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Canadian Library Salaries and Material Quality of Life
Les salaires dans les bibliothèques canadiennes et la qualité de vie matérielle

Jordan Pedersen

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Aller au sommaire du numéro

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Résumé de l'article

Cet article cherche à comprendre quelle qualité de vie matérielle à laquelle peut s'attendre une personne travaillant dans une bibliothèque au Canada, en se basant sur les salaires proposés dans un ensemble de données d'offres d'emploi sur un site d'emplois national sur une période de trois mois. Les affichages étaient catégorisés par province et par municipalité ainsi que par niveau de scolarité. Ces données ont été comparées aux informations du recensement sur le coût de logement dans la communauté où se trouvait l'emploi afin de comprendre si le salaire était suffisant pour assurer une stabilité financière et, par conséquent, une bonne qualité de vie matérielle.

Les résultats de l'étude montrent qu'en se fiant sur la moyenne pour toutes les offres, les employés des bibliothèques semblent avoir une bonne qualité de vie matérielle. Toutefois, un nombre important de postes ne fournissaient pas une stabilité financière. Les postes nécessitant une maîtrise en bibliothéconomie ou en sciences de l'information étaient plus susceptibles de fournir une bonne qualité de vie matérielle, tandis que les postes exigeant un diplôme de technicien semblaient ne pas offrir la même qualité.

J'ai mené cette analyse en reconnaissant que les bibliothécaires existent au sein de communautés, à la fois dans les bibliothèques où nous travaillons et dans le sens plus large de l'endroit où nous vivons. Ces contextes ont une dynamique de pouvoir, et ceux qui ont une plus grande stabilité financière ont la responsabilité de défendre ou d'être solidaires avec d'autres membres de la communauté qui ont moins de moyens.

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Jordan Pedersen
Research and Scholarship Librarian
University of Guelph
jpederse@uoguelph.ca

Abstract / Résumé

This paper seeks to answer what material quality of life can be expected for someone working in a library in Canada, based on the salaries offered in a data set of three months of job postings on a national job board. The postings were categorized by provincial and municipal location and education level. These data were then compared to census information about the cost of housing in the community where the job was located, to approximate whether the pay was sufficient to provide financial stability, and therefore a good material quality of life.

The results of the study show that based on the average of all postings, library workers appear to have a good material quality of life. However, a significant number of individual positions did not provide financial stability. Positions that required an MLIS were more likely to provide a good material quality of life, while positions that required a technician diploma were less likely to do the same.

I conducted this analysis with the acknowledgement that library workers exist within communities both in the libraries where we work and in the broader sense of where we live. These contexts have power dynamics, and those who have greater financial stability have a responsibility to advocate for, or stand in solidarity with, other members of the community who have less.

Cet article cherche à comprendre quelle qualité de vie matérielle à laquelle peut s'attendre une personne travaillant dans une bibliothèque au Canada, en se basant sur les salaires proposés dans un ensemble de données d'offres d'emploi sur un site d'emplois national sur une période de trois mois. Les affichages étaient catégorisés par province et par municipalité ainsi que par niveau de scolarité. Ces données ont été comparées aux informations du recensement sur le coût de logement dans la communauté où se trouvait l'emploi afin de comprendre si le salaire était suffisant pour assurer une stabilité financière et, par conséquent, une bonne qualité de vie matérielle.

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J'ai mené cette analyse en reconnaissant que les bibliothécaires existent au sein de communautés, à la fois dans les bibliothèques où nous travaillons et dans le sens plus large de l'endroit où nous vivons. Ces contextes ont une dynamique de pouvoir, et ceux qui ont une plus grande stabilité financière ont la responsabilité de défendre ou d'être solidaires avec d'autres membres de la communauté qui ont moins de moyens.

Keywords / Mots-Clés

Income equality, library worker solidarity, affordability, library salaries, compensation; égalisation des revenus, solidarité des employés d'une bibliothèque, accessibilité financière, salaires dans les bibliothèques, compensation

Introduction

Although working in a library can be a rewarding career choice, library employment has been facing increased challenges and public attention due to immense workload expectations and sometimes dangerous working conditions. For example, public libraries have received news attention in Canada and the United States for their role as a low-funded stopgap for social problems exacerbated by austerity governments (Crabb & Liewicki, 2023; "Ottawa Libraries," 2023). Academic libraries, too, have received repeated budget cuts (Bendico, 2022; Hinchliffe, 2022; Markovich, 2023; McKenzie, 2020). Given this context, it is important to ask about the economic value of library jobs, because other types of employment could provide healthier working conditions. It is also important because library workers should be able to ensure working conditions and remuneration are adequate for those who stay.

The cost of obtaining the degrees required for many library jobs is high. For example, the cost of tuition for an ALA-accredited degree in Canada ranges from approximately $11,000 to $25,000 for people paying domestic tuition, and from approximately $22,000 to $90,000 for International Students (see Appendix A). Tuition for library technician

programs is harder to calculate because there are more programs throughout Canada, offered in various ways with corresponding differences in fees. For example, programs in English Canada are typically two-year college programs, but in Quebec they are often three-year college or CEGEP programs. Library workers pay a lot of money to enter workplaces with challenging working conditions, and it is fair to expect compensation that is adequate for our well-being. Although an early motivator for this paper was to understand how the cost of obtaining the required education relates to the salaries expected from work in the library field, that topic has been covered in some depth by others (Comanda et al., 2021), and it became less interesting than the relationships between salaries and the material quality of life enjoyed, in general, by library workers. While salary is only one component of material quality of life—other considerations could include benefits, vacation, flexibility in working location and hours, and so forth—it is a significant one. Exploring salary specifically enables direct comparison with other dollar figures, such as cost of degree or cost of housing, which in turn can support individual decision-making about jobs or institutional policies and salary scales.

Libraries are only one type of workplace amongst many others that have their own unique challenges with working conditions or pay. As workers in Canada, we live in capitalist societies that require us to pay for everything, including our necessities. This is also true for our friends, neighbours, and families, regardless of the type of work they do. While high incomes are not required for well-being, financial security has been shown to improve mental and physical well-being (Financial Consumer Agency of Canda, 2019), and knowing whether Canadian workers can all afford to live is a valuable rallying point for worker solidarity. While I believe one should not have to work in order to have necessities, it is beyond the scope of this paper to fully discuss the issues with requiring paid work to live.

This study seeks to answer what material quality of life can be expected for someone working in a library, based on the salaries offered in new library job postings in Canada. I compared these data with census information about the cost of housing in the communities where the jobs were located to approximate whether the pay was sufficient to provide financial stability and therefore a good material quality of life. Common measures for assessing good material quality of life are discussed further in the Literature Review section.

As library workers ask questions about how our labour is compensated, we can also open ourselves up to understanding a few other concepts that are less individual in nature. One is that the profession regularly bemoans its homogeneous nature (Espinal et al., 2018; Gohr, 2017; Vinopal, 2016). Librarians are predominantly white (Hulbert & Kendrick, 2023), female, and middle class (Mars, 2018), but this may not be true of all people who work in libraries. Is it possible that these are the only people who can afford to become, and stay, library workers? Do compensation differences between types of jobs reinforce inequality across many identities? Although this would be impossible to determine from the job postings because they do not include demographic data about who will fill the role, the results of this study could be combined with data about salaries of current job holders to get a better understanding of who occupies these roles. More on this is included in the Directions for Future Research section. A second concept is

that the study of libraries tends to look inward a lot, but library workers have full lives within our broader communities. By gaining a better understanding of where we fall economically within our communities, we can improve our sensitivity around the class and power dynamics that might be at play within our workplaces, both between colleagues and between us and our patrons. With this knowledge we can stand in solidarity with others, with improved awareness of our respective privileges and struggles.

To these ends, the research questions I sought to answer are:

1. Based on salary information available for new job postings in Canadian libraries, what is the material quality of life—based on meeting guidelines for affordable housing—that someone working in a library can expect to have?

2. Does this quality of life differ depending on the municipal and provincial location and level of education required?

3. How do library salaries compare with other incomes within the same community? Does this differ by gender, location, or education requirements?

Literature Review

There is no shortage of salary surveys and aggregate salary data across libraries; organizations such as the Canadian Association of Law Libraries (2023), the Association of Research Libraries (2022), the Canadian Association of University Teachers (2017), and the American Library Association (Grady & Davis, 2006) provide data for different types of libraries. There are also examples that focus on type of job (Ontario Association of Library Technicians, 2017) and newness to the profession (Ontario Library Association, n.d.), and even crowd-sourced webpages that use collective agreement information (*Librarianship.ca*, 2023). Frequently, these types of resources have asked whether library professionals are paid adequately, and sometimes they have sought to understand what factors affect the salaries that are offered (Meyer, 1990). Some studies have used library job boards as a data source for employment prospects and geographic concentration of work (e.g., Bickford, 2017).

There is also an abundance of information exploring salaries, cost of living, and affordability in Canada for the general population. Nationally, the Consumer Price Index from Statistics Canada (2023) is used to approximate the cost-of-living, but it is measured as the change in price of a fixed basket of goods and services; the raw data are unavailable (Statistics Canada, 2023). Affordability, generally construed, is a major area of research and features prominently in newspapers across the country. Examples include reports of the number of people living in poverty despite working (“Nova Scotians Feeling the Pinch,” 2024), reports of the increase in mutual aid as Canadians struggle with increases to the cost of living (Braat, 2024), and even articles questioning whether $100,000 per year is sufficient to live (Alini, 2023). Many of these news sources have drawn from reports by Statistics Canada, the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA), the Ontario Living

Wage Network, and the Alberta Living Wage Network. These organizations use data to explore relationships between shelter costs and wages across the country. For example, the CCPA releases calculations and reports for both living wages (Living Wage Canada, n.d.) and rental wages (Macdonald & Tranjan, 2023). While reports from the CCPA use robust data sources, rates are only available for select census metropolitan areas (CMAs), which leaves many areas lacking data.

This paper builds on the existing literature by examining the relationship between salaries in library job postings and the cost of housing where the job was located, and it includes a comparison with the salaries of other members of the community where the job was posted. As discussed, this is novel because it addresses the current gap in the research between library job salaries, and salary and cost of living for the general population.

Methods

Data

The job postings came from the Partnership Job Board (https://partnershipjobs.ca/), a popular job posting site for people working in libraries in Canada. They were collected from March 28 to June 28, 2023. I chose these dates because they were the first quarter of the second year in which Partnership required compensation to be included in all postings (Partnership, 2023), and this date range allowed me to use a sample of postings for the year after the practice of including salary was established. I signed up for email alerts for all newly posted jobs and followed the link in each email approximately once per week to copy the job posting and save it as a text file. I used the posting identifier at the end of the URL as the file name when I saved the postings. In total I saved 346 job postings, but seven of these were for jobs outside of Canada, which I excluded based on the scope of the study. In addition to the 346 postings originally collected, eight postings were published on the Partnership Job Board during the collection period but were not included in the analysis because they had been removed by the time I tried to view them. The analysis therefore included 339 postings. Some postings did not include sufficient information to be included in all steps of the analysis, which is indicated in the respective findings when the number of postings differs from the overall total of 339.

In addition to the job postings, I used data from the 2021 Canadian census to determine housing costs and income across the communities where the jobs were posted (Statistics Canada, 2022b). The version of the census I downloaded was the “census metropolitan areas (CMAs), census agglomerations (CAs) and census subdivisions (CSDs)” CSV file.

Data Preparation and Setting Up the Analysis

To extract the relevant data from the job postings, I created a python script to extract the file name, position title, institution, population centre, province, closing date, compensation, and sentence(s) about education requirements. I manipulated the

compensation field to break it into columns based on whether compensation was given as an hourly, weekly, or yearly number (see Appendix B for the script). Because compensation was usually posted as a range, I calculated both the yearly low and yearly high, assuming a 35-hour work week for 52 weeks. Where there was no range, I gave the same value for both the yearly low and high. When developing this script, I made modifications to the original script I created by running it through ChatGPT (GPT-3) to improve how salary was normalized. I created a query using my original code, followed by this prompt:

> Salary data is messy because the low end and high end of salary ranges are in the same column, along with variations in hourly versus yearly salaries and uses of K or $ to mean money. Write a python regex script to clean salary data. Sample salary data includes $30.41 per hour; $73,599 - $116,883; $61,204 to $85,514 per year / 61 204 à 85 514 $ par année; Salary Range: $928.59/weekly - $1075.07/weekly Hiring Range: $928.59/weekly - $975.00/weekly; Over $100K; 46000;$121,166 - $144,309 (reviewed upon interview);75k to 90k.

I then requested further refinements, specifically by prompting ChatGPT to improve the previous script by considering, “If ‘hour’ is present, add a column for hourly. If ‘weekly’ is present, add column for weekly. If hourly and weekly columns are not present, add a column for yearly.”

To identify educational requirements, the script searched for keywords such as: Masters, Master of, Diploma, MI, MLIS, ALA, Degree, or Bachelor. I reviewed all results manually to confirm the matching keywords were used to describe educational requirements of the job. During this review, I also separated library technician diplomas from other college diplomas. When developing the educational requirements categories, I noted that only one position referenced a doctorate degree, and it was contextualized as being optional above the MLIS. It was therefore not included as a category in this study, but it could be included in future analyses with larger data sets.

To extract the relevant information from the Canadian census, I uploaded the data into an SQL database, which I chose because of the large size of the file. I then used SQL queries to extract information for the census characteristics relevant to the analysis:

- Characteristic 113 - Median total income in 2020 among recipients ($)
- Characteristic 1486 - Median monthly shelter costs for owned dwellings ($)
- Characteristic 1487 - Average monthly shelter costs for owned dwellings ($)
- Characteristic 1494 - Median monthly shelter costs for rented dwellings ($)
- Characteristic 1495 - Average monthly shelter costs for rented dwellings ($) (Statistics Canada, 2022b).

I then joined both sets of data on the name of the population centre, and I reviewed matches and added the census data manually if needed.

Limitations and Data Decisions

Not all jobs related to librarianship in Canada are posted on the Partnership Job Board, but because of its wide usage and required salary information, I identified it as the most consistent, reliable data source. Given the length of time during which data were collected and the data cleaning decisions that were required, the findings should be interpreted as a general guide with the possibility for further, longitudinal study.

One notable data cleaning decision was to calculate a yearly salary for all jobs, regardless of how the posting was structured. Some postings were for part-time, contractually limited, or occasional employment, but they were often difficult to identify programmatically because the expected hours of work were not always clearly defined within the posting. My other notable decision was to categorize the postings using the highest degree mentioned, regardless of whether it was required, strongly preferred, or preferred. I used the categories “Secondary,” “College,” or “University” for general degree requirements, and “Tech Diploma” or “MLIS” when they were specified. Technician diplomas were treated as higher than college diplomas because they are specific to the library workplace. Internships were added because they were distinctly low in salary and were structured to serve the purpose of gaining work experience instead of providing a livable salary.

Regarding the census data set, it should be noted that even though 2021 was the most recent census data at the time of this study, the cost of living had dramatically increased by 2023 when the job postings were collected. For example, rental prices across Canada have rebounded from the lows in 2021 caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Across Canada, average monthly rent rose from $1,662 in April 2021 to $2,002 in April 2023, and continue to rise (Urbanation & Rentals.ca, 2024). Another limitation of the census data set is that Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs), Census Agglomeration (CAs), and Census Subdivisions (CSDs) are distinct for the purposes of Statistics Canada, but they can have overlapping jurisdiction over a job posting. For example, there is both a Census metropolitan area called Barrie and a Census subdivision called Barrie, City (CY). Where this overlap occurred, the CMA was used. Additionally, although I used the Median total income in 2020 among recipients, there is no way to access raw salary data to provide the same level of nuance to the community analysis.

Findings

Exploratory Analysis

The 339 job postings were situated in 128 unique locations. Most of the postings were in Ontario (*n* = 148) and British Columbia (*n* = 97), followed by Alberta (*n* = 33), Quebec (*n* = 17), Manitoba (*n* = 11), New Brunswick (*n* = 10), Nova Scotia (*n* = 8), Saskatchewan (*n* = 8), Newfoundland (*n* = 3), and the Northwest Territories (*n* = 1). Three postings did not have required in-person locations; these were excluded from the

location analysis but included in the overall analysis and the analysis by education level. There were no postings for Prince Edward Island, the Yukon, or Nunavut. The percentage of all postings per province was comparable to the population of that province as a percentage of the total population of Canada, with two major exceptions. British Columbia had 13.5% percent of Canada's population (Statistics Canada, 2022) but accounted for 28.6% of the postings. Quebec had 23.0% of Canada's population (Statistics Canada, 2022b) but accounted for only 4.9% of the postings. Although analyzing the percentage of postings relative to the percentage of Canadian population per province cannot provide insight into the economic viability of working in a library in each place, it is interesting to see which provinces may have had more positions available, or more than their expected share based on population. It is tempting to speculate why, but there is not enough information to know for sure.

Determining Material Quality of Life

I used the percentage of income spent on shelter as a proxy for material quality of life. I assumed the salary would support only the library worker, with no other income, and the library worker would live in the same place they worked. This is a comparable approach to the rental wage calculated by the CCPA (Macdonald & Tranjan, 2023).

Thirty percent of before-tax income being spent on shelter is the marker of affordability used by the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (2018) and Statistics Canada (2022a). This is by no means a perfect or complete measure of material quality of life; however, it is a straightforward way to measure without access to more complex data sets for the costs of goods and services, such as those employed by Statistics Canada. The census includes information about the median and average cost of housing in each location, and the percentage of the population that spent 30% or more of their income on housing in each location, all of which I used in the analyses when comparing library postings to the broader community.

Exploring Material Quality of Life

I began by exploring all job postings, and I found that the average ($59,692 for low; $70,382 for high) and median ($60,878 for low; $69,629 for high) salaries were higher than the 2021 census Canadian employment income average ($51,600) and median ($39,500). As I mentioned, both the yearly low and yearly high salary were retained when a range was given. If no range was given, the low and high were the same.

To continue this initial exploration, I determined the material quality of life for this group of postings by comparing them to the Canada-wide shelter costs, which were:

- Median monthly shelter costs for owned dwellings ($) 1,240
- Average monthly shelter costs for owned dwellings ($) 1,498
- Median monthly shelter costs for rented dwellings ($) 1,070

- Average monthly shelter costs for rented dwellings ($) 1,209 (Statistics Canada, 2022b)

Based on this comparison, the average and median salaries for the library job postings would allow workers to spend less than 30% of their income on shelter, regardless of whether they paid the median or average cost to own or rent, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1

The percentage of salary required to pay for shelter, broken down by the census categories for Median Cost for Owned Dwelling, Average Cost for Owned Dwelling, Median Cost for Rented Dwelling, and Average Cost for Rented Dwelling

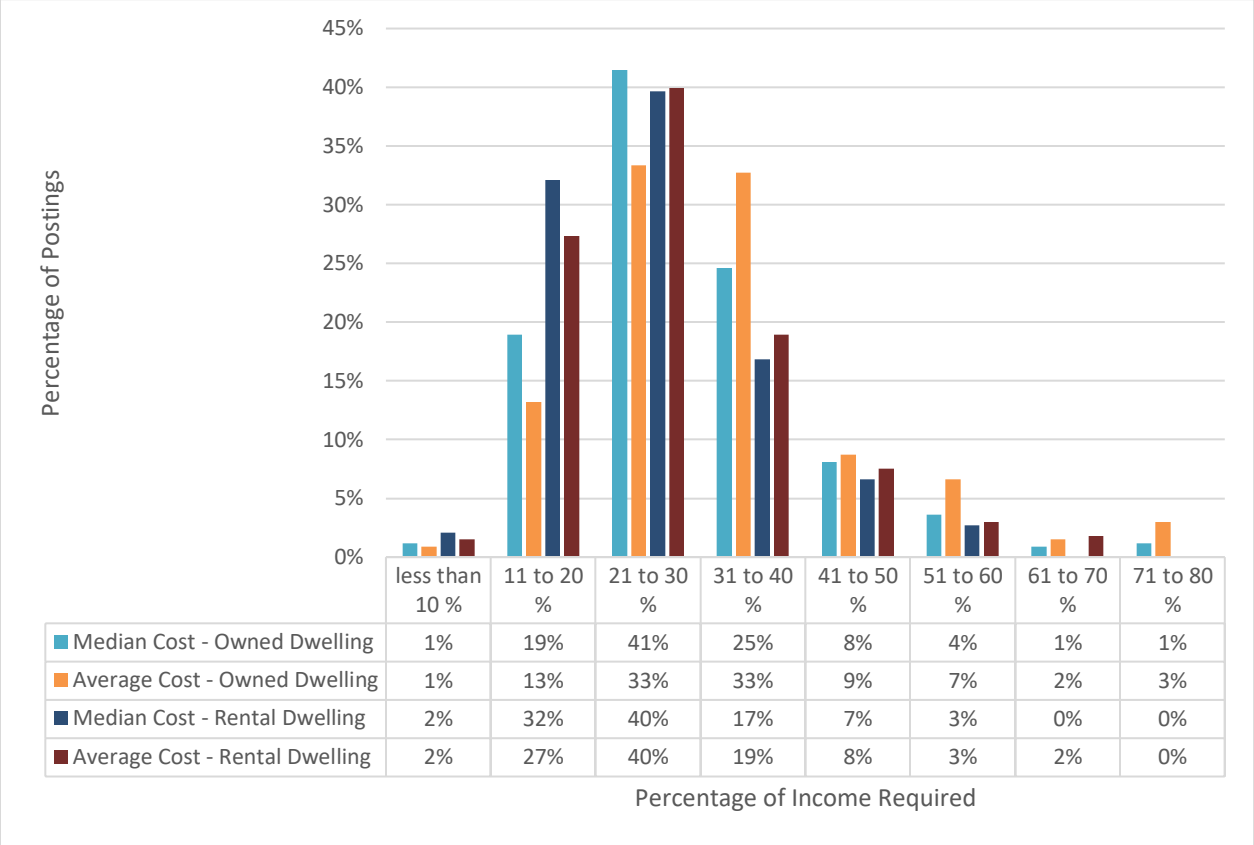
Average and Median Salaries for all Library Postings	Percentage of income required for median owned dwelling costs	Percentage of income required for average owned dwelling costs	Percentage of income required for median rented dwelling costs	Percentage of income required for average rented dwelling costs
Average yearly low	25%	30%	22%	24%
Average yearly high	21%	26%	18%	21%
Median yearly low	24%	30%	21%	24%
Median yearly high	21%	26%	18%	21%

I then analyzed the salary data for each posting individually and compared them with the median and average shelter costs for the specific census area where the job was posted. Using the median versus average values for shelter costs gave minor differences in the results. Both are included in this initial exploration, but in later analyses I only provide the median costs for owned and rented dwellings. This is because the results for average and median costs are similar, but averages are known to be more affected by extreme values.

Figure 1 shows what percentage of the job posting income would be required for shelter in the location where the job was posted. The percentage of income required is displayed in 10% intervals, and I calculated it using the yearly low salary. Only 333 postings are included, because the cost of shelter was not available in the census data for three jobs (e.g., on First Nations Reserves), and three jobs allowed for remote work. All six of these were excluded.

Figure 1

Percentage of income (using the lower value of the posting salary range) required to pay for shelter using the Canada-wide average and median costs for both owned and rented dwellings



	less than 10 %	11 to 20 %	21 to 30 %	31 to 40 %	41 to 50 %	51 to 60 %	61 to 70 %	71 to 80 %
Median Cost - Owned Dwelling	1%	19%	41%	25%	8%	4%	1%	1%
Average Cost - Owned Dwelling	1%	13%	33%	33%	9%	7%	2%	3%
Median Cost - Rental Dwelling	2%	32%	40%	17%	7%	3%	0%	0%
Average Cost - Rental Dwelling	2%	27%	40%	19%	8%	3%	2%	0%

Depending on which census characteristics are analyzed, between 47% and 69% of positions would allow workers to spend 30% or less of their income on housing. The smallest percentage, 47%, is based on the average cost of owned dwellings, and the largest percentage, 69%, is based on the median cost of rental dwellings. These percentages represent 158 and 246 postings, respectively.

This section should be understood solely as the starting point. Next, I examined material quality of life based on the location of the job posting and educational requirements, to determine whether there were patterns around which jobs would provide a good material quality of life.

Material Quality of Life by Province

The previous analysis focused on the material quality of life when comparing salaries to local shelter costs, and in this section the material quality of life is further compared across provinces. This comparison is valuable, because variations in minimum wage legislation between provinces could impact the salaries offered. Additionally, provincial-level comparisons may help identify differences in material quality of life across the

country. To begin I calculated the average of the yearly low and the yearly high salary per province, and then I ranked the provinces based on whether their average fell above or below the average for all postings.

This analysis and the analysis of educational requirements both started with an assessment averaging both the yearly high and the yearly low salaries. This allowed me to determine whether there were huge ranges within a category that might make the data unhelpful, potentially indicating employers giving huge salary ranges when posting to meet the requirements of the job board but not providing useful information for this study (or for candidates). Afterward, both analyses more closely examined the lower average salary value and compared it to the cost of shelter. I used the lower salary value because it is the minimum a candidate would expect to receive.

Regardless of whether the yearly low or yearly high salary are used, the three provinces offering the highest average salaries, in order, were Quebec, Northwest Territories, and Ontario, as shown in Table 2. British Columbia and Alberta fell above the average salary of all postings in both situations, and Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and New Brunswick fell below the average in both. The “(blank)” row represents postings for remote work, which were not connected to a specific province.

Table 2

The average salary per province using the yearly low salary and yearly high salary in the job postings

Province	Average of Yearly Low Salary	Rank Based on Yearly Low Salary	Average of Yearly High Salary	Rank Based on Yearly High Salary	Total Number of Postings
QC	$77,511.38	1	$88,010.96	1	17
NT	$74,000.00	2	$88,000.00	2	1
AB	$72,180.38	3	$85,465.00	3	33
ON	$67,372.19	4	$80,213.68	5	148
(blank)	$66,590.67	5	$73,320.33	7	3
BC	$63,694.91	6	$73,489.22	6	97
NS	$60,732.38	7	$64,260.23	10	8
NL	$59,641.40	8	$80,557.87	4	3
SK	$56,533.60	9	$68,075.50	9	8
MB	$53,904.14	10	$63,026.73	11	11
NB	$53,162.00	11	$69,417.20	8	10
All postings	$65,972.05	N/A	$77,617.69	N/A	339

To answer the question about material quality of life, I again calculated what percentage of the salary would be required for shelter, using the same process as for the individual postings in Figure 1. The results are shown in Table 3 and 4 and are grouped by province. Note that again the number of postings is 333, because of the three jobs

where the cost of housing was not available in the census and the three jobs that allowed for remote work. Table 3 shows the percentages when the dwelling was owned, and Table 4 shows the results if the worker was renting.

Table 3

The percentage of income required to pay for shelter using the lower value of the salary range and the median cost for owned dwellings in the census location for the job posting, split by province

Percentage of salary required for the median owned dwelling costs	AB	BC	MB	NB	NL	NS	NT	ON	QC	SK	Grand Total
less than 10								2	2		4
11 to 20	**6**	**20**		**8**		**5**	**1**	**19**	**3**	**1**	**63**
21 to 30	16	35	9	1	3	3		55	12	4	138
31 to 40	**8**	**23**	**2**	**1**				**46**		**2**	**82**
41 to 50	1	13						13			27
51 to 60	**1**	**5**						**6**			**12**
61 to 70		1						1		1	3
71 to 80								**4**			**4**
Grand Total	32	97	11	10	3	8	1	146	17	8	333

Table 4

The percentage of income required to pay for shelter using the lower value of the salary range and the median cost for rented dwellings in the census location for the job posting, split by province

Percentage of salary required for the median owned dwelling costs	AB	BC	MB	NB	NL	NS	NT	ON	QC	SK	Grand Total
less than 10								5	2		7
11 to 20	**13**	**22**	**2**	**8**	**3**	**7**	**1**	**33**	**15**	**3**	**107**
21 to 30	17	32	8	2		1		69		3	132
31 to 40	**2**	**28**	**1**					**24**		**1**	**56**
41 to 50		13						8		1	22
51 to 60		**2**						**7**			**9**
Grand Total	32	97	11	10	3	8	1	146	17	8	333

By considering the cost of housing, I determined that some of the provinces that stood out for their high wages, Ontario, British Columbia, and Alberta, had a large percentage of postings that did not meet the threshold for a good material quality of life. This is especially apparent with Ontario, where 48% of positions (n = 70) would result in spending more than 30% of income based on the median cost for owned dwellings, or 26% (n = 39) based on the median cost for rented dwellings. However, Quebec, which offered the highest average salary of all the provinces, also seemed to provide the best material quality of life, indicated by having no positions that required more than 30% of income for shelter. In comparison, New Brunswick fell below the national average for

salary alone, but 90% of positions (n = 9) would allow workers to pay 30% or less based on the median cost for owned dwellings, and all positions would allow them to pay 30% or less when renting based on the median cost for rented dwellings.

The number of postings in each province limits the significance of comparisons; for example, the Northwest Territories appeared to provide an extremely high material quality of life, but it would be foolish to make broad generalizations based on one job posting.

Material Quality of Life by Education Requirements

To begin to understand what the material quality of life would be per educational requirement, I calculated the average of the yearly low salary and the average yearly high salary for each, which is shared in Table 5.

Table 5

The average income for all job postings per educational requirement

Education Level	Number of Postings	Average Yearly Low Salary	Average Yearly High Salary
Intern	2	$29,120.00	$ 29,120.00
Secondary	**4**	**$37,755.90**	**$ 37,755.90**
College	16	$58,066.96	$ 65,374.75
Tech Diploma	**64**	**$51,115.18**	**$ 55,876.83**
University	26	$65,918.01	$ 78,740.60
MLIS	**175**	**$73,961.56**	**$ 89,827.69**
(blank)	52	$63,416.91	$ 71,421.53
Grand Total	**339**	**$65,972.05**	**$ 77,617.69**

In general, compensation averages were higher for more advanced degrees. Postings that mentioned a MLIS or equivalent comprised the largest number of postings (52% of the total) and provided the highest average salaries. It was sobering to see the difference in compensation between these MLIS postings and postings that mentioned a library technician diploma, which was the second most common education requirement (19% of total number of postings). The average yearly low salary for MLIS postings was $73,169.95, whereas the average yearly low for library technician diploma positions was just $51,103.73.

I was surprised that general college education was rewarded with higher compensation than technician diplomas, because I assumed technician diplomas would be more highly valued for their specialized skills suited to a library workplace. I speculate that the higher salaries for general college diplomas may be explained by the smaller number of postings with these requirements, or the higher salaries may suggest that administrative roles that generally require business, marketing, or IT education are more highly valued in the workplace than the work done by library technicians. There is also some evidence of de-professionalization in libraries where some jobs that were traditionally held by

holders of specific degrees are now held by more generally educated people (McNally, 2024). Another alternative theory is that the lower salaries were being offered in areas with low housing costs, so we must focus instead on the percentage of income required for shelter.

Figure 2 shows the percentage of postings by education requirement in relation to the median cost for owned dwellings. The data are also presented in Table 6 to provide an alternate format for accessibility. In total 283 job postings were included in this analysis, because 50 of the postings did not include educational requirements. See Table 5 for the number of postings for each educational requirement.

Figure 2

Percentage of salary (using the lower value of the posting salary range) required for the median cost for owned dwellings, separated by the educational requirements

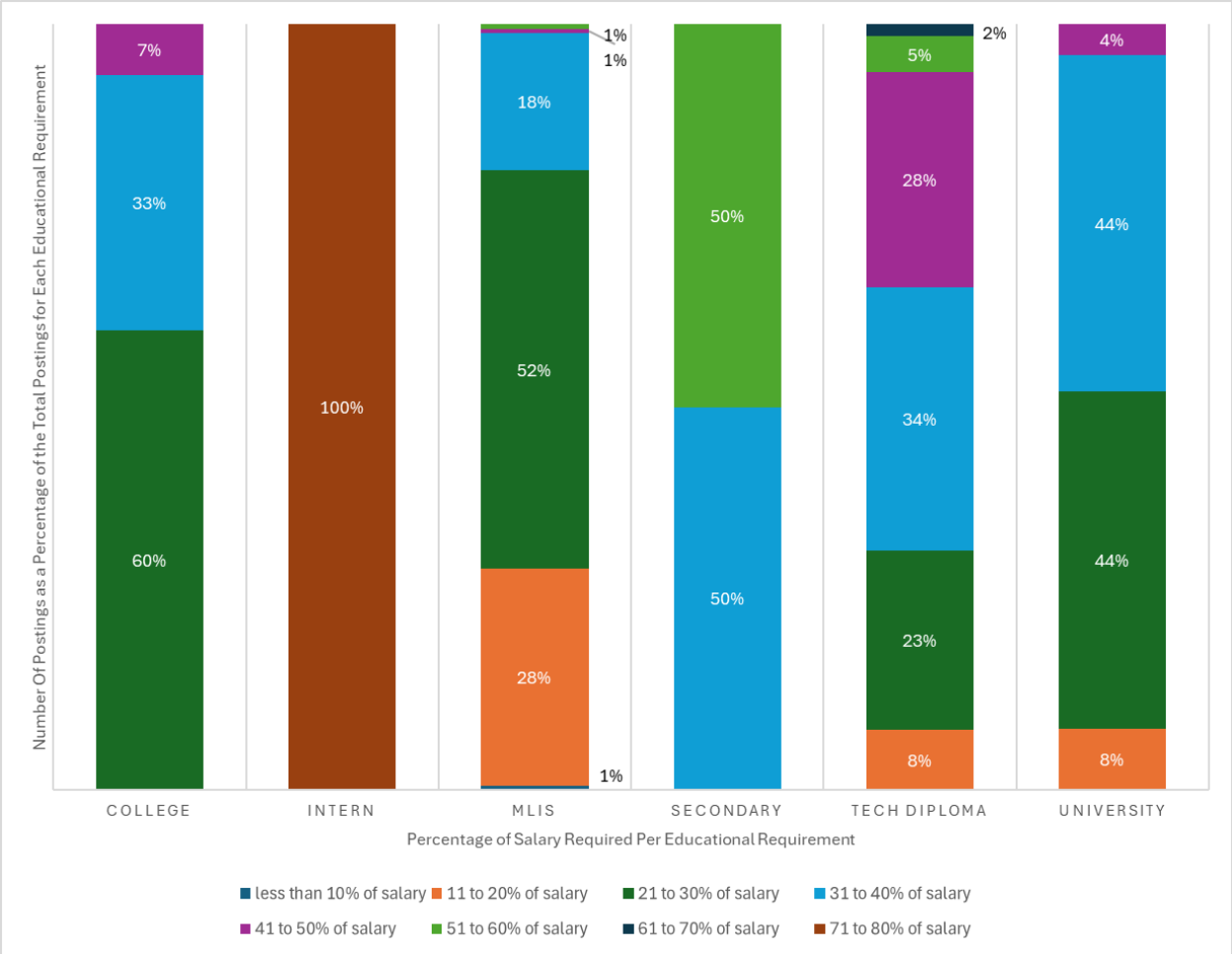


Table 6

Percentage of salary (using the lower value of the posting salary range) required for the median cost for owned dwellings, separated by the educational requirements

Percentage of income	College	Intern	MLIS	Secondary	Tech Diploma	University
less than 10	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%
11 to 20	**0%**	**0%**	**28%**	**0%**	**8%**	**8%**
21 to 30	60%	0%	52%	0%	23%	44%
31 to 40	**33%**	**0%**	**18%**	**50%**	**34%**	**44%**
41 to 50	7%	0%	1%	0%	28%	4%
51 to 60	**0%**	**0%**	**1%**	**50%**	**5%**	**0%**
61 to 70	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%	0%
71 to 80	**0%**	**100%**	**0%**	**0%**	**0%**	**0%**

Eighty-one percent of MLIS postings (*n* = 140) would allow workers to spend 30% or less on shelter based on the median owned cost in the posting location. In the near-affordable realm, 18% of postings (*n* = 31) would require workers to spend 31 to 40% of their income, leaving only two MLIS postings that would require more than 40%. In comparison, only 31% of Tech Diploma postings (*n* = 20) would require spending 30% or less on shelter, and only 66% (*n* = 42) would require spending 40% or less. At the extreme end of unaffordability, three library technician positions would require 51% to 60% of income, and one would require 61% to 70%. I reviewed those postings to determine whether they were outliers affected by the decision to normalize all postings as if they were full-time. However, all these positions appeared to be full-time positions at school boards, public libraries, or museums and archives, and these were simply the yearly salaries offered.

Next, I analyzed the salaries using the median cost for rented dwellings. While renting would provide a better material quality of life, there remains a divide between MLIS and Library Technician postings. Figure 3 shows the percentage of income required for rented dwellings separated by educational requirements. These data are also presented in Table 7 as an alternate format for accessibility. See Table 5 for the number of postings for each educational requirement.

Figure 3

Percentage of salary (using the lower value of the posting salary range) required for the median cost for rented dwellings, separated by the educational requirements

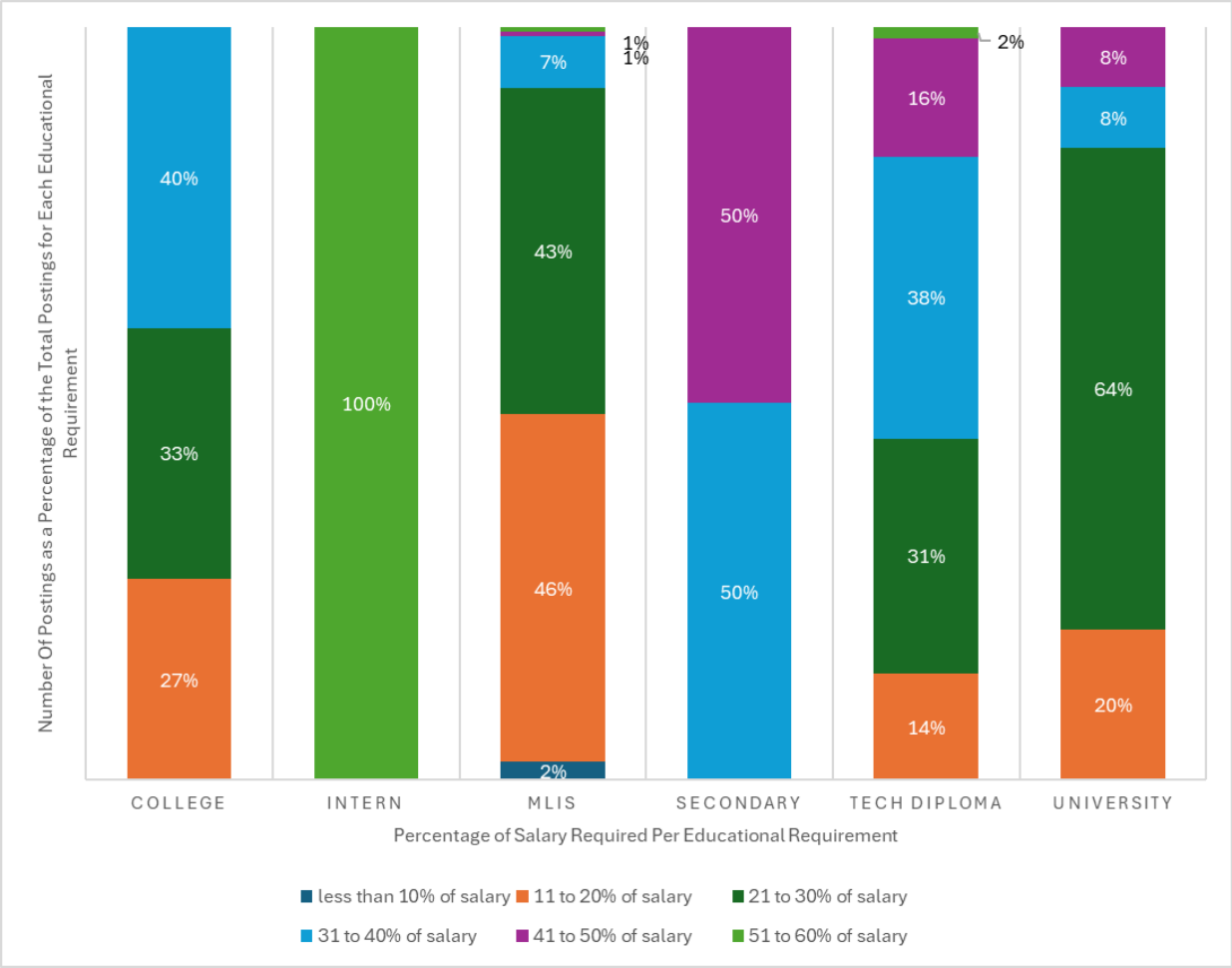


Table 7

Percentage of salary (using the lower value of the posting salary range) required for the median cost for rented dwellings, separated by the educational requirements

Percentage of income	College	Intern	MLIS	Secondary	Tech Diploma	University
less than 10	0%	0%	2%	0%	0%	0%
11 to 20	**27%**	**0%**	**46%**	**0%**	**14%**	**20%**
21 to 30	33%	0%	43%	0%	31%	64%
31 to 40	**40%**	**0%**	**7%**	**50%**	**38%**	**8%**
41 to 50	0%	0%	1%	50%	16%	8%
51 to 60	**0%**	**100%**	**1%**	**0%**	**2%**	**0%**

Ninety-one percent of MLIS positions (n = 159) would allow workers to spend 30% or less of income on shelter. In comparison, only 45% of Tech Diploma positions (n = 29) would allow spending 30% or less. This is an improvement from the 31% for owned dwellings, but it still means most positions that required library technician diplomas did not allow workers to spend less than 30% on shelter.

Both the owned and rented shelter graphs show that a large number of postings that mentioned an MLIS would allow workers to spend even less than 20% of their salaries on shelter. For example, 49% of MLIS postings (n = 84) would allow for spending less than 20% of income on rent, compared to only 14% of all technician postings. These postings were consistently at administrative and executive levels, with responsibilities for heading entire libraries or seemingly large departments. While it is not surprising that those with more responsibility would receive larger salaries, this disparity highlights the salary implications of the power dynamics within many library workplaces, where only MLIS holders can occupy leadership positions. The material quality of life differences between managerial and rank-and-file positions could be an area for more exploration, as I mention in the Directions for Future Research section at the end of this paper.

Income Comparison with the Rest of the Community

Comparing the income for library jobs with the income for other jobs in the community is difficult given the limited data available publicly. I decided to use census characteristic 113: median total income in 2020 among recipients. Unfortunately, these data are not available for census subdivisions, which limited the number of job postings that could be compared. In total, 160 postings matched with census locations that had information for the median total income. Of those, 91% of postings (*n* = 146) were above the census median, and 9% of postings (*n* = 14) were below the census median. Regarding the educational requirements of those below the median, six referenced a technician diploma, six had blank education requirements, and two were intern positions. For the six that were below the median, one was in Alberta (out of 23 total Alberta-based postings), one in Manitoba (out of 10 postings), three in British Columbia (out of 49 postings), three in Saskatchewan (out of 8), and six in Ontario (out of 59).

Given that library work is often considered a feminized profession, I also compared the salaries to the census median total income for men and the census median total income for women, which are the only two gender categories available for the 2021 census. Seventeen percent of postings (*n* = 25) were below the median salary for men, while only 5% (*n* = 8) were below the median salary for women. This means most positions were above the median salary for all men or women. It also shows that despite being a feminized profession, library work paid relatively well, with 95% of postings (*n* = 152) offering more money than the average for women in a given community.

In addition, I assessed what percentage of the median income for each area would be required for the median costs of both owned and rented dwellings, to determine the material quality of life that other people in the community could expect in comparison to library workers. The census median income consistently required spending more income on shelter than the library salaries. This is expected because the library salaries

were almost always above the census median. Ninety-three percent of census median incomes would require workers to spend more than 30% of their income on owned dwellings, in comparison to 17% of the library postings. Similarly, 81% of census median incomes would require workers to spend more than 30% on rented dwellings, but only 9% of library postings would.

Working with census medians rather than raw data presents challenges because medians include all people in the community, including those who cannot work full time. Still, I deemed the median values for the community more reliable than averages, because medians are not skewed by the presence of a few outstanding salaries. However, because income distributions are often more concentrated at the low end of the income scale, median incomes are also generally lower than the average (Statistics Canada, 2015). Therefore, these findings about library workers having better material quality of life than the average of their community could be considered interesting but not particularly useful: the data set includes less than half of the total number of postings in the study, and the median census income is only one way to measure income in a given census area.

Discussion

Summary of Key Points

My first research question asked, based on salary information available for new job postings in libraries, what is the material quality of life that someone working in a library can expect to have? The average salary of all the Partnership job postings would allow a worker to have a good material quality of life, indicated by spending 30% or less of their salary on Canada-wide shelter costs. Based on the specific shelter costs within the communities where jobs were located, only 47% to 74% would have a good material quality of life with the minimum salary given in the job posting. The number is lowest, at 47% of postings, when using the salary to meet the average costs for an owned dwelling, and is highest, at 74% of postings, when using the salary to meet the median costs for a rental dwelling.

My second research question asked, does this quality of life differ depending on the location and level of education required? When I examined the material quality of life across provinces, I did not identify any provinces that were markedly better or worse, despite the provincial average salaries differing by over $20,000 from province to province. This may be attributable to the number and types of postings in each province, but it is also due to the shelter costs in each location. Quebec, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick had the highest percentage of postings with salaries that allowed for a good material quality of life, while Ontario and British Columbia offered the highest percentage of postings that did not.

When I analyzed the material quality of life by educational requirements, I found a significant disparity between postings. Positions that required an MLIS degree were most likely to provide a good material quality of life, with 81% to 91% requiring workers to spend less than 30% of their salary on shelter (81% based on the cost for owned

dwellings; 91% for rented dwellings). This is in sharp contrast to postings that required a library technician diploma, where only 31% to 45% of workers could spend less than 30% of their salary on housing. This disparity existed across the country.

My third research question asked, how do library salaries compare to other incomes within the same community? When I compared library salaries to the median income in the local communities, most of the Partnership postings (91%) offered salaries higher than the median income in the communities for which data are available. This is true even when the communities' median incomes are split by gender, with 95% of library salaries being higher than the female median income, and 83% being higher than the male median income.

Directions for Future Research

This study provides a snapshot in time about the state of library salaries and the material quality of life those salaries could provide given the median shelter costs where jobs were posted. The study was exploratory in nature and could also have included a comparison between ranks (e.g., management roles compared to rank-and-file positions) and between library types (e.g., academic, public, special). Undertaking these types of comparisons in the future could lead to a better understanding of the causes of the salary differences I discovered. Educational requirements could also be analyzed in greater detail, including an assessment based on whether the education mentioned was required or preferred.

In addition, a live dashboard of results would be valuable to future library professionals and current job seekers and could provide the ability to track progress over time. However, given the difficulty of normalizing salary data and matching them with census data, this could be challenging.

To better understand some of the equity implications of these findings, it could be valuable to survey people who have left library work or pursued more advanced degrees, to determine whether salary impacted their decisions. This would be especially valuable when combined with research about the attrition rates of underrepresented groups in librarianship (Vinopal, 2016) and should be expanded to include all groups that work within libraries, not just librarians.

Conclusion

The original value-driven intentions of this study were to understand material quality of life and to explore whether there are inequalities within library workplaces and in relation to the broader communities. The findings show that many library jobs offered salaries that would provide workers with a good material quality of life, based on spending less than 30% of their salaries on shelter. Library jobs also consistently offered salaries that were higher than the median salaries in the communities where they were posted. This means library workers are likely in a position of relative privilege, and we should be sensitive to that when working and living in our communities.

However, this study also demonstrates that salaries that offer a good material quality of life are not consistent within libraries. Jobs that required an MLIS were much more likely to provide this than those without an MLIS requirement, even when a job required a library technician diploma. Although the difference in real salary is important (jobs that required technician diplomas offered approximately $20,000 less than MLIS positions, on average), it is also significant that the non-MLIS postings frequently did not provide a good material quality of life. Of the postings that mentioned a library technician diploma, 55% to 69% of workers would have to spend more than 30% of their salary on shelter, depending whether they rented (55%) or owned (69%). Library workers should remember these differences in compensation (as well as working conditions) and continue to fight for improved rights and compensation. For example, in the academic context librarians are often unionized with faculty, and all other unionized library staff are often part of another union such as USW or CUPE. Although these unions do not bargain together, being aware of one another's struggles and working to limit inequality is important, especially when it appears that MLIS holders (presumably librarians) are consistently guaranteed a better material quality of life than other library workers.

Developing full responses to this internal problem goes beyond the scope of this paper, but I would like to provide a few potential actions in brief. The first is for anyone in a position of power within their organization to evaluate the criteria being used in developing salary scales in relation to the cost of living in their area. While many library positions are influenced by organizational policies and budgets that are outside the direct control of the library, there may be room to address these salary shortcomings. Secondly, many library workers have unionized positions. Because of this, we may have the power of collective action to address these shortcomings; prioritizing union solidarity may help improve working conditions for all. Finally, continuing to support and develop regular salary monitoring through surveys and projects like this study can help us identify and address these shortcomings in their nascency, rather than when salaries that offer a poor material quality of life have become normalized.

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Appendix A

Cost of obtaining ALA-accredited degrees in Canada.

School (with links to tuition pages)	Domestic tuition per year in CAD ($)	International tuition per year in CAD ($)	Notes
Dalhousie	10,000 – 11,000	28,546 – 29,546	
McGill	5,211.25 – 11,322.52	31,202	5,211.52 for Quebec residents, 11,322.52 for non-Quebecois Canadians
University of Alberta	undetermined	undetermined	
University of British Columbia	5,530.11	11,101.05	May not include student fees
University of Ottawa (Ontario, non-Ontario, International)	Approximately 6,500 - 7,500	20,000	6,500 for Ontario residents, 7,500 for non-Ontarian Canadians
University of Toronto (domestic & international)	12,348.96	44,994.96	
University of Western Ontario	9,615.82	27,809.82	

Appendix B

Python script for extracting data.

```
import sys, csv, traceback, warnings, logging, re, os, glob
import pandas as pd
files = glob.glob('[0-9]*.txt')

# Create an empty list to store the extracted data
data = []

# Define the education level keywords pattern
education_keywords = r'\b(?:Masters|Master
of|Diploma|MI|MLIS|Degree|Bachelor)\b'

# Loop through the files
for f in files:
    with open(f, encoding='utf-8') as fRead:
        lines = fRead.readlines()
        first_line = lines[0].strip('\n')
        location = lines[-1].strip('\n')
        institution = lines[-2].strip('\n')
        closing_date = lines[-3].strip('\n')
        compensation = lines[-4].strip('\n')

        # Extract sentences with education level keywords
        education_sentences = []
        for line in lines:
            sentences = re.split(r'(?<=[.!?])\s+', line)
            for sentence in sentences:
                if re.search(education_keywords, sentence, re.IGNORECASE):
                    education_sentences.append(sentence.strip('\n'))

        # Clean compensation data
        hourly = None
        weekly = None
        yearly = None

        # This removes $ and K
        compensation = re.sub(r'[$K]', '', compensation)

        if 'hour' in compensation:
            hourly = compensation
        elif 'week' in compensation:
            weekly = compensation
        else:
            yearly = compensation

        data.append({"File": f, "First Line": first_line, "Institution":
institution, "Location": location, "Closing Date": closing_date,
"Compensation": compensation, "Education Sentences": education_sentences,
"Hourly": hourly, "Weekly": weekly, "Yearly": yearly})

# Convert the data into a dataframe
df = pd.DataFrame(data)
```

```
# Save df as csv
df.to_csv('all_postings_extract.csv', sep='\t', encoding='utf-8')
```