

# TRANSITIONING BY DEGREES: BECOMING A SUBJECT LIBRARIAN THROUGH ADVANCED EDUCATION

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PANEL: NARROWING THE SCOPE: TRANSITIONING FROM GENERAL LIBRARIANSHIP TO  
SPECIALIZED SUBJECT LIAISONS

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# INTRODUCTION

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As part of the “Narrowing the Scope: Transitioning from general librarianship to specialized subject liaisons” panel at CAPAL18 - Community, Diversity, and Education: Academic Librarianship in Challenging Times, this talk looks at the **experiences of one librarian’s transition from working as a generalist librarian to a subject specialist** position at a public research university, with a focus on the educational experience that guided the transition.



CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF PROFESSIONAL ACADEMIC LIBRARIANS  
L'ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE DES BIBLIOTHÉCAIRES ACADÉMIQUES PROFESSIONNELS

# RESEARCH ON ADDITIONAL ADVANCED DEGREES

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- The presence of literature on additional advanced subject degrees is somewhat dated; Mayer and Terrill noted in 2005 that much of the research and writing was conducted in the late 1980's and early 1990's.
- Research published by Smith and Oliva in 2010 regarding attitudes toward generalist and subject specific reference and professional development.
- Jennifer Ferguson published a study in 2016 on advanced subject knowledge in libraries which explores the occurrences of dual master's degree options and the prevalence of additional degree requirements in librarian job advertisements.

# ACADEMIC BACKGROUND

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- B.A. Penn State University (2004)
  - Comparative Literature, Japanese, East Asian Studies
- M.S. Clarion University of Pennsylvania (2007)
  - Library Science
- M.S. Maine Maritime Academy (2016)
  - International Logistics Management



# LIBRARY EXPERIENCE

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- Penn State University (~42,000 students)
  - Library Assistant
- University of Alaska Southeast (~4,000 students)
  - Public Services Librarian
- Maine Maritime Academy (~1,000 students)
  - Director of Library Services
- University of New Hampshire (~15,000 students)
  - Business Librarian



University of  
New Hampshire

# OTHER EXPERIENCE

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- Maine Maritime Academy
  - Adjunct Professor, Loeb Sullivan School of Business
    - Intro to Research Methods
    - Research Methods and Management Consulting



# DIFFERENCES IN POSITIONS

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- Public Services Librarian (UAS)
  - Generalist reference work (8-10 hours per work)
  - Training of circulation staff and part time reference librarians
  - Knowledge of regional resources, including Alaska Native Studies and language resources
- Director of Library Services (MMA)
  - Generalist reference work (5-8 hours per week)
  - Administrative duties
  - Maritime knowledge, Coast Guard license exam support
- Business Librarian (UNH)
  - Generalist reference work (2.5 hours per week)
  - Instruction, Outreach, Collection support for Peter T. Paul School of Business and Economics

# DAILY LIFE AS A SUBJECT LIBRARIAN

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- Instruction sessions across all business disciplines from first year through graduate levels
- Collections issues, usually related to databases and course reserves
- Develop research guides
- One-on-one research consultations
- Outreach and out-of-the-building
  - Entrepreneurship programs
  - First Year Research and Innovation Program

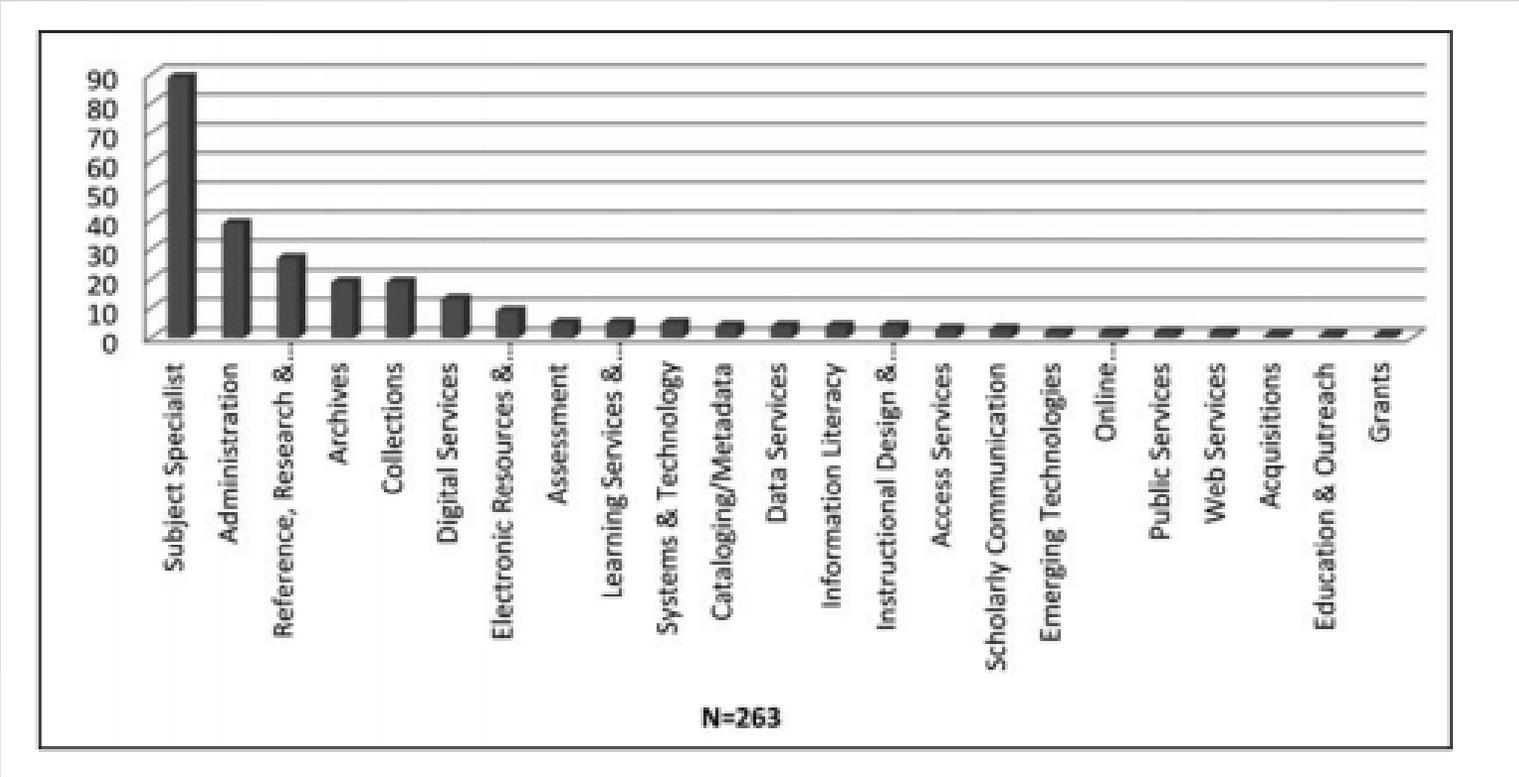


# FERGUSON'S 2016 STUDY

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- Ferguson noted that 33 percent of the 800 job ads surveyed “either required or preferred a second advanced degree or advanced subject knowledge.”
- Of those, only 53 required a second degree while the remainder stated it as a preference.
- Of the 263 positions that required or preferred a second advanced degree, the most frequent functional areas asking for advanced subject knowledge were subject specialists (89 positions).

# NUMBER OF JOB OPENINGS BY AREA THAT REQUIRED OR PREFERRED A SECOND ADVANCED DEGREE



Source: Ferguson, 2016, page 728

# MAYER AND TERRILL (2005)

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- "Having an advanced-subject degree is important to my career advancement."
- "Having an advanced-subject degree is beneficial to my job performance."
- "I would advise a person interested in becoming an academic librarian to pursue an advanced-subject degree."
- "If I were doing it over, I would get an advanced subject degree again."

# THE VALUE OF THE SECOND MASTERS DEGREE

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- Understanding of curriculum within the college/department
- Familiarity with business research resources used for undergraduate and faculty research
- Empathy for students
- Eased transition to subject librarianship
- Factor in promotion for tenure track positions
- More competitive in the job market



# IMPOSTER SYNDROME

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- “Imposter syndrome can be defined **as a collection of feelings of inadequacy that persist despite evident success.** ‘Imposters’ suffer from chronic self-doubt and a sense of intellectual fraudulence that override any feelings of success or external proof of their competence. ... some researchers have linked it with perfectionism, especially in women and among academics.”

# CONCLUSION

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- Holding an additional advanced degree in a subject area was highly beneficial for making the transition to subject librarianship after nearly a decade as a generalist librarian
- Increased ability to qualify for more positions
- More research should be done on existing positions and their requirement for additional advanced subject degree

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