    - ○ Records checked randomly
    - ○ No records checked
    - ○ Other
13. How is your productivity measured?
    - ○ On number of records completed in a given time period
    - ○ On number of errors per record
    - ○ Not measured quantitatively
    - ○ Other

For the following 17 questions, please choose from a scale of 1 to 5.
   1 = Strongly disagree   2 = Disagree   3 = Neutral   4 = Agree   5 = Strongly agree   n/a = Not applicable

14. As a professional cataloger, my work is valued.
15. As a staff cataloger, my work is valued.
16. Professional catalogers should have more responsibilities.
17. Staff catalogers should have fewer responsibilities.
18. Professional catalogers should handle more complex cataloging.
19. Professional catalogers should only handle more complex cataloging.
20. Staff catalogers should handle less complex cataloging.
21. Staff catalogers should only handle copy cataloging.
22. Only professional catalogers should handle original cataloging.
23. Staff catalogers do important work.
24. Staff catalogers are often undervalued.
25. Professional catalogers do important work.
26. Professional catalogers are often undervalued.
27. Professional catalogers are often overvalued.
28. I feel that being a professional cataloger allows me more freedom in decision making.

29. I feel that being a professional cataloger gives me greater responsibility.
30. I feel that being a staff cataloger allows me to do my job without any greater responsibility.
   Additional comments:

31. At what type of institution do you work?
   ○ ARL institution
   ○ Other four-year university
   ○ Four-year college
   ○ Community college
   ○ Other
32. What is your gender?
   ○ Male
   ○ Female
33. How old are you?
   ○ 24 or younger
   ○ 25–34
   ○ 35–44
   ○ 45–54
   ○ 55–64
   ○ 65 or older
34. How many total years have you worked in the library profession, in any type of position?
   ○ 0–3
   ○ 4–6
   ○ 7–10
   ○ 11–15
   ○ 16–20
   ○ 21 or more
35. How many years ago did you earn your MLS?
   ○ 0–3
   ○ 4–6
   ○ 7–10
   ○ 11–15
   ○ 16–20
   ○ 21 or more
   ○ I am currently working towards an MLS
   ○ I don't have an MLS

Appendix B. Responses to Survey Question 14 Reporting Perceptions about Cataloging Work

Professional Respondents	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly agree	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
As a professional cataloger, my work is valued. (*N*=107)	3	2.8	4	3.7	14	13.0	50	47.0	36	33.6
Professional catalogers should handle more complex cataloging. (*N*=114)	6	5.3	1	0.9	7	6.1	32	28.1	68	59.6
Professional catalogers should only handle more complex cataloging. (*N*=118)	10	8.5	22	18.6	24	20.3	37	31.4	25	21.1
Staff catalogers* should handle less complex cataloging. (*N*=113)	13	11.5	14	12.4	20	17.7	44	38.9	22	19.5
Staff catalogers should only handle copy cataloging. (*N*=117)	28	23.9	53	45.3	11	9.4	13	11.1	12	10.3
Only professional catalogers should handle original cataloging. (*N*=119)	26	21.8	38	31.9	18	15.1	16	13.4	21	17.6
Staff catalogers do important work. (*N*=118)	3	2.5	0	0.0	1	0.8	17	14.4	97	82.2
Staff catalogers are often undervalued. (*N*=118)	4	3.4	10	8.5	13	11.0	39	33.1	52	44.1
Professional catalogers do important work. (*N*=118)	4	3.4	0	0.0	2	1.7	23	19.5	89	75.4
Professional catalogers are often undervalued. (*N*=118)	1	0.9	10	8.5	2	1.7	45	38.1	41	34.7
Professional catalogers are often overvalued. (*N*=119)	33	27.7	52	43.7	21	17.6	6	5.0	8	6.7
I feel that being a professional cataloger allows me more freedom in decision-making. (*N*=105)	3	2.9	2	1.9	11	10.5	40	38.1	49	46.7
I feel that being a professional cataloger gives me greater responsibility. (*N*=105)	2	1.9	4	3.8	8	7.6	33	31.4	60	57.1
Paraprofessional Respondents	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly agree	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
As a staff cataloger, my work is valued. (*N*=117)	3	2.6	20	8.5	11	9.4	43	36.8	50	42.7
Professional catalogers should handle more complex cataloging. (*N*=105)	11	10.5	17	16.2	18	17.1	30	28.6	29	27.6
Professional catalogers should only handle more complex cataloging. (*N*=107)	19	17.8	28	26.2	25	23.4	22	20.6	13	12.1
Staff catalogers should handle less complex cataloging. (*N*=115)	30	26.1	35	30.4	17	14.8	26	22.6	7	6.1
Staff catalogers should only handle copy cataloging. (*N*=117)	67	57.3	29	24.8	13	11.1	4	3.4	4	3.4
Only professional catalogers should handle original cataloging. (*N*=112)	61	54.5	28	25.0	11	9.8	6	5.4	6	5.4
Staff catalogers do important work. (*N*=117)	2	1.7	3	2.6	2	1.7	16	13.7	94	80.3
Staff catalogers are often undervalued. (*N*=117)	5	4.3	9	7.7	11	9.4	24	20.5	68	58.1
Professional catalogers do important work. (*N*=110)	3	2.7	4	3.6	5	4.5	32	29.1	66	60.0
Professional catalogers are often undervalued. (*N*=107)	11	10.3	25	23.4	45	32.7	17	25.9	19	17.8
Professional catalogers are often overvalued. (*N*=108)	7	6.5	24	22.2	30	27.8	23	21.3	24	22.2

* "Staff cataloger" was used on the survey and is repeated in this appendix. Within the paper, the term "paraprofessional cataloger" is used as a synonym.