
LIBRARY PROFESSIONALS: FACTS AND FIGURES

Highlights:

- In 2024, employment among librarians increased more than 27 percent, while employment among library assistants declined and library technicians remained steady. More research is needed to determine the cause of the sharp increase in librarians from 2023 to 2024.
- In 2024, librarians who were union members earned on average almost 41 percent more per week than their non-union counterparts. Union library professionals are more likely than their non-union counterparts to be covered by a retirement plan, health insurance, and paid sick leave.
- The librarian profession suffers from a persistent lack of racial and ethnic diversity that has not changed significantly over the past two decades. Librarians and other library professionals also tend to be slightly older than the general workforce.

Librarians and other library professionals provide essential services for schools, universities, and communities. Americans go to libraries for free, reliable, and well-organized access to books, the Internet, and other sources of information and entertainment. They rely on library personnel for help with research and reference questions and searches for employment and government assistance, among other things. And they take part in programs for children, immigrants, seniors and other groups with specific needs and interests.

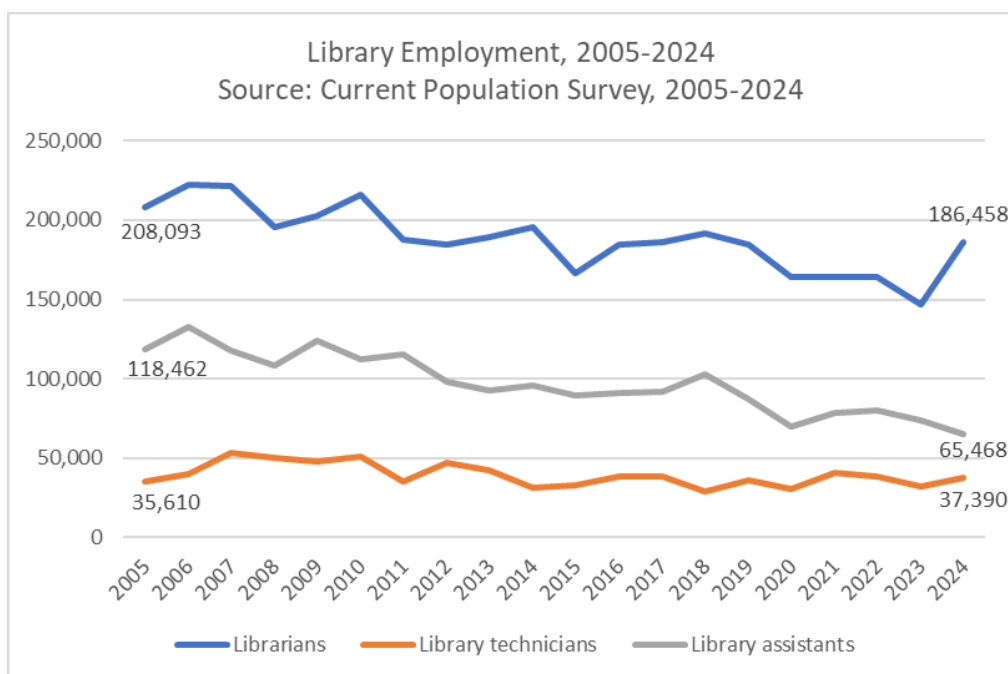
This fact sheet explores the role of library staff in the workforce, the demographics, educational attainment and wages of librarians, as well as the benefits of union membership for library professionals.

Library Occupations and Library Usage: By the Numbers

Library Employment

- In 2024, there were approximately 289,400 professional and technical workers employed in libraries in the United States, including 186,500 librarians, 37,400 library technicians, and 65,500 library assistants. They worked in public libraries, primary and secondary schools, institutions of higher education, museums and archives, as well as in libraries operated by private corporations, government agencies, and other organizations.
- Employment of library professionals has been gradually declining after hitting a peak of almost 395,000 in 2006, though the most recent figures suggest that the number of employed librarians has returned to pre-COVID-19 pandemic levels.¹ There was a relatively sharp increase in the number of librarians from 2023 to 2024. It is possible that grants awarded to libraries and institutions enabled the hiring of more library professionals during this period, though more research is needed to determine what factors may have caused the abrupt increase.

¹ U.S. Census Bureau. Current Population Survey Microdata. 2024. Available at <https://data.census.gov/app/mdat/>.



Library Programs

- In fiscal year 2022, more than 17,500 U.S. public libraries circulated about 2.2 billion print and electronic materials and offered 3.3 million programs, attended by about 64 million members of the public. Children's programs accounted for 49 percent of all programs offered, serving over 35 million children and parents.²
- Electronic media, computer use and internet access are an increasing component of library materials and services, and e-books now comprise 57 percent of all collection materials. In addition, library patrons accessed over 273,000 public computers over 83 million times during fiscal year 2022.³
- Libraries provide important training and educational programs for the public. A 2020 survey by the Public Library Association revealed that more than 88 percent of public libraries offer at least basic digital literacy training, and in many cases more advanced technology training.⁴ Additionally, a 2022 survey also by the Public Library Association revealed that 78 percent of public libraries provide job and career services; 24 percent have workforce development programs; and 51 percent offer assistance with health insurance enrollment.⁵

² The Institute of Museum and Library Services. PLS Benchmarking Tables. Fiscal year 2022. Available at <https://www.imls.gov/pls-benchmarking-tables>. The most recent data that is publicly available on the Public Library Survey is from fiscal year 2022.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Public Library Association. (2021). 2020 Public Library Technology Survey Summary Report. Available at <https://alair.ala.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/92286029-0155-4aed-aca9-47a187140466/content>.

⁵ Public Library Association. (2023). Public Library Services for Strong Communities Report: Results from the 2022 PLA Annual Survey. Available at https://www.ala.org/sites/default/files/pla/content/data/PLA_Services_Survey_Report_2023.pdf

- A 2023 study published by the American Library Association (ALA) found that 54 percent of Gen Z (born 1997-2012) and Millennials visited a physical library within the past year.⁶

Duties and Roles of Library Professionals

- While specific roles and responsibilities may change depending on the size and setting of libraries, librarians and other library professionals' main role is to help people find information and conduct research on a variety of personal, professional, and academic subjects. Library professionals also teach classes, organize library collections, and tailor programs to a variety of audiences, including young children, students, professionals, and the elderly.⁷
- Librarians are also often responsible for multiple aspects of management, including ordering books and other materials; purchasing new technology; supervising library technicians, assistants, and volunteers; and managing library budgets.⁸
- Library technicians assist librarians in the operation of libraries, and their tasks include assisting visitors, organizing library materials, and performing administrative and clerical functions. Library assistants have similar roles as library technicians, but may have fewer independent responsibilities.⁹

Where Library Professionals Work

- Librarian employment in 2024 was split between public libraries (27 percent); elementary and secondary schools (34 percent); colleges, universities, and professional schools (22 percent); and other libraries and archives, including those at law firms, nonprofit organizations, and scientific organizations (17 percent).¹⁰
- Employment of library technicians in 2024 was split between public libraries (60 percent); elementary and secondary schools (10 percent); colleges, universities, and professional schools (18 percent); and other libraries and archives in the private sector (12 percent).
- Employment of library assistants in 2024 was split between public libraries (48 percent); colleges, universities, and professional schools (19 percent); elementary and secondary schools (14 percent); and other libraries and archives, including those at businesses and scientific organizations (19 percent).¹¹

⁶ Berens, Kathi Inman and Rachel Noorda. (2023). "Gen Z and Millennials: How They Use Public Libraries and Identify Through Media Use." American Library Association. Available at <https://www.ala.org/sites/default/files/advocacy/content/tools/Gen-Z-and-Millennials-Report%20%281%29.pdf>.

⁷ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Outlook Handbook, "Librarians and Library Media Specialists." 2024. Available at <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/education-training-and-library/librarians.htm>

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Occupational Outlook Handbook, Library Technicians and Assistants." 2024. Available at <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/education-training-and-library/library-technicians-and-assistants.htm>

¹⁰ U.S. Census Bureau. Current Population Survey Microdata. 2024. [above, n. 1]. For the purposes of this factsheet, all private sector libraries and archives are included in the "other private and nonprofit libraries" classification, though some private, not-for-profit libraries (such as the Carnegie system of libraries in Pittsburgh) play the role of public libraries in their communities.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

- In 2024, 20 percent of librarians, 52 percent of library technicians, and 54 percent of library assistants worked part-time.¹²

Racial and Ethnic Diversity and Age Demographics of Library Professionals

The librarian profession suffers from a persistent lack of racial and ethnic diversity that has not changed significantly over the past two decades.¹³

- Librarians were slightly less diverse than the workforce of professionals in all education, training, and library occupations, which was almost 79 percent white in 2024. Black and African American professionals made up 11 percent of the total education, training, and library workforce, while Hispanic and Asian professionals represented 12.6 percent and 6.5 percent, respectively.¹⁴
- In 2024, a little less than seven percent of librarians identified as Black or African American and 13 percent identified as Hispanic or Latino of any race. Additionally, librarians identifying as Asian American or Pacific Islander made up only 4 percent.¹⁵
- In 2024, just over 84 percent of librarians and 71 percent of library assistants identified as white.¹⁶
- Librarians and other library professionals skew older than the general workforce. While Americans over 55 accounted for 23 percent of the total workforce in 2024, 34 percent of librarians were over the age of 55.¹⁷

Educational Attainment

In many settings, librarians are required to hold at least a master's degree in library science or meet state teaching license standards for being a school librarian.¹⁸ Many other library workers, including lower-paid library technicians and library assistants have high educational attainment as well.

- In 2024, 54 percent of librarians held a master's degree or higher, 26 percent held a bachelor's degree, and 5 percent held an associate's degree.¹⁹
- In comparison, in 2024, 8 percent of library technicians held a master's degree or higher, 30 percent held a bachelor's degree, 10 percent held an associate's degree, and 47 percent had a high school diploma or equivalent as their highest degree attained.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ In comparison, librarians were 85 percent white in 2015, 84 percent white in 2010 and 88 percent white in 2005. Source: U.S. Census Bureau. American Community Survey Microdata. 2005-2015. Available at <https://data.census.gov/app/mdat/>.

¹⁴ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. Table 11: Employed persons by detailed occupation, sex, race, and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity, Annual Averages, 2024. Available at <https://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat11.pdf>.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. Table 11b: Employed persons by detailed occupation and age, 2024. Available at <https://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat11b.htm>.

¹⁸ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Outlook Handbook, "Librarians." [above, n. 7].

¹⁹ U.S. Census Bureau. Current Population Survey Microdata. 2024. [above, n. 1].

- In 2024, 21 percent of library assistants held a master's degree or higher, 33 percent held a bachelor's degree, 7 percent held an associate's degree, and 14 percent had a high school diploma or equivalent as their highest degree attained.²⁰

Women and Library Professions

- In 2024, women accounted for 89.2 percent of all librarians, an increase of 6.7 percentage points from the year prior. Women accounted for 84.2 percent of library assistants, which was above the average of 73.4 percent for women employed in all education and library professions.²¹
- Women represented 82.5 percent of graduates in Master of Library Science (MLS) programs in 2021-2022. However, Black women and Asian or Pacific Islander women only accounted for 4.6 percent and 2.7 percent of all MLS graduates, respectively. Hispanic women made up 8.4 percent of the 2022 class.²²

Library Worker Earnings and the Wage Gap

In 2024, the mean hourly wage for librarians working full-time was \$33.26 and the mean annual salary was \$69,180. The mean hourly wage for library technicians was \$20.70, and \$18.22 for library assistants.²³

Regional Variance in Salaries

Librarian earnings vary significantly from region to region. The District of Columbia had the highest mean annual earnings for full-time librarians at \$94,300 in 2024, followed by Washington, California, Maryland, and New York. These salaries were not adjusted for differences in cost of living across states.²⁴

Institutional Variance in Compensation

Library staff compensation also varied based on the type of library employer. On average, in 2024, librarians working full-time at elementary and secondary schools earned \$69,880, those working at public colleges, universities, and professional schools earned \$68,570, and those employed by local governments (excluding education) made \$60,510.²⁵

Gender Inequality

Pay inequity remains a persistent and pervasive problem in society. In 2024, median weekly earnings for women in all occupations were 82.7 percent of men's earnings.²⁶ For most women of

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. Table 11: Employed persons by detailed occupation, sex, race, and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity, Annual Averages, 2024. Available at <https://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat11.pdf>.

²² U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics. Tables 323.30 and 323.50. 2021-2022. Available at https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/2023menu_tables.asp. The most recent data that is publicly available about MLS graduates from the National Center for Education Statistics' is from 2021-2022.

²³ Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics. Bureau of Labor Statistics. May 2024. Available at https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_stru.htm.

²⁴ Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics. Bureau of Labor Statistics. May 2024 OEWS Profiles. Available at <https://data.bls.gov/oesprofile/>.

²⁵ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Outlook Handbook, "Librarians." [above, n. 7]

²⁶ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey, Table 37, "Median weekly earnings of full-time wage and salary workers by selected characteristics." 2024. Available at <http://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat37.pdf>.

color, the earnings gap is even larger: Black or African American women earned just 73 cents for every dollar earned by men of all races in 2024, and Hispanic or Latina women earned just 66 cents on the dollar.²⁷ Asian women were the only racial group to earn more than men of all races, but they still earned only 79 cents to the dollar reported by Asian men.²⁸

Though library occupations are predominantly held by women, a wage gap still exists in the profession. Even though the wage gap for librarians has narrowed considerably in recent years – from 88 percent of the median annual earnings reported by men in 2021 to 97.7 percent in 2022 – that figure went back down to 91.1 percent in 2023.²⁹ In 2023, women working as full-time library assistants reported median annual earnings that were 94.3 percent of the median annual earnings reported by men.³⁰

The 6th edition of the American Library Association-Allied Professional Association's *Advocating for Better Salaries Toolkit* includes sections on how to determine fair compensation for librarians, advocate for raises, identify pay inequities, and negotiate salaries. Importantly, the toolkit identifies union organizing and collective bargaining as an effective means to increase librarian pay and increase equity in the workplace.³¹

Health Benefits

In 2023, 79.4 percent of librarians had health insurance through a current or former employer or union, though librarians working 35 hours per week or more had a much higher coverage rate of 91.6 percent. In 2023, 2.7 percent of librarians did not have health insurance coverage.³²

- Among library technicians in 2023, just 65 percent received health insurance through a current or former employer or union, though library technicians working 35 hours per week or more had a higher coverage rate of 83.5 percent. A total of 8 percent were uninsured that year, up from 3.6 percent who were uninsured the year prior.³³
- Among library assistants in 2023, 63 percent had employer-provided health insurance, though the rate was higher for full-time library assistants at 84 percent, leaving 5.4 percent of library assistants uninsured in 2023.³⁴

The Union Difference

Unions are an important way for library professionals to negotiate collectively for better pay, benefits, and working conditions. Unions work to elevate library professions and secure working conditions that make it possible to provide quality service.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ U.S. Census Bureau. Full-Time, Year-Round Workers & Median Earnings by Sex & Occupation. American Community Survey. 2023. Available at <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/industry-occupation/median-earnings.html>.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Bartholomew, Amy, Jennifer Dorning, Julia Eisenstein, & Shannon Farrell. "Advocating for Better Salaries Toolkit." ALA Allied Professional Association. April 2017. Available at <https://alair.ala.org/items/4c36b254-8692-41e7-bcb2-d570b4cc4498>

³² U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, Public Use Microdata, 2023. Available at <https://data.census.gov/app/mdat/>.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

- In 2024, professionals working in education, training, and library occupations had the highest unionization rate for any occupation group, 35.8 percent.³⁵
- In 2024, 24.6 percent of librarians were union members.³⁶

Wages and Benefits

Union librarians and library workers have leveraged their collective voices to earn fair wages and stronger benefits. Wages and benefits earned by union librarians and library workers are more commensurate with the skilled and professional nature of library work.

In 2024, librarians who were union members earned on average almost 41 percent more per week than their non-union counterparts and union library technicians earned 12 percent more per week than their non-union counterparts.³⁷ While these statistics are subject to volatility due to small sample sizes, trends in the data show that it pays to be a union library professional.

Union members are more likely than their non-union counterparts to be covered by a retirement plan, health insurance, and paid sick leave. In 2024, 95 percent of union members in the civilian workforce had access to a retirement plan, compared with only 72 percent of non-union workers. Similarly, 95 percent of union members had access to employer provided health insurance, compared to 71 percent of non-union workers. Additionally, 91 percent of union members in the civilian workforce had access to paid sick leave compared to 79 percent of non-union workers.³⁸

Union Library Professionals Success Stories

In many states, collective bargaining rights of public sector employees, including professionals at public libraries, are established by state and municipal laws rather than at the federal level. This creates additional barriers for public sector workers to join together in union. While some states have anti-union laws in place that restrict the extent to which public sector employees can collectively bargain, that trend has been changing over the last few years, as some states have passed pro-worker legislation. Featured below are some legislative and organizing highlights from union library professionals over the past few years.

In late April 2024, library professionals in the state of Maryland won collective bargaining rights when the state's Library Workers Empowerment Act was signed into law. Before this law existed, the right of library professionals to collectively bargain in this state was determined on a county-by-county basis. Library professionals across Maryland will now be able to collectively negotiate with their employers for better pay and benefits and improved working conditions through union representation. Additionally, in 2022, after fighting for years for their right to collectively bargain in Baltimore County, Maryland, public library employees voted to unionize and join the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAM).³⁹ The IAM worked

³⁵ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Table 42. Union affiliation of employed wage and salary workers by occupation and industry." 2024. Available at <https://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat42.htm>

³⁶ Hirsch, Barry and Macpherson, David. Union Membership, Coverage, Density, and Employment by Occupation, 2024. *Union Membership and Coverage Database from the CPS*. Available at <http://unionstats.com/>

³⁷ U.S. Census Bureau. Current Population Survey Microdata. 2024. [above, n. 1].

³⁸ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. National Compensation Survey: Employee Benefits in the United States, March 2024. Available at <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/ebs2.pdf>.

³⁹ DeVille, Taylor. "Baltimore County Library Staff Votes to Form Union." *Baltimore Sun*. January 7, 2022. Available at <https://www.baltimoresun.com/maryland/baltimore-county/bs-md-co-county-library-staff-unionize-20220107-unnyd7xavvbsrcj3amgwda7fry-story.html>.

with Maryland public library employees to help advocate for the collective bargaining rights of library workers and the passage of the 2024 Library Workers Empowerment Act.

Advocacy for public sector collective bargaining has also been gaining momentum in the state of Virginia over the past few years, as a growing number of counties and municipalities have been passing laws granting collective bargaining rights to more public sector employees, including public library workers.⁴⁰ This activity is due to a state law that went into effect in May 2021 allowing counties, municipalities, and towns to recognize labor unions as bargaining representatives for public employees. A major victory for Virginia's public sector professionals in education and library services took place in June 2024, when over 27,000 public sector school employees, including school librarians, in Virginia's Fairfax County voted overwhelmingly to join in union and be represented jointly by the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National Education Association.⁴¹

Additionally, in March 2023, the state of Michigan repealed its anti-union right-to-work law, which allowed employees in unionized workplaces to opt out of paying dues while still reaping the benefits of union representation. When the law went into effect in February 2024, Michigan's union library professionals – and unionized employees more broadly – became part of stronger unions that are now better able to support the needs of their members.

Gains made by union library professionals in their first contracts

Library professionals have seen organizing victories and contract gains across the U.S. Unions including AFT, IAM, Office and Professional Employees International Union (OPEIU), and the United Steelworkers (USW) represent a growing number of library professionals in both public and private sector libraries. Many union library professionals who have recently ratified their first contracts have seen significant gains, including increases in pay and starting salaries, guaranteed annual wage increases, and greater job protections.

- In January 2024, library professionals and library workers represented by the Ohio Federation of Teachers (part of AFT) at the Grandview Heights Public Library in Grandview Heights, Ohio ratified their first contract. They won new benefits of paid parental leave and partial tuition reimbursement, as well as 12 percent raises over the course of the contract.⁴²
- In June 2023, college staff, including library professionals, represented by OPEIU at the Cornish College of the Arts in Seattle, Washington ratified their first contract, which included a retroactive base wage increase of four percent to the previous year and an additional three percent wage increase in the first year of the contract. They also secured protective measures against layoffs in the event of the introduction of new technology that could

⁴⁰ Overman, Stephenie. "In Virginia, 'Patchwork' of Ordinances Makes Public-Sector Organizing a Maze." *Virginia Mercury*. January 16, 2023. Available at <https://virginiamercury.com/2023/01/16/in-virginia-patchwork-of-ordinances-makes-public-sector-organizing-a-maze/>.

⁴¹ "More than 27,500 Fairfax County (Va.) Education Workers Overwhelmingly Win Historic Union Elections." American Federation of Teachers. June 10, 2024. Available at <https://www.aft.org/press-release/more-27500-fairfax-county-va-education-workers-overwhelmingly-win-historic-union>.

⁴² "First Union Contract Goes Into Effect for Grandview Heights Public Library Workers." Ohio Federation of Teachers, AFT. January 2, 2024. Available at <https://www.oft-aft.org/press/first-union-contract-goes-effect-grandview-heights-public-library-workers>.

impact staffing, and the agreement established a Labor Management Committee to promote improved working conditions.⁴³

- In July 2022, librarians, archivists, and curators across all three University of Michigan campuses ratified their first contract after voting the previous year to join in union with AFT Local 6244, the Lecturers' Employee Organization. Among other substantial gains, the librarians, archivists, and curators on the lowest end of the pay scale received raises between nine and 30 percent. Additionally, collective bargaining granted academic freedom to these library professionals, a right previously afforded only to university faculty.⁴⁴
- In January 2022, library professionals represented by USW at the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh ratified their first contract, which included "standardizing positions into 'Job Grades' and increasing starting wages, most significantly among the lowest-paid positions; wage increases for current workers guaranteed by four raises over the life of the four-year agreement; limitations to health insurance rate hikes, and the addition of Christmas Eve and Juneteenth as paid holidays."⁴⁵

If you are a library professional looking for more information about organizing a union to secure your rights in the workplace, please get in touch with DPE at www.dpeaflcio.org.

The Department for Professional Employees, AFL-CIO (DPE) comprises 24 national unions representing over four million people working in professional and technical occupations. DPE's affiliates represent teachers, physicians, engineers, computer scientists, psychologists, nurses, university professors, actors, technicians and others in more than 200 professional occupations.

Source: DPE Research Department
815 Black Lives Matter Plaza, N.W., 6th Floor
Washington, DC 20006

Contact: Alana Staiti
(202) 638-0320 extension 14
astaiti@dpeaflcio.org

June 2025

⁴³ Collective Bargaining Agreement Between the Cornish College of the Arts and Office and Professional Employees International Union Local no. 8, AFL-CIO, For the period of July 25, 2023 through August 31, 2025. Available at <https://www.cornish.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Cornish-CBA-OPEIU8-2023-2025.pdf>.

⁴⁴ Dodge, Samuel. "17% Salary Increase Part of First-ever Librarian Union Deal with University of Michigan." *Michigan Live*. July 29, 2022. Available at <https://www.mlive.com/news/ann-arbor/2022/07/17-salary-increase-part-of-first-ever-librarian-union-deal-with-university-of-michigan.html>.

⁴⁵ "Carnegie Library Workers Ratify First Labor Agreement." United Steelworkers. January 7, 2022. Available at <https://m.usw.org/news/media-center/releases/2022/carnegie-library-workers-ratify-first-labor-agreement>.