Evaluation of the Professions of Librarian and Information Scietist by Students of Information Science: Prestige and Status

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abstract:

This thesis examined the way in which students of information science estimate the professional status, professional prestige, level of interest, potential salary, required education, and the gendering of that profession. Furthermore, this thesis studied the students' opinions of which tasks are fulfilled by librarians and which by information scientists, and in which workplaces each is likely to be found.

This research was done in Bar-Ilan University, during the academic year of 2001-2002. The research studied a population of 180 students from the information science department, which comprised 154 women, and 26 men. The subjects were chosen randomly out of this pool. This research is quantitative, and includes a questionnaire with 'closed' questions, and one 'open' question. The questionnaire was comprised of the following four categories of questions: the tasks of the librarian and the information scientist, the workplaces of the librarian and the information scientist, professional esteem, and personal information.

Firstly, the subjects were asked to assess nine tasks, to see to what degree they are connected to the work of the librarian and the information scientist. Secondly, ten workplaces were presented to the subjects, for instance: government offices, schools and banks, and the subject was asked whether this was the workplace of a librarian, of an information scientist or of both. Thirdly, the subjects were asked how they evaluate the connection between library studies and information sciences: Fourthly, the subjects were asked to rate library studies, library

sciences, and five other professions, such as teacher and programmer, according to professional prestige and amount of training or education necessary.

The findings were as follows: the first hypothesis was that information science would be evaluated as a more prestigious profession than librarian, a more interesting profession, a more masculine profession' a profession that requires a higher degree of education or training, and a profession with a potentially higher salary. The findings of this research verify this hypothesis. The findings further demonstrate that, in the students' opinion, the most prestigious profession is that of the computer programmer. After the programmer, the students placed the information scientist and journalist. The bookkeeper was placed somewhat bellow that, and the social worker was placed even lower, with the teacher and librarian at the bottom rung.

Regarding the amount of training or education necessary in each profession, computer programming was seen as the profession requiring the most training. Next come social work and information science. Slightly bellow came bookkeeping and teaching. The professions that were seen as requiring the least training were journalism and librarian. The subjects were also asked to rate, on a scale of one to five, the five professions of: librarian, teacher, computer programmer, and information scientist, according to six of the following criteria: level of interest, gendering, potential salary, and necessary general knowledge and higher education.

The finding suggest that the profession that receives the highest status and salary is computer programming, after which comes information science, next the teacher, and on the lowest scale – the librarian. Furthermore, the most masculine profession was the computer programmer, and next the information scientist, while the librarian and teacher were perceived as feminine professions. Regarding the level of interest in the job, information

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science was perceived as the most interesting field, after which came computer programming; teaching was placed in third, and the librarian was placed last.

From the aspect of education and training, it seems that the most knowledge and the most education are required in the information science field, while the least are required for the librarian.

The second hypothesis was that there would be difference in the estimation of the information scientist and librarian regarding jobs and workplaces. The finding of this research support this theory as well. The results of this research indicate that tasks such as: referring others to a research tool such as a dictionary or encyclopedia, cataloging and sorting, giving advice and recommendations for specific items, and providing guidance for using databases and/ or referring others to these databases are perceived as tasks that are connected to the librarian. Tasks such as: locating information, matching processed information to a client according to a personal profile, sifting information, summarizing information, and building and running sites are perceived as tasks more related to the profession of the information scientist.

Regarding the workplaces of librarians and information scientists, the finding of this research support the theory that while the information scientist will be seen as someone working in the private / independent / industrial sectors, the librarian will be seen as someone working in the public / academic / government sectors. The findings indicate that clear-cut differences were perceived between the workplaces of the two professions, with the exception of non-profit organizations.

The subjects were also asked to assess the degree of connection between the two professions of information science and librarian. The findings indicate the following: similar percentages of subjects from both undergraduate students (6.9%) and graduate students (6.5%) think that

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the job of the information scientist is essentially the same as that of the librarian. With a slightly higher rate among the undergraduate students (72.2%) than among graduate students (66.7%) the subjects see the information scientist and the librarian interconnected. At almost double the rate, graduates (21.3%) and undergraduate students (11.1%) think that the role of the information scientist is unrelated to that of the librarian.

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