

# BEST (AND WORST) AVERAGES IN THE LIBRARY MAJORS

**Which large systems have the best rookie librarian salaries?  
It's time to name names**

**by Thomas J. Hennen Jr. and Michael McGrorty**

**N**ew library-school graduates know that a good rating in Hennen's American Public Library Ratings (see p. TK) may be nice in the library they are going to work for, but it will not put food on their own dinner tables. These newly minted MLSes, who are seeking to launch their professional careers, would do better to focus on two divergent facts that have permeated recent discussion in the library world:

- On the one hand, it is clear that our graying profession is beginning to retire, which would seem to open up spaces for new library school graduates.

- On the other hand, there appears to be a scarcity of entry-level jobs. One explanation for these contradictory trends could be the fact that many of the largest library systems have low starting-pay levels.

Adjusted for the cost of living, the Seattle-area King County Library System may be the best-paying major library system for the new graduate; Ohio's major urban library systems (Cuyahoga County, Columbus, Cincinnati and Hamilton County, and Cleveland) rank high as well. The lowest starting pay (adjusted for cost of living) among the major systems is found at New York, Queens Borough, Hawaii, and Chicago.

The 25 major libraries included in this study provide service to more than 37 million Americans—about 13% of the population. The libraries considered here employ over 18,000 staff, nearly 5,000 of them holding MLS degrees from ALA-accredited programs. These 25 libraries account for one-sixth of all the spending by the 9,000 public library systems in the nation.

The accompanying table reports data from surveys conducted in May and June by Michael McGrorty,

data from Hennen's American Public Library Ratings, and the Cost of Living Comparisons from CNN/Money Magazine ([cgi.money.cnn.com/tools/costofliving/costofliving.html](http://cgi.money.cnn.com/tools/costofliving/costofliving.html)).

The 25 largest libraries are compared by nominal and cost of living-adjusted salaries. The table provides potential job seekers with information on the level of increase in salary they can expect by moving from Houston, the library with the nominally lowest pay, to any of the 24 other libraries in the study.

The table begins with each library's starting salary as determined by Michael McGrorty in his May survey. The nominally lowest-paying library was Houston at \$24,596. Cleveland had the nominally highest starting salary, but after adjustments for living costs, the honor went to King County Library System, headquartered in Issaquah, Washington. The table also gives job seekers two additional things to consider beyond adjusted salary and the library labor market in a geographic area—namely staff productivity and library spending per capita.

We assume that job applicants will want to know that the library staff is productive and that the materials budget is strong. The number of circulations divided by available staff hours is one (admittedly rough) measure of such productivity. A well-funded library can provide well for the staff and have enough to supply the public with ample materials and programs. Such libraries are usually more satisfying places to work, so we measured spending per capita as well.

We combined all factors and scored them to provide a single combined rank for each library as displayed in the final column.

Tom Hennen used the salary comparison calculator at CNN/Money to adjust each starting salary as compared to the low starting salary in Houston. If you worked in Houston for \$24,596, you might consider it a pay raise to move to Washington's King County, whose nominal salary is nearly twice that (\$52,936). However, you could be surprised to discover that, after adjusting for the cost of living, your real salary is \$39,196—still an increase but not as much as you originally thought.

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Here are some truths and their resulting consequences:

- Librarian salary rates tend to reflect conditions prevailing in the surrounding area; when they do not, a library will have difficulty attracting and retaining staff.

- Superior candidates will seek and attain jobs in systems that offer higher salaries; higher-paying libraries will have a better pool of candidates to hire from, and better staffing overall.

For the starting librarian, the best strategy could well be to apply to libraries that pay higher starting salaries and that are located in areas with high con-

centrations of other career opportunities. This would permit multiple career options, either within a given library system or in the surrounding area.

Finally, we must note that most surveys indicate that salary is only one of the important factors in job satisfaction. Considerations that figure highly as well for job seekers include immeasurables such as

autonomy and respect in the workplace. Our survey does not rate the cultural and quality-of-life issues that are also critically important, but it does provide important information to consider for those seeking entry-level professional positions in our largest public libraries. ❖

**Many of the largest library systems have low starting-pay levels.**

<b>Composite Ranking of Library Salaries, Circulation, and Spending</b>										
Top 25 Libraries	Starting Salary	Adjusted by Cost of Living	Rank of 25	As % of avg. Salary for area	Rank of 25	Circ per FTE Staff Hour	Rank of 25	Expend. per Capita	Rank of 25	Comb. Rank
King County (WA)	\$52,936	\$39,196	2	100%	1	10.4	2	\$53.88	7	1
Cuyahoa County PL	\$35,110	\$33,556	7	69%	19	10.3	3	\$96.33	1	2
Columbus Metro.	\$34,527	\$36,289	4	70%	17	9.8	4	\$62.62	5	3
Cincinnati & Hamilton	\$36,296	\$37,345	3	72%	14	9.3	5	\$61.42	6	4
Cleveland PL	\$42,913	\$41,014	1	85%	4	4.3	17	\$94.73	2	5
Montgomery Co. (MD)	\$40,480	\$26,135	14	69%	20	12.0	1	\$33.22	15	6
Mid-Continent (MO)	\$31,126	\$31,772	9	71%	16	5.5	12	\$40.34	11	7
Milwaukee PL	\$33,443	\$32,571	8	74%	9	4.2	18	\$41.77	10	8
Phila. Free Library	\$36,144	\$30,241	10	71%	15	3.7	20	\$45.40	9	9
Buffalo and Erie	\$34,565	\$35,525	5	68%	22	2.6	22	\$34.42	13	10
Dallas PL	\$37,604	\$33,942	6	85%	3	5.5	11	\$20.48	23	11
San Diego PL	\$40,632	\$25,089	17	78%	6	7.5	6	\$27.83	19	12
Brooklyn PL	\$35,563	\$25,619	15	73%	11	5.2	14	\$30.98	16	13
Queens Borough PL	\$35,563	\$17,917	24	73%	11	7.3	7	\$33.28	14	14
Enoch Pratt PL	\$32,459	\$26,744	13	69%	18	1.1	25	\$50.42	8	15
Los Angeles County	\$41,537	\$25,291	16	75%	7	6.4	10	\$21.59	20	16
Boston PL	\$36,576	\$20,492	20	69%	21	2.1	23	\$68.29	3	17
St. Louis PL	\$25,903	\$20,435	21	57%	23	7.2	8	\$29.01	18	18
Los Angeles City	\$48,838	\$29,736	11	88%	2	5.4	13	\$20.34	24	19
Detroit PL	\$30,699	\$26,780	12	52%	24	1.2	24	\$38.51	12	20
New York PL	\$35,563	\$12,833	25	73%	11	3.0	21	\$63.02	4	21
Hawaii PL	\$36,360	\$20,325	22	75%	8	6.5	9	\$20.52	22	22
Chicago PL	\$36,732	\$19,426	23	81%	5	4.7	16	\$30.08	17	23
Miami-Dade County	\$35,941	\$24,826	18	74%	10	4.1	19	\$21.03	21	24
Houston PL	\$24,596	\$24,596	19	52%	25	4.8	15	\$18.37	25	25
<b>Averages</b>	<b>\$36,457</b>	<b>\$27,908</b>				<b>5.8</b>		<b>\$42.32</b>		