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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Christina E. Tracy entitled "Perspectives of Rural Library Managers/Directors Regarding Professional Education: A Qualitative Study in Northwest Georgia." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, with a major in Information Sciences.

Bharat Mehra, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

William C. Robinson, Kimberly Black

Accepted for the Council:
Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

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Perspectives of Rural Library Managers/Directors Regarding Professional Education:
A Qualitative Study in Northwest Georgia

A Thesis Presented for the
Master of Science Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Christina Eileen Tracy
May 2008

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The success of this project was achieved with the help of several individuals whose efforts on my behalf are greatly esteemed.

First, I would like to thank my thesis adviser, Dr. Bharat Mehra, for his insight and patience in completing this project. I would also like to recognize my committee members, Dr. Kimberly Black and Dr. William Robinson, for their help in the process of refining this thesis paper.

Second, I would like to thank the library managers and directors in Northwest Georgia, whose willing and honest discussions supplied the meaningful findings of this study.

I would also like to express gratitude to my husband John, who was a single father on many evenings as he watched our children so that I could finish this project. Special thanks go to my children, Peter and James, who have given me up for countless hours of their young lives.

ABSTRACT

Attempts have been made by several organizations, including the American Library Association (ALA), to provide greater access to professional education for library managers/directors; however, the rural environment presents unique challenges to education not addressed by many of the policies and programs currently in place. This study examined the perspectives of library managers/directors in rural Northwest Georgia about the factors that impede or facilitate professional degree attainment. Participants included twelve library managers/directors serving in rural communities. Qualitative interviews with the library managers/directors identified their experiences and issues including challenges and incentives to professional degree attainment. The principal findings include: the difference in the experiences and perspectives of degreed and non-degreed participants, regarding professional degree attainment; and the degree to which multiple financial, geographical and cultural factors are affected by demographic characteristics of participants. The results of this study can be used by organizations and agencies who seek to improve the education of rural library managers/directors.

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1. INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

In 2004, only 32% of rural library managers/directors held a professional degree compared to 79% of their urban counterparts (U.S. Department of Education 2006). Some scholars predict this lack of education will bring about the demise of rural librarianship in the twenty-first century if government agencies and professional organizations do not intervene to provide special support for rural library managers/directors (Vavrek 1997). While programs have been implemented to provide greater access to professional education, the rural environment presents several unique challenges including geography, funding and a culture that prevent rural library managers/directors from taking advantage of these programs (Luchs 2001).

The Georgia Public Library Service (GPLS), the state library administrative agency directed by the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia, is one agency that has attempted to increase the number of library managers/directors with a master's degree in library science from an American Library Association (ALA) accredited institution. The state agency has accomplished this goal by providing funds to all state library systems to hire at least one degreed library director. Before developing the agency's most recent five-year plan, the GPLS conducted an extensive survey of the state's fifty-eight library system managers/directors to identify aspects of library service that need improvement. The survey results revealed that 100% of those surveyed felt that more emphasis needs to be placed on educating library managers/directors. To meet these demands, the GPLS planned to implement several programs, including a new ALA accredited Library Science program designed to educate library managers/directors serving in any part of the state by 2008 (Georgia Public Library Service, July 2002).

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The GPLS is working to overcome the geographic barrier by creating more education outlets. Currently, nearly 100% of Georgia's urban library managers/directors hold a Library Science degree, compared to only 42% of their rural counterparts (Diana Ray Tope, in interview 11 December 2006). Though both urban and rural managers/directors in the state currently share a similar geographic barrier to institutions that offer MLS programs, rural managers/directors continue to fall behind their urban counterparts in professional degree attainment, revealing the presence of additional barriers unique to the rural environment.

Private businesses and legislative bodies also influence access to professional education through legislation and technology. The Telecommunications Act of 1996 provides financial assistance in the form of 20%-90% discounts off of available telecommunications services and infrastructure for rural communities (Bertot 2003). In the years following the 1996 Act, rural access to dial-up Internet service soared to 97% of rural communities in the U.S. However, the widespread access to the online professional degree programs has not lead to an increase in the percentage of rural library managers/directors with library science degrees (U.S. Department of Education 1997 and 2006).

This study identified factors that impede and promote access to professional education unique to the rural environment of Northwest Georgia in the twenty-first century. It attempts to address gaps in published research on the factors that impact professional degree attainment for rural library managers/directors in the twenty-first century.

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1.1 Research Question

This study addresses the following interrelated research questions:
What professional experiences and perspectives impact professional degree
attainment for library managers/directors in rural Northwest Georgia? What can
we learn about factors that impede or promote professional degree attainment
from the perspectives of library managers/directors in rural Northwest Georgia?

1.2 Method

The perspectives of library managers/directors were assessed through face-to-face
interviews. Potential participants for this study were identified by using the Georgia
Public Library Service web directory (Georgia Public Library Service 2007) sorted by
region to create a list of all library managers/directors currently serving in Northwest
Georgia. The result was a list of seventeen potential participants. Population statistics
from the 2000 U.S. Census were used to analyze the communities served by the
seventeen libraries, and only those serving rural communities of less than 25,000 people
were selected as per the definition (see page 9). The result was a sample of twelve rural
library managers/directors in Northwest Georgia.

The Interview Guide (Appendix C) was created to direct conversation during the
interviews. The questions covered a range of topics explored in the Literature Review
(Chapter 2) including whether the managers/directors held a professional degree,
challenges and incentives that effect attainment of a professional degree, and the
perspectives of library managers/directors on professional education.

1.3 Problem Statement

While 76% of America's public libraries serve rural communities (U.S. Department of Education 2004), according to congressionally verified rural libraries expert, Bernard Vavrek (1997), only one in five of the managers/directors operating those libraries has attained the professional education necessary to adequately manage a library in the Information Age. These librarians serve twenty percent of America's population (U.S. Department of Commerce 2000), a number that increases each year as more people emigrate from the city to the countryside in search of the rural ideal and as international immigrants choose to live and work in rural industries (Dart 2006), among other reasons. These new arrivals often bring with them a different expectation of information services than previously existed in traditional rural communities.

Prior to 1980, there were no journals dedicated to publishing information on the unique concerns of rural librarians, resulting in a limited amount of literature available on the topic of rural public libraries in the early and mid twentieth century. What is available reveals that the initial development of rural libraries in southern U.S. was hindered due to a lack of funding. In 1936, 66% percent of the South's residents had no access to library services. The southern communities that did have a public library operated on budgets one half the amount of the national average (Preer 2004). Library scholars and national conventions occasionally published manuals of techniques for rural library managers to improve services to rural communities. The valuable information was often not applied by its intended audience either due to the lack of an information distribution network for

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librarians or because the library did not have adequate funds to implement the recommendations (National Commission on Libraries and Information Science 1974).

In 1981, the Clarion University Center for the Study of Rural Libraries initiated the publication of a new journal, *Rural Libraries,* which provided an opportunity for those with experience in the field to publish informational articles for the benefit of others who are concerned about rural libraries. A review of the literature published during the nineteen eighties and nineties reveals a pervasive fear that rural library managers/directors possess insufficient professional education to survive in an era of reduced budgets and increased technology demands. In a 2001 study that reflects on publications about barriers to ALA accredited degree programs for rural public library managers over the previous two decades, Amanda Luchs revealed some financial, geographic, and cultural barriers that prevent many rural managers/directors from accessing the professional education that could save their jobs and benefit their communities. Similarly, French (2006) reflects that due to inadequate funding, library staff are often poorly trained. The result is inadequate reference services which may discourage library users from returning to the public library. A 2003 survey reveals that some public libraries require a professional degree primarily because it encourages the hire of better educated individuals, a condition that improves library services and can encourage the public's respect of their rural public library (Goldstein 2003).

Insufficient literature was published specifically on the topic of rural American librarianship in the early years of the twenty-first century to either verify or refute the published fears that a generation of non-degreed library managers would lead to the downfall of rural librarianship. Factors such as growth of highway and Internet

infrastructure and the resulting changes in rural culture may help rural library managers/directors overcome barriers that hindered library managers/directors in the twentieth century. The current study attempts to clarify the state of contemporary rural librarianship in Northwest Georgia in light of the predictions regarding the sustainability of rural librarianship posed by Vavrek and others in preceding decades in addition to changes in the rural environment in the twenty-first century.

Attempts have been made by several organizations, including the American Library Association and the Georgia Public Library Service, to provide greater access to professional education for all librarians; however, the rural environment presents unique challenges to education that are not addressed by the policies and programs currently in place. This study utilized qualitative interviews with library managers/directors to identify the experiences of all twelve of the rural library managers/directors, including challenges and incentives to professional degree attainment in rural Northwest Georgia. The results of this study can be used by organizations and agencies who seek to improve the education of rural library managers/directors.

1.4 Research Limitations

The purpose of this research is to examine the subject matter in depth for this particular region of Northwest Georgia, in order to understand how the participants' experiences are influenced by factors unique to the region. The challenges facing library managers/directors in rural Northwest Georgia are entwined with the particular environment. Therefore, one must be careful in the application of the research data to general populations. Future studies can overcome this limitation by including rural library

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managers/directors from an adequate sample of regions in the United States. There are aspects of the current study that can be applied broadly, such as the difference in perspectives of degreed and non-degreed library managers/directors towards professional education, as well as the importance of having an affordable ALA accredited Library Science degree program available.

1.5 Researching Perspectives of Rural Library Managers/Directors

The purpose of this study is to research the perspectives of rural library managers/directors on professional degree attainment, and discover factors that impede or facilitate professional degree attainment. Chapter 1 introduces the topic and states the purpose. Chapter 2 reviews literature on the topic. Chapter 3 describes the research setting and data collection method. Chapter 4 presents the data that was collected in the study. Chapter 5 discusses the data. Chapter 6 draws conclusions for the study and makes recommendations for future research.

1.6 Research Vocabulary

The following definitions of terms used in this study come from sources as wide ranging as "ALA Rural Libraries Committee" members to Georgia State Legislation. *Library Manager/Director*- an individual who represents the library in the community and directs library operations, regardless of educational background. All library directors have an ALA accredited Library Science degree as do some of the library managers. Two of the library directors in the current study also oversee other library branches that may or may not have a regular full time manager. The official titles and job duties of library

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managers and directors depend on the library system that employs them. The title "Library Assistant III," is often used to describe non-degreed library managers and "Librarian I," is a common title for library managers with an ALA accredited Library Science degree (Georgia Public Library Service, Nov 2006). Job responsibilities depend on the library system that employs these individuals rather than their job title or whether they have an ALA accredited Library Science degree. In reality, job descriptions for degreed and non-degreed library managers/directors vary based on multiple factors, including the needs of the local community and the experiences of the system director.

Librarian- a person certified by the state of Georgia after completing an ALA accredited Library Science degree program and demonstrating "the necessary training and qualifications to plan, organize, communicate, and administer successfully the use of the library's materials and services" (Georgia Official Code 43-24).

Library Support Staff (LSS)- library employees who work in positions within a library that do not include specialists or those in positions requiring a Master of Library Science (American Library Association 2001).

Northwest Georgia- The Board of Regents of the University Service of Georgia uses the label "Northwest" to describe a variety of locations in the far northwestern corner of the state of Georgia. The exact number of counties designated as "Northwest," is based on each specific application by the Board of Regents (email from Board of Regents, 11 November 2006). For the purposes of this study of library managers/directors employed by the Board of Regents, Northwest Georgia will refer to the counties in the geographic

northwestern corner of the state with libraries that serve rural populations, specifically Chattooga, Dade, Fannin, Floyd, Gilmer, Pickens, Polk, and Walker Counties.

Professional Education- a course of study which leads to a Master's of Science in Information Studies, Master of Information Management Systems, Master of Library Science, or another similar degree from an ALA accredited institution (American Library Association 2001). The ALA only accredits graduate level professional degree programs, so an ALA accredited degree is necessarily a master's degree.

Rural Library- The current study uses the definition created by the Clarion University Center for the Study of Rural Librarianship, which indicates that a rural library serves a community of up to 25,000 people (Boyce and Boyce 2000). Additionally, this study's definition includes the American Library Association Rural Libraries Committee stipulation that the residents of the community consider themselves to be rural (American Library Association 2004), because some Northwest Georgia communities retain their small population while gaining a suburban feel as an improved state highway system connects them to the amenities and services of the Atlanta metropolitan region.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter explores trends in rural librarianship in four sections: 1) historical trends in rural librarianship in the twentieth century; 2) contemporary challenges that rural library managers/directors face in accessing professional education in the twenty-first century; 3) solutions that have arisen since the most recent publications on challenges of rural librarianship; 4) efforts that the Georgia Public Library Service has made to improve conditions for rural library managers/directors.

2.1 Historical Trends in Rural Librarianship

As early as the 1930s, the American Library Association (ALA) recognized the need for significant federal funding to support the expansion of library services to rural communities. The goal of the 1936 ALA annual conference was to raise awareness of the particular needs of underserved populations which were failing due to insufficient funding.

Research presented at the ALA's conference sought to strengthen the argument for the need of federal funds to promote library improvement and extension for rural communities throughout the southern United States (American Library Association 1936). Debate ensued between librarians from northern states who had a long tradition of community support for public libraries, and southern advocates who represented libraries that operated on budgets one half of the national average (Preer 2004). However, the economic deficiency that existed in the South throughout the twentieth century prevented rural residents and local governments from having additional capital to invest in public libraries. The ALA committee's recommendations to secure federal funds were accepted

and ALA President Louis Wilson spoke of the Association's new commitment to adjust the thinking of librarians to become more legally and politically minded in order to achieve new levels of support from the government and society.

In the following decades, increased financial support improved library services to the rural South (Milch 1978). However, in an era before states organized the library system, regional cooperatives emerged to share resources and inspiration, overcoming staff apathy and still inadequate funding. One means that rural communities adopted to overcome lack of funds in combination with a failing economy and social pressures was to make more efficient use of public resources by allowing cooperation between school and public libraries (Little 1979). Pamlico County, North Carolina, was one of the first southern communities to experiment with a joint school/public library facility (Brumback 1981). The success of this venture encouraged shared facilities and resources in other rural public libraries throughout the southern U.S.

The U.S. Census Bureau data provided much insight into changes into the rural environment that impacted rural librarianship during the final decades of the twentieth century. A comparison of the U.S. Census for 1970 and 1980 revealed a record sixteen percent population growth for rural regions, leading government agencies and professional organizations to take a closer look at the realities that rural professionals faced (Vavrek 1985).

Rural libraries benefited from the new attention and studies on a broad range of topics were conducted relating to rural librarianship leading to better understanding of fundamental characteristics of rural librarianship such as: the information needs of rural library users, the role of the rural public library, and the impact of computers on

information services to rural communities. The findings produced an increase in published literature on topics relating to rural library managers/directors in the 1980s.

The primary factor in understanding the information needs of rural library users is an analysis of the geographic isolation of rural communities (Jaugstetter 1983). Rural residents are physically remote from healthcare and educational facilities. While public libraries could be a resource for rural residents to access information on these issues and others, the cultural characteristics of the rural environment additionally contribute to the failure of the public library to become an integral part of rural life. One reason for this failure is the fact that the level of education a person attains influences the probability that the person will read and use libraries (Jackle 1994). Since rural communities have a high percentage of functionally illiterate residents, it follows that rural public libraries are underused compared to their urban counterparts (Klevar, Smith 1988). Additionally, the geographic distance between the residents of a rural community and the public library building may be so great that it is not possible for the residents to access library services. Before the state highway systems and the Information Superhighway were more fully developed in the late 1990s, there were few resources for rural library users to fill their information needs.

The role of rural public libraries in the 1980s was to achieve the same objectives as urban libraries, but without the financial and geographic benefits that cities possess (Gamaluddin 1982). Rural library users changed drastically in that era as industrial, economic, and cultural upheaval caused population shifts around the nation and the world. Although they did not yet have access to resources like a broader tax base and the Internet, rural public libraries were creative in their efforts to expand library services to

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their communities (Heasley and Price 1988). Some library systems decentralized their services through bookmobiles. Others combined services with other local information providers such as the school libraries and the city government. The rapid advance of computer technology made the electronic storage and transmission of information cheaper than previous alternatives in print form (Bish 1983).

In the 1990s, the publications on rural librarianship changed focus from rural culture to the new technologies that began to impact library services. The topics of publications progressed to reevaluating the role of the rural public library in light of new technology.

Initially the microcomputer was offered to library managers as a replacement for the typewriter (McMorran 1981). "Just imagine having the ability to type a catalog card only once and then at the press of a button, having as many copies of the card as required in a neatly typed format," rural public library director Charles McMorran enthusiastically remarked in 1981. By the end of the decade, around 20% of rural public libraries reported that their circulation systems were automated (Mumma 1991). By the mid 1990s, computer software handled the creation of bibliographic records, resulting in a higher standard of cataloging for rural libraries (Anderson 1995). Computers were so efficient at handling basic tasks, like cataloging, circulation, and reference work that human library staff had always done, that librarians were beginning to ask the question, "Are librarians a necessary part of the library?" (Fitzsimmons 1996). However, Joe Fitzsimmons, the former president of University Microfilm International, argued that while the information revolution is real, it does not make the library an anachronism. Instead, it makes the library professional more important than ever before.

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An analysis of librarianship during the 1980s and 1990s reveals that rural public libraries had not received the same valuable oversight and funding as urban libraries, leading to widespread deficiencies in information services to rural areas. Combined with a culture that tended to place little value on formal education, the lack of adequate library services was a detriment to rural America in the last decades of the twentieth century (Lichter 1993). However, as more affluent families moved their residences from cities to rural communities during a large migration, additional money and public interest was invested in these libraries (Domina 2006), an investment that potentially leads to greater information services for rural Americans in the new millennium.

Rural public libraries in the southern U.S. are still in the formative stages of development. While a 1936 study by ALA field agent Tommie Barker presented by the ALA found that most rural residents did not have access to libraries in the early 1900s (Barker 1936), public libraries are now available in nearly every county at the beginning of the twenty-first century. State and federal governments have allocated money to construct and maintain facilities, pay employees, and build collections for rural communities that would not otherwise afford these expenses. However, educational institutions have had difficulty decreasing the number of functionally illiterate residents in rural America (Cooter 2006). While the local public libraries might have set themselves up as partners with these educational institutions, in reality public libraries were busy simply trying to keep up basic operations with minimal funding and staff. Rural public libraries in the twentieth century missed a valuable opportunity to position themselves as not only a source of recreational materials like popular novels and movies, but also as a local institution of life long learning for adults and children. A recent trend

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continues to draw wealthy and educated urbanites to rural communities in search of a rural ideal. The result is an increase in tax base and public interest for public libraries to serve not only the new affluent residents, but to concentrate on programming and collection development for the traditional residents who need continuing education opportunities. Assisted by the insight and finances of government agencies, rural public libraries in the South can continue to grow into institutions that educate and entertain diverse communities.

2.1.1 The Value of Education across Generations

The educational attainment of public library managers tends to reflect the cultural attitudes toward education of the rural community where these managers live and work. Prior to the 1980s, public education in the U.S. was defined by the 1947 President's Commission on Higher Education (Hutcheson 2007). Influenced by the philosophies of the great American educator and abolitionist Horace Mann, members of the 1947 Commission focused on education as the great equalizer of American society in the Post-World War era. As the Cold War and Vietnam War escalated internationally and the Civil Rights Movement and the War on Poverty raged domestically, many public secondary schools and universities flagged in their responsibility to educated students around the nation (Urban, Wagner 2000).

When five of the six of the non-degreed participants in the current study were school children, President Eisenhower was leading the nation through a period of relative calm and prosperity between World War II and the Vietnam War. However, the launch of the Soviet satellite *Sputnik,* drastically changed the academic priorities of the nation's

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public schools (Bracey 2007). By reinitiating the public's fear of the Cold War, the launch of the first functional man-made satellite galvanized support for the previously faltering National Defense Education Act (NDEA). The NDEA was the first in a succession of curriculum reforms which maintained that to win the "brain race" with the Soviets, America's public education institutions needed to overcome the academic deficiencies that had plagued the system for decades (Urban, Wagner 2000). Southern states like Georgia particularly supported the act because they felt they could not sufficiently fund and cultivate their public schools without outside help.

With a surge of funds sponsored by the NDEA, scholars and the National Science Foundation created innovative new courses in physics, chemistry and mathematics for high school students in the 1960s (Fleming 1972). However, implementation of the new curriculum failed because the scholars who created the courses were not familiar with the realities of public school education, leading to frustrations both on the part of educators who were not well educated in math and science, and on the part of parents who were uncomfortable with the advanced level of education (Fleming 1972). The lack of enthusiasm on the part of teachers and parents continued to stymie the education of a many students, specifically in the nation's South (Kirst and Bird, 1997).

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, a series of national and international crises tested the nation. President Johnson attempted to return to the foundations of the 1947 Commission on Higher Education in order to equalize educational disparities for racial minorities and the economically underprivileged (Dallek 1998). However, Johnson's domestic agenda was curtailed by the escalation of the Vietnam War and the beneficial changes did not reach high school graduates until the 1980s.

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The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, better known as the G.I. Bill, encouraged college attendance in rural communities. Created at the end of World War II to reward military service, the G.I. Bill granted U.S. veterans financial assistance to return to college after a period of military service (Boulton 2005). However, by the 1960s and 70s, many veterans complained that the education benefits were insufficient to permit return to college, resulting in an increase in the allotment to each veteran and a subsequent increase in the number of veteran's who used the G.I. Bill to return to school. Volunteer soldiers frequently come from rural areas because the promises of regular salaries and educational benefits attracted rural residents into military service (Rangel 2005). The result is that while at the beginning of the 1900s, rural residents had significantly less education on average than urban residents, by the end of the century, there was virtually no difference between the education attainment of rural and urban residents (Howell 1997).

The framers of the G.I. Bill lived in a society that did not consider the necessity of higher education for women (Selb 2002). The G.I. Bill applied equally to both men and women, however the armed forces did not make an adequate effort to encourage the use of the G.I. Bill for female service members. Approximately of one-third of female veterans surveyed did not even know they were eligible for the G.I. Bill. Due to this environment of discrimination prior to the 1980s, the G.I. Bill was not widely available to the women in rural Northwest Georgia who are participants in the current research.

Residents of the Appalachian region, of which Northwest Georgia is a part, experience educational trends uniquely from the rest of the nation due to cultural traits shaped by geographic isolation caused by the mountains in the region (Duncan 2001).

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The broad education gap between fifty year olds in the Appalachian region and fifty year olds in the nation as a whole illustrates the region's cultural assumptions about higher education that were prevalent in the 1960s and 1970s (Haaga 2004). In a 2004 study of degree attainment in Appalachia, population trends expert John Haaga reported that while a higher percentage of students graduate from high school today than were graduating in the 1980s, the region is not producing, retaining, or attracting college graduates fast enough to narrow the gap at the high end of the educational spectrum. The region succeeded in following the rest of the nation in reversing the gender gap among college graduates since the mid 1970s, with a nearly equal number of women earning an undergraduate degree as men, a trend caused in part by a reduction in the number of men pursing a college education (Haaga 2004). Men still earn graduate and professional degrees at a rate almost twice as often as women in Appalachia. However, women who completed their secondary education in the 1990s are more likely than men to have an associates degree or higher (Kane and Rouse 1999). Because college graduates are highly mobile, the Appalachian region has difficulty retaining educated citizenry who prefer to move to other regions where there are more high paying employment opportunities.

The residents that remain behind tend to have achieved a lower level of education. "Studies indicate that college enrollment, student achievement, and retention are directly related to the educational achievement levels of students' parents" (Eggsware 2005, 1). High school graduates whose parents have not completed post-secondary education, like three participants in the current study, are particularly prone to choose alternatives to higher education such as raising a family or taking a job that doesn't require a degree.

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In the future, rural communities in Northwest Georgia may be able to retain highly educated citizenry by investing in physical infrastructure, such as highway systems, and public services, which encourage affluent individuals to move their residence to rural areas while commuting to jobs in distant cities. The return on human capital may create a self perpetuating cycle that can benefit the entire region because people with a higher education earn higher salaries and therefore pay higher taxes. With the additional capital, communities will be able to reinvest in public services such as libraries and schools, promoting higher education among the population.

2.1.2 Deprofessionalization of Public Librarianship

In a controversial 1973 article, library historian Michael Harris asserts that professional librarianship has been driven by a "self conscious and impelling desire to gain entrance to the professional pantheon" (Harris 1973, 2511) since the late 1800s. In the final quarter of the twentieth century, when Harris wrote his cynical review of librarianship, the information age was unfolding with potentially detrimental consequences for the public library. The ubiquitous nature of information can be seen as a boon for librarianship; instead the increased dissemination of information has been perceived as a threat to some members of the profession because they have not grasped the opportunities that appear to be occurring (Birdsall 1994), such as the need to educate the public on how to use the vast resources available through the Internet to solve information problems.

Rural library expert Bernard Vavrek makes a similar observation in his 1989 publication, "Education of Rural Librarians: Is the Sky Falling?" where he complains that

the greatest detriment to rural public libraries may be the apathy of the library managers themselves. Instead of flourishing, public librarianship is entering a period of deprofessionalization, when the public does not appreciate the potential role of degreed librarians because these professionals do not value their own unique abilities. Birdsall explains that for librarianship to be recognized as a true profession, its practitioners must dominate a specialized body of knowledge.

Through the process of monitoring and managing this body of knowledge in a meaningful way, highly educated and certified librarians will gain the respect of the public and the right to call themselves professionals. However, unlike more complex professions such as legal practice which require continual reliance on trained experts, the goal of public librarianship is that the client grows or changes through their encounter so that in the future the client can handle the problem, if encountered again, on his or her own. The result is that the public misunderstands the true nature of the information professional, construing the willingness of a librarian to disclose the practice of interpreting information as a detriment to the field instead of a vital part of its practice.

Sociologist Andrew Abbott (1998) points out that the textbook definition of a professional is one who practices within an organized body of experts who apply some form of abstruse knowledge to particular circumstances. According to sociologists, librarianship is a semi-profession, differing from full professions in the bureaucratic employment of its practitioners who do not subscribe to a body of knowledge as esoteric as that of law or medicine. The future survival of the profession, from a sociological standpoint, lies in the ability of the librarianship to redefine itself, accepting changes in

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information technologies and improving the way libraries provide information services to communities (Burnett and Bonnici 2006).

Public libraries built their reputation on being the information center or a book repository for a community in the early twentieth century (Crowley 2003). While many people continue to define public libraries by this model, the information environment has changed. ALA-MLS programs have expanded their mission to prepare information professionals for the variety of environments found in an expanding information based economy.

An increasingly popular trend in public library organizational management is one in which systems save money by hiring professional librarians as managers and replacing reference librarians with library assistants to provide the requisite human presence at information desks (Crowley 2005). The attempt to deprofessionalize the public library in order to lower costs is based on quantitative measures and financial pressures, neglecting issues in the different quality of information services provided by an employee who is not formally trained in the field (Goldstein 2003). A 2003 survey found that some library staff believe professional attitude and good "people skills" are more important than an advanced degree when it comes to providing information services to the public.

Public libraries need to develop a new model of librarianship that does not support the deprofessionalization of the field (Fitzgibbons 2000). The new model removes public libraries from their twentieth century roles as information and recreation providers, which he feels largely diminished the profession's philosophical commitment to education. Instead, libraries need to return to the nineteenth century roles outlined in an 1852 document, "Upon the Objects to Be Attained by the Establishment of a Public

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Library" (Carrigan 1995). In it, the trustees of the city of Boston declare that the primary role of their city's public library was to provide self-education opportunities for the citizenry, with the cooperation of other public institutions from elementary schools to universities. Central to the 1852 plan was the leadership of formally trained professionals, similar to the requirements for classroom teachers in public education.

The information environment is quite different more than one hundred and fifty years after the city of Boston promoted its plan to make the public library a learning environment. In the twenty-first century, the information necessary to assist the public in accomplishing their education goals is available in nearly every home through the Internet. Rural communities have come to expect the public library to be a source of entertainment through movies and novels and many libraries have scrambled to build their recreational collections. However, the public is beginning to realize that while the Internet makes information ubiquitous, that information is not accessible to those who lack the tools and training to interpret the vast stores of data on the World Wide Web. As the new millennium advances, libraries should strive to meet the same needs they were created to fulfill—to help the community access information that can provide educational opportunities for the public.

A gap currently exists between academics who have a bird's eye view of the information environment, and library managers who are often bogged down in the field. Literature published during the last quarter of the twentieth century reflects both the scholarly view that professional librarians are of increasing importance in the Information Age and the public library staff views that funding agencies do not appreciate the value of professional education for library managers. The disparity is caused by the difficulty of

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disseminating information prior to the widespread use of electronic communications. Government and professional agencies published information to help rural public library managers better serve their communities and to help them communicate the importance of librarians to funding agencies. However, it wasn't until the twenty-first century that the Internet was widely available to rural communities so that library managers could easily make use of important publications like the ALA's "Grant Writing and the Rural Library," which is now offered online (ALA 2006). With the increase in funding caused by population shifts of affluent residents from the cities to rural communities combined with greater access to the insights provided by academia, public library managers/directors in rural Northwest Georgia are in a better position stave off the trend towards deprofessionalization that began in the 1970s and 1980s.

2.1.3 Public Libraries and the Internet

Near the end of the twentieth century, apprehension pervaded literature on rural libraries as they faced cultural and technological challenges of the new millennium. Predictions that America Online would eventually replace all of the books on library shelves and that rural libraries would eventually become archaic in light of the increasing availability of the Internet in the home were common (Christensen 1995). One leading scholar believed that rural libraries would waste money on new technologies and that staff would not be qualified to implement them, therefore being forced to close their doors due to lack of funding (Vavrek 1997). To support these predictions, studies showed no significant change in the number of rural library managers/directors who held ALA accredited MLS degrees between 1988 and 2000 despite significant population growth

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(Vavrek 1989b and U.S. Department of Education 2000). America's rural libraries were clearly headed for difficult times in the twenty-first century.

Internet service providers like America Online (AOL) and the revolutionary web browser Mosaic made the World Wide Web available in the homes of the general public in the early 1990s. In 1995, it was evident to professional librarians John Christenson and Daniel Barron that library funding agencies were interested in the lower costs incurred by digital collections. Local and state bodies began asking library managers, "why do you need a new library building or building enlargement when all library information will be in electronic formats?" (Christensen 1995, 24). As the Information Age has progressed, the need for information professionals to assist the public in filling information needs has actually expanded (Novlijan 1998). Rural residents must use the Internet to submit job applications, to earn certifications and degrees for career advancement, as well as other tasks required for daily life. The rural public library provides Internet access to those who don't have it at home and public library employees assist the community in completing their tasks. Far from being replaced by AOL, rural public libraries have become necessary for comprehensive use of the Internet.

As the hardware components that make up computers became cheaper to manufacture in the early 1990s, computer companies commended their machines to public libraries as a means to allow library users to search more efficiently for information. Bernard Vavrek (1997) feared that libraries would waste their resources by purchasing computers that can not perform as impressively as the manufacturers suggested, leaving the public libraries broke and without the financial ability to keep the library doors open. However, rural public libraries tended to be so under funded that they

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were not able to take advantage of such opportunities. In this instance, the poverty of rural public libraries prevented them from fulfilling Vavrek's prediction.

Following the publication of these pessimistic forecasts, the attention of library professionals and scholars has shifted from rural libraries in America to those in developing and third-world countries. While foreign communities deserve consideration as they continue to advance during the twenty-first century, scholars should not neglect to study and comment on American rural libraries in an increasingly technological and interconnected global society.

2.2 Contemporary Challenges of Rural Librarianship

In 2004, only thirty-two percent of rural library managers/directors held a Master's degree from an ALA accredited institution compared to seventy-nine percent of their urban counterparts (U.S. Department of Education 2006). Compared to the statistics from the nineteen eighties and nineties, no increase in education of rural library managers/directors was found in the new millennium.

Rural culture remains affected by geographic isolation even while exposure to popular culture through mass media is gradually blurring the distinction between rural and urban values in areas such as class differences, employment patterns, and literacy (Dewey 1960). However, rural communities still lack access to institutions of higher learning and skilled jobs, which are needed to achieve such values (Sullins, et al 1987). As a result, 15.2% of rural people struggle to support themselves, working at low-skill, low-wage jobs, compared to the national average of 11.3% (Aslam 2007). Rural

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librarians tend to follow this same cultural pattern, earning an average of $20,600 per year without an MLS degree (American Library Association 2002).

Should rural library managers/directors desire higher education, they must overcome their community's survival mindset in order to secure public funding for the training. This level of fiscal conservatism is evident in the type of support that rural libraries receive from their communities (Hanks 1990). Rural communities place more emphasis on employing volunteers from within the local community than on hiring paid employees to staff public libraries; and it is often necessary for library managers/directors to manage inadequate facilities because the library buildings have historical value for the community. In his role as a library consultant, Hanks observed that rural communities may even be wary of giving more money to the public library system due to the common suspicion that all public agencies waste money.

Regardless of the biases present in local politics, it is clear that rural libraries draw from an insufficient tax base. In 2002, the median income of a rural family was only $37,654, a figure 30% below the median income in an urban setting (U.S. Department of Agriculture 2004). Further, 28% of the people living in completely rural counties live in persistent poverty counties; by contrast, only 7.5% of the people living in urban areas live in persistent poverty counties.

Luchs (2001) determined that library managers/directors who are given just enough funding to keep the library doors open and books on the shelves may feel that spending thousands of dollars on a professional degree would be superfluous. Besides, most rural libraries are unable to pay a library director the salary to which an advanced

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degree entitles them. She asks, "What good is it to have a master's degree if one is barely living above the poverty level?"

Another barrier to professional education for rural library managers/directors is the geographical distance to schools that offer library science programs (Vavrek 1982) or access to sufficient bandwidth to utilize online programs. Even if a director has the desire to attend a class, travel expenses may be prohibitive. The cost of a substitute to run the library for any time that the director must be away is additionally unaffordable (Ming, MacDonald 1987). The ubiquity of distance educations programs is an excellent solution to the problem of distance, but the percentage of rural library managers/directors with library science degrees has not increased in the years since the advent of online professional degree programs. Geography may provide a challenge in accessing these beneficial programs, as a 2006 study found that nonmetropolitan households are three times more likely to lack access to high speed Internet than urban ones (U.S. Department of Agriculture 2006), potentially prohibiting library managers/directors from using the Internet to access professional education.

Further complicating the geographical barrier is a general opinion within the profession that distance education is not as valuable as on-site learning. Daniel Barron (1991), Director of the School of Library and Information Science and the University of South Carolina expressed the concern of some professional librarians that distance education students lose something by not participating in an academic environment. Still other professionals argue that vital resources are not available to distance education students who instead must gather research materials from the insufficient collection at a local public library (Schwellenbach 1995). Barron concludes that one of the greatest

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concerns about distance learning is that librarians will not be socialized into the profession, with the opportunities to network with other professionals who can provide references and assistance in the future.

In a landmark study of rural librarianship, Vavrek states that, "The most serious factor hindering the education of rural staff may be the lack of an incentive for change within the library profession" (Vavrek 1989a, 95). His statement is supported in part by the National Center for Education statistics which show that the percentage of rural library managers/directors holding professional degrees from ALA accredited institutions has not changed since the inception of the first online degree program in 1997 (U.S. Department of Education 1997 and 2006). Due to the conservative culture of rural communities, the public library is perceived as a recreational resource (Swanson 2001). Local decision makers tend to hire library managers that share this view, so neither the manager nor the local decision makers are dedicated to investing the considerable funding necessary to making the library an information resource for the community.

Contemporary challenges in the rural environment prevent 68% of library managers from accessing professional education (U.S. Department of Education 2006). While the state of professional librarianship has improved in Northwest Georgia, there is an apparent lack of incentive for the public or library staff to encourage further change in some communities because neither party realizes the improvements that a degreed librarian can present such as increasing services to a larger segment of the population. The vitality of rural librarianship has been damaged by the problems of access to professional education. However, in the twenty-first century, many solutions have developed to assist rural library managers/directors.

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2.3 Solutions for Rural Library Managers/Directors in the 21st Century

U.S. Census data shows that in the last decades of the twentieth century, an increasing number of Americans began moving from the city into rural communities (U.S. Department of Commerce 2000). Analysts believe the migrations are a result of people searching for the cleaner and simpler way of life that small-town America has always boasted (Castle 1995). This migration brought attention to the special needs of rural libraries that serve increasingly diverse communities. The American Library Association's Task Force on Rural School, Tribal and Public Libraries is one of the many committees created by a variety of professional organizations and government agencies to study and respond to the needs of rural library managers/directors. Combined with cultural changes and technological advances of the early twenty-first century, these organizations have the potential to provide solutions for accessing professional education in rural America.

2.3.1 Technological Solutions

Telecommunications companies and policymakers have historically considered rural markets "too-complex-to-serve and not-interesting enough" to invest in infrastructure (Best and MacClay 2002), an attitude that exacerbated the geographic barriers to professional education for rural library mangers. Building telecommunications infrastructure in rural areas will inevitably cost more than a deployment reaching an equal number of people in an urban area. For example, if a telecommunications company wires a single city block or subdivision with high speed fiber optic infrastructure it immediately have access to dozens of potential customers. To achieve the same potential

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customer base in a rural area, the telecommunications company may have to invest additional equipment to wire miles of roadway—thus significantly increasing infrastructure costs to reach a customer base which has traditionally had low demand for high speed Internet access.

Business conditions are changing, and the same companies that once overlooked more than half the world's population, are quickly establishing the infrastructure necessary to give Internet access to rural residents due to a saturation of existing urban market bases (International Telecommunications Union 2001). By 2003, 51% of all nonmetropolitan[1] U.S. households had at least one adult who regularly utilized the Internet from work, school, home, or the library (U.S. Department of Agriculture 2006). This development has had a tremendous impact on rural culture as community residents are increasingly exposed to a global culture through the World Wide Web (Salmon 2002). The result is less distinction between rural and urban culture.

In light of the access to higher education provided by technological advances, Barron (1995) presents the case for requiring library managers/directors to obtain an ALA accredited Master's of Library Science degree. Barron recognizes that rural library managers/directors face geographic barriers in accessing professional education. To overcome the issues caused by geographic isolation, he recommends the utilization of distance education in the form of virtual classrooms where students and teachers collaborate using the Internet. With the increasing number of rural communities receiving Internet access, library managers/directors are now able to access one of the thirty-eight

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[1] Metropolitan areas are defined as (1) central counties with one or more urbanized areas, and (2) outlying counties that are economically tied to the core counties as measured by work commuting. Nonmetropolitan is defined as "outside the boundaries of metro areas" (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2003).

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schools that offer a partial or complete online ALA accredited master's degree program (Bitterman 2002).

As early as AD 50, teachers have used written correspondence to provide distance education opportunities for their students; but it wasn't until the late twentieth century when technology permitted synchronous interaction, that really meaningful distance education began (Sumner 2000). Distance education was popularized at the start of the industrial revolution, when a diverse job market began to require an educated and often professional workforce. Correspondence schools rapidly became the norm for the rural population, allowing young adults from remote villages and farming communities to gain credentials before making their move to a larger town or city (Thorpe 2001). However, during the late 1800s and early 1900s, lack of regulation and accreditation of these degree programs lead to abuse of the system. Many colleges and universities opened to take advantage of the lucrative market without providing a credible education, causing a general mistrust of distance education diplomas (Thorpe 2001). The result has been a wide spread distrust in professional degrees attained through distance education. Fortunately, the demonstrated high quality of education offered through ALA accredited degree programs has changed the minds of many previously wary employers.

Technological advances overcome both geographical and cultural barriers to professional education for rural library managers/directors. Previously, rural library managers/directors were isolated from their professional peers with the result that they were less aware of their need to learn new information about their field. With the introduction of the Internet into every library in rural Northwest Georgia, library managers/directors can learn about new techniques for performing their jobs, often

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leading to a desire for professional education. With the opening of this avenue on the Information Superhighway, there is potential for the removal of cultural barriers caused by lack of awareness of the profession.

Additionally, one of the primary reasons for library managers failing to pursue professional education is the need for them to stay close to home to take care of children. The introduction of ALA accredited degree programs online will give many young library managers the opportunity to pursue higher education that their predecessors could not access.

2.3.2 Legislative Solutions

Besides drawing from a growing tax base, rural library managers/directors have access to an increasing number of grants from government agencies that target rural populations. The Federal Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) of the U.S. Congress is one source of funding for libraries that previously had too little funding to take advantage of new information technologies (Institute of Museum and Library Services 2006). Through the LSTA's "Grants to States" program, the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) uses a population-based formula to distribute funds to State Library Administrative Agencies like the GPLS. LSTA outlines two broad priorities for this funding (Georgia Public Library Service, October 2006). The first is for activities using technology while the second is for programs "that make library resources more accessible to urban, rural, or low-income residents, and others who have difficulty using library services" (Georgia Public Library Service November 2002).

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Congress passed the Telecommunications Act of 1996 with the intent of providing current telecommunications services to previously underserviced segments of the population, including rural residents, schools, and libraries. Instead of mandating and funding a plan to reach the goal of universal telecommunications service in America, "the Act relies on competition and the entrepreneurial marketplace to drive investments" in high speed infrastructure by private companies (Depo 1997). However, the guidelines of the 1996 Act have been called into question because little has changed for rural communities since it was enacted (Bertot 2003). While access to the Internet with at least dial-up speed has reached nearly all rural residents, broadband is now needed to meet current telecommunications expectations, including the expectations of online Library Science degree programs. In 2006, broadband penetration had increased to 44% in urban regions while remaining at just 25% in rural regions (Horrigan 2006).

After extensive study of rural librarianship, Vavrek (1989b) made several recommendations on how government agencies can help rural library managers/directors overcome geographic, cultural and funding challenges. He states that these agencies need to make academic certification of library personnel a priority and to provide salaries that attract qualified individuals to libraries in all regions, in order to overcome the apathy towards professional education evident in the field. State governments should provide financial incentives for library staff to gain academic training in library science (Boon 2006). Distance education programs are critical to meeting these goals for geographically isolated librarians, and they should be made available to all library managers/directors, especially those in any of the U.S. states that require certification for upper levels of employment.

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The federal government has attempted to assist rural libraries in accessing information resources through the Telecommunications Act and the LSTA. Prior to the LSTA, local library systems had little assistance developing collections, expanding facilities, or hiring professional librarians to oversee programming for children and adults. Now that federal funds are helping to overcome financial barriers by paying for many aspects of these responsibilities, rural public libraries may have additional funds to hire staff which will allow managers/directors opportunities to pursue professional development.

2.3.3 Cultural Solutions

Between 2000 and 2005, nonmetropolitan regions made substantial population gains, with the nonmetropolitan counties nearest to metropolitan areas experiencing the greatest growth (U.S. Department of Commerce 2003). For example, between the 2000 U.S. Census and the 2005 Population Estimate, California experienced 6.7 % growth, Tennessee's population grew by 4.8%, and Georgia's grew by 10.8% (U.S. Department of Commerce 2005). Analysts suggest that the bulk of this growth is caused by families who are moving from cities to rural areas to take advantage of natural amenities such as forests, pastures, lakes, and beaches (Huang 1999). These families have more formal education and more per capita income than their traditionally rural neighbors. As a result, they create a higher standard of living than formerly existed in many rural areas. This is good news for public libraries who have previously contended with insufficient funding from a poor tax base in addition to a culture that did not fully appreciate educational institutions.

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In the final quarter of the twentieth century, women in the U.S. made dramatic advances in their educational attainment. "The large gaps between the education levels of women and men that were evident in the early 1970s, have essentially disappeared for the younger generation" (Smith et al. 1995). At that time, the majority of the current study's non-degreed participants were finishing high school and approximately 40% of women aged 25-29 had completed one or more years of college, compared to 50% of men (Spraggins 2005). By the 1980s, when most of the degreed participants were finishing high school, women and men were equally likely to enroll in college immediately following high school graduation; and since the late 1980s, women have exceeded men in college enrollment. This trend continues in college graduation rates. The result is a greater number of female library managers who have earned a bachelors degree from the 1970s to the 1980s.

"Amid the social, political, and technological changes of the last 30 years, interest in the education of America's children has remained high" (Campbell, Hombo, Mazzeo 2000). In 1972, female high school graduates were 7% less likely to enroll in college than their male counterparts. However, during the 1970s and 1980s, interest in educational achievement prompted a "back to basics" movement that encouraged students to exceed minimum standards of educational attainment (Ryan 1998). As a result, the number of female undergraduates increased from the minority to the majority between 1975 and 1990 as the numbers of young women who enter college immediately after completing high school, as well as an influx of older women into higher education (Campbell, Hombo, Mazzeo 2000).

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The dramatic increase in the number of female undergraduates completing college between 1976 and 1985 is attributed to many societal factors. The 1965 Higher Education Act allocated $1.2 billion on federal scholarships for higher education (Schrader 1969). Following this initial infusion of money into the nation's institutions of higher education, states began to expand their university systems and college enrollments soared during the early 1970s. The 1965 Act significantly decreased the financial barrier to professional education and consequently, the number of student completing graduate degree programs increased.

In 1969, the US Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) created the first "Task Force on Higher Education" with the intention to improving opportunities for minorities, low-income students, and women (Orfield 1969). The Task Force reported that the institutions of the nation's public education system, ''view women primarily as wives and mothers and their education as preparation for these functions'' (Hutcheson 2007). The report recommended that universities and colleges take female students seriously as future professionals while also espousing more flexible policies to assist their unique needs which include nontraditional degree programs that allow more flexible class schedules and graduation dates. This was a fundamental step in overcoming cultural barriers to professional education for rural library managers in Northwest Georgia, which are predominantly female.

Adding to the number of college graduates in the 1970s and 1980s was the authorization of the 1972 National Commission on the Financing of Postsecondary Education, which strove for greater access to higher education for minority students, students from low-income classes, and women (Glenny 1976). The Commission

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suggested that both access and the ability to choose an institution of higher education were key aspects of a reasonable financial aid policy.

In 1970, women made up 42% of all undergraduate degree students; with the help of financial and cultural reforms, that number had increased to 56% by the year 2000 (Freeman 2004). Similarly, female students made strides in graduate education as they comprised 39% of all graduate students in 1970; but by 2000, 58% of graduate students were female. An additional incentive to degree attainment for women, the dominate gender in public librarianship, was the creation of non-traditional degree programs, which helped to raise the percentage of female master's degree candidates.

Culture shifts (e.g. women choosing to pursue higher education) in the nation and around the world have overcome cultural barriers to education that previously existed in traditional rural culture. Over time, commonly held rural perspectives on education and formerly neglected public institutions like the library system may become an essential source of local social networking in a global community. This development would help rural library managers/directors overcome many cultural and fiscal barriers to accessing professional education.

2.4 Georgia Public Library Service

Between 2000 and 2005, rural Georgia experienced a large population increase, causing some counties to lose their nonmetropolitan status, such as Bartow and Catoosa Counties in Northwest Georgia. The result has been greater concentration on small and rural libraries by the GPLS. The GPLS has undergone many radical changes in structure and focus since the enactment of the LSTA (Georgia Public Library Service July 2002).

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The most significant of these changes is that participation in the LSTA requires the library system to prepare and maintain a five-year plan of action to increase access to technology for all residents. In addition to direction and funding provided by the LSTA, the GPLS was awarded a grant of $1,449,000 from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to provide sustainable public access to the Internet along with computer hardware and software upgrades (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation 2006). With high standards mandated by LSTA and funding provided by the state and private donors, the GPLS began the new millennium in a position to succeed in the Information Age.

The GPLS/ LSTA five-year plan significantly impacted libraries on the local level. In 2002, a committee commissioned by the GPLS conducted an extensive survey of the state's fifty-eight library system managers/directors (Georgia Public Library Service April 2002). Eighty-eight percent of library employees responded, representing a superior response rate. Overall, the survey findings closely match those predicted by twentieth century library scholars who said that without increased education, funding, and intentional community assessment, rural libraries would not survive. The survey showed that 79% of library system managers/directors felt that the GPLS did not do enough to increase the number of professional librarian positions across the state. Only 11% of those surveyed felt that the GPLS had met previously stated objectives that staff at each library would receive sufficient training to provide basic levels of service.

Many improvements were initiated following this survey, including funding to increase print and non-print collections, assistance to maintain and expand facilities, an emphasis on hiring professional librarians to oversee programming for children and adults (Georgia Public Library Service July 2002), and surveys to assess community

opinions. These were largely paid for with money from a $1,703,000 LSTA grant (Georgia Public Library Service November 2002). This adjustment had a significant impact on rural libraries because they no longer relied on insufficient local funding, but instead had greater access to funding and resources (Barbara Hutsell in interview, 14 June 2006).

The GPLS defines a professional librarian as an individual who has earned an ALA accredited MLS degree (Georgia Official Code 43-24); however, access to Library Science degree programs was no longer available directly within Georgia when Emory University and Clark-Atlanta University both closed their library science degree programs in the late 1990s. The GPLS's response to the state's education crisis was to increase opportunities for continuing education at the local level through on-demand technology while working to establish a new MLS degree program within the state university system (Georgia Public Library Service July 2002). The LSTA five-year plan stated that the number of Georgians completing an accredited library science program should increase by 10% between 2003 and 2007, due to the creation of a new Master of Library and Information Science program at Valdosta State University, which was accredited in 2007.

However, students of the new program are required to spend several weekends each year on the Valdosta campus in addition to the distance education element of the program. Since Valdosta is in the extreme southern portion of the state (see Appendix D), many prospective students, including those in Northwest Georgia, may hesitate to commit to traveling the long distance to campus.

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2.5 Summary

Rural librarianship has transitioned through a variety of stages that have lead to an improved level of professionalism and of service to some rural communities. Between 1980 and 2000, population increases directed national attention on rural librarianship, leading to an increase in published literature on the field. In the 1990s, the publications on rural librarianship changed focus from rural culture to the new technologies that began to impact librarians in a variety of environments. However, prior to the advent of the World Wide Web, rural library managers/directors had difficulty accessing and applying the information published. When the Internet became widely available in rural communities, it became more feasible to overcome geographic barriers to ALA accredited professional education. However, the number of rural public library managers/directors did not significantly increase after the Information Explosion, revealing the presence of additional barriers.

The GPLS has attempted to further reduce geographic barriers in addition to financial barriers for non-degreed library managers to pursue an ALA accredited degree by establishing a new Library Science degree program within the state university system. The new program, which was accredited by the ALA in 2007, may increase access to professional degree programs for residents of rural Northwest Georgia; but only if the rural library managers/directors know about the program. The present study determined that the library managers/directors in rural Northwest Georgia have not been informed about degree program which is located in Valdosta, Georgia. This not only means that they cannot take advantage of the program themselves, but they also cannot encourage

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their staff and local residents to look in to the program either. It is necessary to advertise

the new ALA accredited program more thoroughly and effectively.

3. METHODOLOGY

This chapter explores the study's methodology in four sections: 1) the research setting; 2) the participants included in the study; 3) the data collection instrument; 4) and provides a rationale for data analysis methods.

3.1 Research Setting

The study was conducted in rural Northwest Georgia, which consists of Chattooga, Dade, Fannin, Floyd, Gilmer, Pickens, Polk, and Walker Counties. Walker County is home to three rural libraries; Chattooga County has two rural libraries; Floyd County has two libraries, only one is rural; Polk County has two rural libraries; Pickens, Dade, Fannin and Gilmer Counties each have one rural library. The Northwest Georgia region was chosen because of its rural population, because the relatively small number of library managers/directors in the area allows all to be interviewed during the time available, because the author is familiar with the region, and because of its rural population. Public libraries in the region are impacted by environmental factors such as population, income growth, cultural trends in education and state-wide policies regarding requirements for employment.

3.1.1 Financial Indicators

Georgia is one of the five fastest growing states in the nation (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2005). Northwest Georgia experienced this trend with an average of eleven percent growth for the region between the years 2000 and 2006. Table 1 shows recent

Table 1. Estimated Population Growth for Northwest Georgia Counties

Northwest Georgia County	Percent of total growth between 2000-2006
Chattooga	3.8%
Dade	7.1%
Fannin	12.3%
Floyd	5.3%
Gilmer	20.1%
Pickens	29.0%
Polk	7.1%
Walker	5.8%

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce. 2006. "Annual Estimates of the Population for Counties: April 1, 2000 to July 1, 2006"

population gains for some of the rural counties in this study based on 2006 U.S. Census Estimates.

Recent advancements in the highway system for this rural region allow some residents to commute to high paying jobs in larger cities such as Chattanooga or Atlanta (Dart 2006). The result has been a contribution to the 20.3% increase in median household income in Northwest Georgia since 1997, when the trend began. Table 2 lists the rural libraries in Northwest Georgia selected for this study, including the population of the communities they serve.

3.1.2 Cultural Trends in Education

Northwest Georgia follows many of the cultural trends previously discussed in the literature review. For example, a high school drop-out rate of 33% compared to a statewide average of 21.4% shows that many of the region's residents do not value

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Table 2. Participating Libraries

	Library Name	Communities Served	Community Population at 2000 Census
1	Cave Spring Library	Cave Spring	975
2	Cedartown Library	Cedartown	9,470
3	Chattooga County Library	Summerville	4,556
4	Chickamauga Public Library	Chickamauga	2,245
5	Dade County Library	Dade County	15,154
6	Fannin County Library	Fannin County	19,798
7	Gilmer County Public Library	Gilmer County	23,456
8	Lafayette Public Library	La Fayette, Kensington, Rocksprings	6,702
9	Pickens County Public Library	Pickens County	22,983
10	Rockmart Library	Rockmart	3,870
11	Rossville Public Library	Rossville	3,511
12	Trion Public Library	Trion	1,993

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce. 2000. United States Census: 2000.

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formal education (Lichter 1993). Approximately 11.4% of Northwest Georgia residents have a Bachelor's degree or higher, compared to the statewide average of 24.3% and the national average of 24.4%.

3.1.3 Policies Affecting the Education of Public Library Managers/Directors

In 2007, 50% of library managers/directors and in rural Northwest Georgia held the professional degree required to be certified by the state. This percentage is far above the national average for rural library managers/directors, due to the state's requirement that any public library officially serving a community of five thousand people or more must be managed by a state- certified librarian with a professional degree (Georgia Official Code 43-24). Only certified employees are paid on a salaried scale set and funded by the state, beginning at $41,680 per year. Library managers/directors in Northwest Georgia that do not have the necessary degree are paid an average wage of $10.17 per hour (Diana Ray Tope, in interview 11 December 2006).

In 2004, the GPLS identified that a major cause of library managers/directors not attaining an MLS degree is lack of an accredited degree program within the state (Georgia Public Library Service 2004), creating a geographic barrier to accessing professional education for library managers/directors in Northwest Georgia. The Master of Library and Information Science degree program at Valdosta State University was accredited for the 2007 fall semester for the purpose of educating librarians to serve in a variety of library environments in Georgia.

3.2 Participants

Fourteen potential participants were initially contacted. Two were from towns that are no longer considered rural by the local government (U.S. Census Bureau 2006) thereby making them invalid for the purpose of this study. One participant was not available for a face-to-face interview within the necessary time frame and a phone interview was scheduled instead. Eleven participants scheduled face-to-face interviews with the researcher.

Demographic information was collected through a brief questionnaire (Appendix B) which participants were asked to complete at the beginning of the interview. The twelve participants shared demographic characteristics. All participants were over the age of forty: four participants were in their forties, four were in their fifties, and one was over sixty years of age. Eleven were female and one was male; all were Caucasian. Six participants have earned an ALA-MLS degree. Two were part time and ten were full time employees.

The educational background and current pay scale differed greatly between degreed and non-degreed managers/directors. None of the non-degreed managers/directors had completed a bachelor's degree or higher, though two had additional technical training. Two had completed vocational training, and one had some college. All of the degreed managers/directors had an ALA accredited MLS degree, and one had additionally completed the six-year specialist degree for Library Science.

Non-degreed managers/directors earned significantly lower pay than degreed ones. One non-degreed manager/director earned between $10,000-19,000 while five

earned $20,000-29,000. Two degreed managers/directors had a salary of between $40,000 and $49,000, and four earned $50,000 or more per year.

There was a strong correlation between age and educational background. All participants who had a master's degree were in their 40s. This can be explained by the responses to question number six in the interview guide by participants over the age of 50 years. Several factors were mentioned to have prevented degree attainment earlier in life, including: the choice to raise a family instead of attending college; the lack of access to degree programs in rural Northwest Georgia; or the choice to take a job in another field.

3.3 Data Collection Methods

The following section details the qualitative research approach, informed consent procedures, and instrumentation, including the quantitative demographic questionnaire and the qualitative interview.

3.3.1 Qualitative Research Approach

Stanford University Professor Elliot Eisner (2001) describes the goal of qualitative research as "making vivid what had been obscure," by presenting the results of research in such a way that the reader can experience the same sense of person or place that was evident during the interview process. A recent surge in the popularity of qualitative research methods is evidence of a new appreciation for contextual data analysis after decades of allowing psychometrics to "rule our research and thus to decontextualize individuals" (Denzin 1998). The qualitative researcher must collect, analyze, and then make the data understandable in a personal and contextual manner.

Qualitative research emphasizes the depth of understanding within purposively chosen small groups of participants without consideration for generalizing the sample to a larger population (Orcher 2004). Orcher found that the median sample size for a qualitative study is fourteen participants, because studies of this type strive to select individuals who are "information rich," and because the large amount of time required to conduct a qualitative interview limits the number of participants that can be accommodated in the time allotted for the study.

The current study identified twelve participants and implemented a qualitative approach to collecting data through semi-structured, open-ended interviews directed by an interview guide but permitting opportunity for deviation within the discussion. The interview method allowed in-depth discussions with participants and collected informative data that often revealed the reasoning that underlies behaviors (Wang 1999) such as choosing to pursue professional education. While there are no standards for data analysis on the subject of this study, comparisons can be made to previously published scholarly literature to provide a point of reference for the data collected. Themes discussed in the previously published body of literature that are also explored in the current study include barriers to professional education for rural library managers/directors and the importance of professional education for rural library managers/directors. The Interview Guide additionally focused on three primary themes: demographic and employment characteristics; motivation to become a rural library director; and motivation to pursue or decline to pursue an MLS degree. Factors attributing to pursuing or declining an MLS degree received the most emphasis as they answered the research question of the study directly.

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3.3.2 Enactment of the Research Methods

Prior to the interviews, the researcher called each participant on the phone to schedule an appointment for the interview. The researcher then mailed the participants a letter verifying the appointment time and date. The package included the participant's copy of the consent form.

Each interview began with an introduction to the study and an explanation of the participant's rights. Participants read and signed an informed consent statement (Appendix A) which assures the confidentiality of data collected in each interview and granted permission to audio record the interview. The participant was given an unsigned copy of the consent statement to keep for personal records.

Participants discussed their educational and work experience in addition to perceived barriers and incentives to accessing professional education. The researcher took notes during each interview on the Interview Guide marked with an anonymous number. The corresponding audio recording of the interview was marked with the same number. The consent forms, Interview Guides and audio recordings for all participants were stored in a locked file cabinet at the researcher's residence. When the project was complete, the audio recordings were erased, the consent forms were placed on file at the University for up to three years and the Interview Guides were destroyed.

3.3.3 Instrumentation

The Interview Guide consists of a six part demographic questionnaire followed by twelve questions to direct discussion. The interview questions were based on themes of barriers and incentives to professional education presented in previously published

literature. These themes included cultural, geographic, and financial barriers that challenge access to professional education for library managers/directors serving in rural environments.

The Interview Guide opened with an explanation of the study and the consent form. Participants were asked to sign the consent form and then the interview began. The first five questions inquired about the library director's background to establish a framework for understanding responses to subsequent questions. Data collected from question five was used to ascertain the percentage of rural libraries in Northwest Georgia that have a librarian with an ALA accredited MLS degree. This data was compared with the national average of 42% (U.S. Department of Education 2004) to determine how this region compared to libraries across the nation, regardless of rural or urban classification. Question five was also intended to collect information about opportunities and barriers to professional education that the library managers/directors have encountered in their careers, regardless of location. Question six probed perspectives of rural library managers/directors in Northwest Georgia on professional education. Questions seven and eight similarly inquired about challenges and barriers to professional education, but with an emphasis on the current environment of the Northwest Georgia region. The purpose of question nine was to establish the attitudes of rural library managers/directors in Northwest Georgia in light of Vavrek's (1989b) findings that the greatest barrier to acquiring professional education is that the majority of managers/directors don't appreciate professional education. The final question allowed the interviewee to add any other pertinent information that has been missed in the course of the interview.

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3.4 Data Analysis

Grounded theory research encourages detailed description of the research setting to provide a deeper understanding of the participants' perspectives and experiences (Marshall and Rossman, 1999). The result is a deeper understanding of the barriers and incentives that have influenced professional degree attainment for library managers/directors in the region. Coding techniques and procedures were used to develop grounded theory in order to allow the voices of the rural library managers/directors in rural Northwest Georgia to be clearly understood and fairly represented (Strauss and Corbin 1998).

Grounded theory also provides a set of concepts that enables the researcher, participants and published scholars to discuss research concerns and arrive at solutions to common problems addressed by the research question (Strauss and Corbin 1998). The set of concepts is derived from repeating ideas in the interview transcripts (Auerbach and Silverstein 2003). Analysis of the transcripts began after the first set of interviews was complete and served to enhance the interview guide for discussions with the remaining participants. Once the interview process was concluded, relevant text was transcribed from the audio recordings to form a manageable body of text that relates directly to the current research. Open coding was used to generate categories. Axial coding was used to develop and link categories and subcategories. Finally, selective coding was used to integrate and refine these categories.

Strauss and Corbin (1998) explain how open coding is used to "open up the text and expose the thoughts, ideas and meanings contained therein." The researcher began

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this phase of coding by reading the relevant text and identifying quotes that feature repeating ideas correlating to the research question.

While open coding is responsible for breaking the research data into fragments of recurrent ideas, axial coding reassembles the data into categories that "form more precise and complete explanations about phenomena" (Strauss and Corbin 1998). Specific phenomena answer the question, "What is going on here?" or more precisely, "What factors impact professional degree attainment for library managers in rural Northwest Georgia?" Axial coding answers this question by collecting repeating ideas that use similar wording, under the headings created by themes (Auerbach and Silverstein 2003).

Finally, selective coding integrates the themes into theoretical constructs which link data to theory (Auerbach and Silverstein 2003). In cases where the researcher did not have sufficient knowledge of a concept to describe the phenomena, the expertise of published scholars was employed to support and develop some of the topics introduced (Strauss and Corbin 1998), such as the roles of specific cultural barriers and incentives in degree attainment.

Through this process of developing socially grounded theories, the researcher relates the perspectives and experiences of the participants to the expertise of published scholars to answer the research question. The following sample quotation by one participant demonstrates the initial coding that was done to analyze interview data to discern the perspectives of participating library managers on professional education.

Even though they learn a lot on the job, there are things specific to the running of a library that people just don't realize…[6.7a] like the big picture of operating a library: how finances and collection development and reference all work together

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to provide services to a community. Well like cataloging, even though we don't do it all here, to do reference, you have to have some sense of how things are organized… collection development, you know the philosophy of choosing materials [6.7b].

Quotes by participants are italicized throughout for easy identification. Each quote is comprised of statements made by a single participant. Some quotes consist of statements made by a single participant on multiple occasions. In the sample quotation, the two different occasions are identified by numbers within the brackets. The participant was randomly assigned the identifier "6," and both of the quotes are taken from question number "7." However, the discussion initiated by question seven from the Interview Guide, included four distinct concepts. The first statement in the above quotation includes concept "a," namely "purpose of MLS misunderstood." The second statement includes concept "b" of the discussion, namely "benefits of MLS." The presence of "…" within the quotation indicates that portions of the discussion were removed due to irrelevance to the question.

3.5 Summary

The twelve participants were employed in public libraries located in eight rural Northwest Georgia counties. Public libraries in the region are influenced by population and income growth, cultural trends in education, and state-wide policies regarding requirements for employment.

As one of the five fastest growing states in the nation, Georgia is improving the state highway system, which permits many residents of the rural northwestern region to commute to high paying jobs in larger cities such as Chattanooga or Atlanta. While this

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benefits some rural communities in the region, those in Chattooga, Fannin, Floyd, Polk and Walker are excluded from the state highway infrastructure expansion due to unique geographic barriers that make road construction difficult.

The highway system also allows residents of urban population centers to immigrate to rural Northwest Georgia while commuting to their jobs in the city. The influx of more highly educated people seeking to be served by rural public libraries may lead to a demand for more highly educated library managers in the future (U.S. Census Bureau 2000 and U.S. Census Bureau 2006). Currently, the percentage of degreed rural library managers/directors in rural Northwest Georgia is much higher than the national average, due to the state's policies requiring an ALA accredited Library Science degree for any manager serving a population of 5,000 or more.

The current study implemented a qualitative approach to collecting data through semi-structured, open-ended interviews directed by an interview guide that permitted opportunity for deviation within the discussion. The Interview Guide focused on three primary themes: demographic and employment characteristics; motivation to become a rural library director; and motivation to pursue or decline to pursue an MLS degree.

The results of the interview were coded using techniques and procedures to develop grounded theory as rationalized by Strauss and Corbin (1998) and outlined by Auerbach and Silverstein (2003). Grounded theory research encourages an inductive process that moves from the concrete data to broader theories based on that data. The result is a deeper understanding of how the rural environmental influences professional degree attainment for library managers/directors in the region.

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Through this process of developing socially grounded theories, the researcher relates the perspectives and experiences of the participants to the expertise of published scholars in order to answer the research question.

4. FINDINGS

The following chapter reports the findings of the interview process: 1) summary of the demographic and employment characteristics of the participants; 2) the duration and capacity of the participants' employment in libraries through a report of questions one through five of the Interview Guide; 3) the results of interview questions six through twelve, detailing the experiences and perspectives of participants on professional degree attainment; 4) the barriers and incentives to professional education in Northwest Georgia.

The data presented is based on the results of discussions directed by the Interview Guide (Appendix C). A notation in brackets identifies which question on the Interview Guide elicited the response. For example [q3] indicates that the data being presented was a response to question three.

4.1 Demographic and Employment Characteristics

Each participant completed a demographic and employment questionnaire (Appendix B). The data collected demonstrate that majority of participants share demographic and employment characteristics. All twelve library managers/directors are Caucasian. The lack of racial and ethnic diversity found in this study is in line with the findings of 2000 U.S. Census, which found that 91% of the region's population is Caucasian. All of the degreed library managers/directors are under fifty and have an ALA accredited master's degree. One of the non-degreed managers is under fifty, four are between fifty and fifty-nine and one is over sixty years of age. Two non-degreed managers have completed high school and three have additional vocational training while one has some college experience. One non-degreed library manager earns between

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$40,000-49,000 per year and five earn over $50,000. One non-degreed participant earns between $10,000-19,000 per year and five earn between $20,000-29,000.

Library managers/directors in the region are an immobile workforce, tending to remain in the managerial position through retirement. However, the current workforce is rapidly aging, with the result that there will be positions open for degreed librarians in the near future. One degreed participant said that Valdosta State University's (VSU) new degree program opened at a good time.

> *I've heard about that (VSU program) and there is at least one person I know of in our system doing that. I think it is great. I don't know a whole lot about the way they operate it. I think they do most of it online and I think it will give us lots of MLS people. I hope they all get jobs that pay them what they deserve for that degree. At least around Georgia there are a lot of positions open... there are a lot of directors... that are retiring and I just wonder who is replacing them, I see the newsletters that say not as many people are getting their MLS. I don't know the statistics but it could be bad. [2.8]*

4.2 Duration and Capacity of Employment in Libraries

Participants have been in their current positions as library managers/directors for between four months and eighteen years [q2]. The median length of employment as a library manager/director is six years for the entire sample. The median length of employment is seven years for non-degreed managers/directors, and for degreed managers/directors it is five years.

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Ten of the twelve library managers/directors interviewed indicated that their only significant experience working for libraries is with their present employer [q4]. When asked the length of time and capacities of employment in libraries, one participant replied:

> *Twenty years total at this branch. I was here fifteen years as an assistant and then the manager left and I was hired to take his place. The library was built… and I came in then to help out. [8.4]*

None of the non-degreed managers/directors indicated experience outside of their present branch while four of the degreed managers/directors worked at libraries in different states during their years pursuing a bachelor's and a master's degree and the remaining two degreed managers/directors have worked at multiple positions within the library system. The median length of employment in the library field for the entire sample is 16.33 years. For degreed librarians it is 18 years, for non-degreed it is 14.6 years. Degreed librarians have worked in their current positions for most or all of their career, while non-degreed participants came to their current positions after raising children or working in another field.

During seven interviews, the answer to the question, "How long and in what capacities have you served in rural libraries?" [q5] was given in questions three and four, so the question was not asked to avoid repetition. Of the other five participants, four indicated that they have "always lived and worked in" the present rural environment. The fifth worked in a rural library in a different state for three years and in the present rural community for four years, totaling seven years managing rural libraries.

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Several participants described their job duties as including "everything" involved with operating a library.

> *A small librarian does a lot of everything. I supervise two full time and two part time employees... I complete daily and monthly reports to submit to the system director, I collect and deposit money for the branch, I check in and out along with the rest of the employees, I provide reference help, and I help patrons with genealogy. Basically I do everything. [11.1b]*

Tasks that all participants reported performing in their role as library managers/directors are: managing library staff, programming, conducting reference interviews, budgeting city and county funds, collection development, public relations, and computer training. Other responsibilities that were mentioned include circulation, genealogy, supervising other library branches, budgeting state funds, shelving books, computer repair, statistical work, and facilities management.

Six factors were reported to explain why library management is a rewarding career for participants [q3]. Several participants mentioned more than one factor. Responses include the following: Three mentioned positive childhood experiences volunteering in local libraries, as in the following quote:

> *Even as a child I loved libraries, so it was just something I wanted to do. Then I worked in my elementary and high school's library. And after I raised my kids, I got a job at this library and have been here ever since. [11.3]*

Six mentioned being motivated by increased pay and responsibilities when they moved from library assistant to library manager, three managers/directors were approached by the library board or library director and encouraged to apply for the position, six

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participants were motivated to enter the field due to a love of reading or books, two mentioned helping others motivated them, two mentioned the variety of tasks required for their position was a motivator. There was no significant difference in the motivating factors for either the degreed or non-degreed participants as a whole.

4.3 Experiences and Perspectives on Professional Education

The primary difference between those populations referenced in the literature review and this group in Northwest Georgia is the percentage of library managers/directors with an ALA accredited MLS degree. While the national average is thirty-two percent, fifty percent of the participants in this study hold an ALA accredited MLS degree [q6]. Of the six who hold an MLS degree, all earned their degrees on a university campus as opposed to a distance education program [q6b]. Five of these participants earned their degree while they were single and family was not a consideration. Four moved to a different state to complete the degree while living on campus. And finally, two remained in northwestern Georgia and traveled up to 180 miles round trip as often as three days per week to attend classes at a university. Two factors were mentioned to encourage degree attainment: pay or promotion, and an interest in the field piqued during interaction with librarians during undergraduate studies [q6c]. One participant expressed the benefits and challenges of professional degree attainment in the following scenario:

> *I had to move to a different state, but I was ready for a change and I loved it*
> *there… it was expensive and I had to take out loans that I'll probably be paying*
> *for the rest of my life. But it is the best investment that I've ever made and I don't*

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regret a moment of it. Or a penny of it for that matter. Library managers do a

great job as it is, but without the extra education, they can't do as much long term

planning as someone else (with a degree) might. [1.6d]

None of the six non-degreed participants have completed any coursework towards
an MLS degree [q6e]. The demographic questionnaire reveals that all currently non-
degreed participants would need to complete a bachelor's degree first. Half of the non-
degreed participants said they wish they had the opportunity to earn a master's degree in
library science but each expressed regrets at not having earned their bachelor's degree in
the past. Some mentioned factors that impeded them at the time, including lack of library
jobs, lack of degree programs in the area, and raising young children [q6f]. Three non-
degreed participants indicated that nothing could encourage them to pursue a degree at
this time due to their advanced age [q6g]. Two indicated that the library branch is
understaffed and there would be no way to take off work to attend classes. Two indicated
that lack of prerequisite education provided a barrier. One participant reported that young
children currently living at home did not allow the additional time to pursue the degree.

When I first started I was interested, but at that time there was no place in the

area to pursue such. The nearest place was in Alabama but it was too far away

because I had three children at home. [11.6b]

Seven participants expressed frustration with the lack of funding for library
manager/director salaries in Northwest Georgia [q7]. Five participants specifically
mentioned lack of funding for a pay raise as one reason an MLS would not benefit them.
When asked if an MLS degree would be beneficial to library managers/directors, one

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degreed participant responded that at the level of funds currently available, the library system can not afford to hire a library manager who has a college degree or higher.

Currently, the state of Georgia requires each system to have a director with an ALA accredited MLS degree. Systems that meet this requirement receive state aid to pay salaries for a certain number of degreed librarians based on an equation that factors in the size of the population served by each branch. Three of the five library systems choose to cluster their state paid certified positions at the system headquarters to provide technical support to each branch from a distance while other systems place one state paid employee at each branch. Two non-degreed participants expressed frustration with the requirement for state paid positions to be clustered at their system headquarters as a barrier to degree completion [q7].

> *There is no pay for that degree. I'd have to leave the branch to use it. The budget has been so poor that they can't pay salaries to compensate for degree costs. [8.7ab]*

Seven library managers/directors responded positively to the question, "How do you think an MLS degree benefits rural library managers/directors?" [q7] A non-degreed manager/director replied:

> *It would give me credibility with the funding agencies, way higher pay, and it would refine skills that I have learned on the job like cataloging and budgeting.[10.7]*

None answered with a directly negative answer but instead revealed doubts. A manager/director who has completed an ALA-MLS degree said:

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It is hard to say that I use any particular skill that I learned there… [2.7b] I've

got lots of administrative duties that nothing in library school prepared me for, I

don't even answer many reference questions any more and I don't really get to

work with the books that much, so when you look at those things, a lot of those

practical skills just don't get used. [2.7e]

Additionally, two degreed participants suggested that an associate's or bachelor's degree would be more beneficial to rural library managers/directors given their community's background and duties.

Table 3 details the benefits that non-degreed participants said that they perceive would be gained from a degree and the demonstrated benefits that degreed participants responded they have gained [q7b] from their professional degree. It is important to note that degreed and non-degreed participants have few responses in common. Degreed participants shared some frustrations that their MLS did not prepare them for some of the same tasks that non-degreed participants also struggle with. Non-degreed participants revealed uncertainty as to what MLS degree courses would teach them. This uncertainty was articulated by one participant when asked, "How would an ALA-MLS degree benefit rural library managers/directors?" [q7]

There are probably skills that would be good to have. But what you usually need

that for is over at the main branch to learn cataloging and such. [7.7b]

The primary response from degreed professionals when asked how their MLS degree benefits them in their job is summed in this quote:

It provides a broader perspective than I had previously. I learned reference skills, and

the philosophy of profession (information constructs). It was important for me

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Table 3. Perceived and Demonstrated Benefits of an ALA Accredited Degree

Benefit	Degreed Managers	Non-degreed Managers
"Big picture" perspective of information service	4	0
Budgeting skills	1	1
Cataloging skills	2	3
Collection Development (purchasing and weeding)	2	0
Computer Skills	0	3
Credibility with local business community/ funding agencies	0	2
Higher pay/ promotion	1	2
Knowledge of forms (i.e. résumés, taxes, voter registration, etc.)	0	2
Management skills	0	1
Reference	2	0

> *to be immersed in information which online programs don't provide. Basically,*
>
> *my classes showed me that there is more out there to explore, and I learned to*
>
> *approach an information problem from many angles. [5.7bc]*

Answers from other degreed participants included the words "big picture" and

"philosophy" of providing information resources to the community.

Participants' views on the importance of hiring a library manager/director with an

ALA-MLS degree [q11] were sharply divided between degreed and non-degreed

participants. The overwhelming response from degreed library managers/directors is:

> *Yeah, it would definitely be important because none of the other managers in this*
>
> *area have a degree so we need someone around who has the broader ranging*
>
> *goals and vision for our communities. [1.11]*

However, three of the same responses were followed with concerns such as:

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It would depend on what funding is like at the time. If the state is still providing

funds for the position, we wouldn't hesitate to hire someone with a degree.

However, if the state or system reallocated those funds while the position is

vacant, someone without a degree would be considered. [3.11]

The response from non-degreed library managers/directors was unanimous but along a

different vein as expressed in the following scenario:

There are only two state paid positions in the system so there isn't a lot of

opportunity to use a degree. [9.11c]

4.4 Barriers and Incentives to Professional Education

The participants' responses to the question on the impact of the new MLS

program at the state university in Valdosta on the education of library employees in

Northwest Georgia [q8] were predictable based on the results of previous studies outlined

in the Literature Review. Eight participants expressed doubt that the Valdosta program

would benefit Northwest Georgia; two expressed uncertainty about the details of the

program; two emphatically endorsed the program for Georgia library employees; and one

expressed concern that the Valdosta MLS program will harm library managers/directors

in Northwest Georgia. Five of six degreed participants explained that Northwest Georgia

residents may take advantage of the in-state MLS program though it does not appear that

they will be able to return to their rural communities to make use of their degree.

Eight participants responded that they are not aware of any financial assistance for

degree attainment [q9]. Other participants mentioned potential sources as the GPLS, the

Gates Foundation, and completing coursework while on the clock. Another mentioned an

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encouraging system director who couldn't provide financial assistance but was willing to work out schedules for employees to attend classes.

Participants mentioned a variety of barriers to professional education [q10] including: difficulty taking time from work in an understaffed branch, difficulty taking time away from family, distance to program, paying for the degree on low pay, lack of opportunity for promotion once a degree is had, and lack of time.

4.5 Summary

Two principal findings emerged during analysis of the data. The first is the difference in the experiences regarding professional degree attainment between library managers/directors who have earned an ALA accredited MLS degree and those who have not completed any course work towards that degree. Degreed librarians chose to go to a four-year college, where they observed professional librarianship in a public or academic setting. This experience, among other variables, led these participants to pursue an ALA accredited MLS degree. Non-degreed participants chose to "do other things" after high school, such as raising children or attending a technical or business college. As a result, they took jobs in libraries when they were older and had less time to commit to earning an MLS degree.

The second finding concerns the degree to which various demographic characteristics impact geographic, financial, and cultural factors that impede or facilitate professional degree attainment. Degreed participants tended to pursue their MLS degree when they were younger and did not have family constraints on their time. As a result, they were able to travel to university campuses in other regions to complete their degree.

In addition, finances did not impede these young students because work study and student loans were available to them. Furthermore, after they had earned the degree, a professional position was available with greater income to pay back those student loans. Non-degreed participants consistently stated that a lack of money or time to devote to years of college and graduate school made MLS degree attainment impractical.

5. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents analysis of the interview findings in relation to the key research question, including: 1) the experiences and perspectives of library mangers in rural Northwest Georgia regarding professional education; 2) and financial, geographical and cultural factors that impede or promote professional degree attainment in rural Northwest Georgia.

5.1 Experiences and Perspectives Regarding Professional Education

Perspectives and experiences of library managers/directors regarding degree attainment in rural Northwest Georgia differ greatly between degreed and non-degreed library managers. This section addresses these differences through discussions of the following themes: the purpose and importance an ALA accredited Library Science degree; the impact of organizational management styles within library systems in the region; and the effects of academic and nonacademic pursuits on higher education in young adulthood.

5.1.1 Purpose and Importance of an Accredited Library Science Degree

Fifty percent of the participants reported uncertainty as to the purpose of an ALA accredited Library Science degree. The following quote demonstrates the frustrations that a degreed library manager can have with the lack of practical training in their degree program coursework.

It is definitely a benefit to managers, but I wish there were more management courses, budgeting, etc. I think I was better prepared for my courses because I

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had practical experience to back up the skills that are taught more in depth in

MLS classes [3.7]

The Master of Library Science is a professional degree rather than an academic one. The degree entitles the graduate to the professional designation of librarian. In other words, "it's not the job that makes you a librarian, it's the degree" (Miller 2006). An ALA accredited Library Science degree is intended to prepare information professionals to practice the "creation, communication, identification, selection, acquisition, organization and description, storage and retrieval, preservation, analysis, interpretation, evaluation, synthesis, dissemination, and management" of information (American Library Association 1993).

An undergraduate degree in library science is valid for training in the technical work of librarians with some discussion of the theoretical framework of the field; but these programs differ from the two year master's degree program in content and depth. "The master's degree provides the foundation to move librarianship forward, which arguably has allowed it to thrive in the face of the new technological developments appearing almost daily" (Hawkins 2007).

Participants in this study who have earned an ALA accredited Library Science degree believe that while their jobs as library managers can be done without a master's degree, a non-degreed manager isn't capable of keeping the public library relevant for the long term in the "big picture" of information services. One degreed participant explains:

Even though they learn a lot on the job, there are things specific to the running of

a library that people just don't realize…[6.7a] like the big picture of operating a

library: how finances and collection development and reference all work together

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to provide services to a community. Well like cataloging, even though we don't do

it all here, to do reference, you have to have some sense of how things are

organized... collection development, you know the philosophy of choosing

materials. [6.7b]

Degreed participants frequently conveyed concern about the devaluation of the

MLS degree for rural public library managers by some state and local library system

directors. A degreed library manager said this of the Master of Library Science degree,

I do think it is important, but I can't guarantee it will always be like this. Some

directors don't think it is as important so if we get a new director, there's no

telling how things will change [6.11].

The American Library Association has made the case for the importance of an ALA-

MLS degree in the twenty-first century, but system directors increasingly choose to

replace degreed professionals with non-degreed library staff to perform reference duties

in order to save staffing dollars.

While the non-degreed participants in the current study are supervised by a

degreed library system director, 83% of these participants reported that their system

director has little influence on operations at the branch libraries due to geographic

barriers such as distance and land formations between the branch and the system

headquarters that keep system directors from maintaining a close relationship with the

communities served by their branch libraries. Instead, library managers/directors must

assess the unique information needs of their own communities and make decisions about

services that can best serve local library users.

All of the non-degreed participants in the current study have long resided in the same community which they now serve as a library manager. Only two of the degreed library managers indicated that they lived in their service area before they accepted a job as library manager/director. Some of the non-degreed library managers believe that their intimate knowledge of the local communities greatly improves the abilities of non-degreed managers to provide effective information services to the library users. Future research may determine whether on-the-job training and prior personal experience in the community allows non-degreed library managers to provide information services effectively without professional education.

The current research reveals that five of the six non-degreed managers in Northwest Georgia misunderstand the purpose of professional education and view it simply as a union card, a guarantee of higher pay (Forsee 2007) and as a type of technical training.

> *There are probably skills that would be good to have. But what you usually need that for is over at the main branch to learn cataloging and such. You know, for promotion, since you have to have one to get a state paid job at the main branch [7.7a].*

Another non-degreed participant states:

> *On the job experience is more important but you need a degree to move up and make decent money [9.11b]*

Non-degreed participants identified several benefits that they perceived a professional degree would bring. Three participants said that if they had earned a professional degree, they would have learned basic computer skills which they instead learned either at a

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technical school or on-the-job. However, one of those participants pointed out that due the fact that she graduated from high school before the information age, she would not have learned these valuable skills even if she had gone to college and graduate school right away.

Now I think it would help most with the computer courses you would take, because so much of it is automated now. I think that would be the biggest thing that would help someone getting into the career... In fact, if I had gone right out of high school I wouldn't have gotten that because it was so far back. [12.7]

Three non-degreed participants mentioned they would like to learn cataloging skills in order to possibly earn a higher paying job at the system headquarters where all cataloging is performed. Two indicated that they have difficulty helping library users with needs such as developing résumés and completing tax forms, functions they believe a professional degree program would help them perform. Other perceived benefits named are intangible, such as management skills and credibility with local funding agencies who respect degree holders.

The frequent misunderstanding of the purpose of professional education proves to be a barrier to achieving the formal education that would improve library services to the communities of rural Northwest Georgia. Half of the non-degreed library managers stated that they are so close to retirement that there is not time for them to complete the prerequisite education as well as the master's degree. However the perspective held by two-thirds of the non-degreed managers who believe that professional education is not important to their job may influence a future generation of library managers who currently work with them.

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Degreed participants explained that demonstrated benefits of a professional degree include a broader perspective of information services for their communities, which not only help them perform daily tasks but also plan for the future vitality of their profession and the public library. Two degreed participants said that they appreciate their education in cataloging not for the purpose of entering records into the catalog, a task neither respondent performs, but because knowledge of the way a catalog is organized helps them perform references and collection development responsibilities.

Often, degreed participants in the current study expressed disillusionment in the inability of an MLS degree to prepare them for practical and technical aspects of their chosen career as a library manager. John Berry (2004), the editor in chief for *Library Journal*, relates an exchange between library educators on an electronic discussion list. During the discussion, the ALA president elect Michael Gorman alleged that ALA-MLS professional degree programs are eliminating practical training in librarianship in favor of academic theory. "They are not training Ph.D.'s in librarianship to teach library courses," he said. "Retiring professors are regularly replaced by information science Ph.D.'s" (Gorman in Berry 2004). The deans of two schools of Information Science disagreed with Gorman's assertion, each claiming that their degree programs are thriving and producing qualified information professionals. Four of the six degreed library managers in rural Northwest Georgia stated that they agree that their degree programs did not provide adequate practical training.

In recognition of wide spread misunderstandings about appropriate education for library managers, the ALA is using an IMLS grant to establish a national certification program for library support staff (LSS). The purpose of the program is to ensure that

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support staff, including non-degreed library managers, have the skills necessary to serve their communities in the information age. The ALA has adopted the Western Council of State Libraries (WCSL) term "Library Practitioner" (Helmick, Swigger 2006) to describe LSS who manage public libraries but who do not have an ALA-MLS degree and usually have little or no formal education in librarianship or experience in the field prior to assuming their current managerial role. The ALA's plan for a new Library Practitioner certificate is modeled after an existing program overseen by the WCSL which addresses "considerable confusion about the roles of the support staff and librarians. This comes into clear focus when public libraries are headed by directors without the library degree" (Strege 2007).

Strege explains that the WCSL project does not seek to legitimate the role of the non-degreed library manager or director through a certificate program, leading to devaluation of professional librarianship. Instead, it asserts that cities or other areas without adequate resources cannot hope to attract ALA-MLS professionals now or in the near future, therefore state librarians and the Council have an interest in ensuring that the non-degreed directors meet a list of qualifications for the job. Non-degreed library managers need training that is technically orientated without the conceptual and theoretical background to which professional librarians are exposed to in a master's level program. The Library Practitioner certification program provided by the ALA would give LSS the practical skills needed to responsibly manage personnel, finances, planning, and more, in accordance with the wishes of some of the degreed library managers/directors in the current study. One degreed participant acknowledged,

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> *At least the core classes or a paraprofessional program would be nice just to*
>
> *provide some basic skills. [4.7b]*

The libraries represented by the WCSL are aware of the ALA standard that every public library should be directed by a librarian with an ALA accredited master's degree. However, rural communities in rural Northwest Georgia cannot compete with the salaries offered by libraries in larger communities, with the consequence that non-degreed managers are the norm in the region. The new ALA program may raise performance standards and pay scale for non-degreed library managers, though it also has the ability to quell the advances that have been made towards making professional education accessible to library managers/directors in the state of Georgia. While they will be initially better trained to carry out technical tasks in the library, some degreed library managers in the current study say that minimally certified library managers do not have the ability to improve information services for their communities as the information environment rapidly changes in the near future.

Fifty percent of the participants in the current study fit the description of Library Practitioners. The new certification program addresses another assertions made by some of the participants in the current study. When asked if an MLS degree benefits rural library managers, a degreed participant answered:

> *I don't know if I'd recommend an MLS, but maybe a technical school or*
>
> *bachelor's degree would be good to learn collection development (weeding,*
>
> *purchasing for a broad range of users, not just popular requests) [5.7d].*

The ALA certification program would provide this technical training for library managers in rural Northwest Georgia by holding these non-degreed library managers to a standard

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of professionalism, defined by multiple competencies (Western Council of State Libraries 2007). There are currently no in-state or online bachelor degree programs in Library Science available to educate rural library managers in Northwest Georgia, and the only vocational training program is on campus in Atlanta. The addition of the ALA certification program would provide the necessary training for non-degreed library managers in rural Northwest Georgia by overcoming the financial and geographical barriers that keep the non degreed participants in the current study from accessing this basic training.

The ALA's introduction of a certification program is recognition of the duality of the digital divide. Not only does the digital divide separate those rural communities that have the technological infrastructure to access information resources from those which remain isolated, but it separates those library managers who can interpret information and apply it for the purpose of serving the needs of a community and those who lack the training to do so. The lessening of this divide comes as intellectual growth occurs through training provided by LSS certification programs, enabling the non-degreed library managers to interact more fully and beneficially with the information environment.

5.1.2 Division of Labor within Library Systems in Northwest Georgia

Participants reported each of the five library systems in this study employ a cluster model for the division of labor. Two of the library systems employs some of the degreed employees at the headquarters while the others direct branch operations. The remaining systems cluster all degreed librarians work in the system's headquarters performing technical duties while non-degreed employees manage branch libraries,

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working with the public. However, because the headquarters is often in a distant community isolated from the branch libraries, there is little incentive for non-degreed managers to pursue their professional degree because they would have to move away from their rural communities to use it.

Both degreed and non-degreed participants expressed frustration with this model as revealed in the following scenarios by degreed and non-degreed participants. When asked if earning an ALA-MLS degree benefits rural library managers, one degreed participant answered:

> *Yes, to be succinct about it, I do think it can benefit them, but the way the system is set up in Georgia, I don't think it would be possible... They top load it at the system headquarters so there isn't anything left for anyone else [1.7].*

Similarly, a non-degreed participant insinuated that the requirement to work at the system headquarters proves a barrier to degree attainment:

> *Like I said, I'm not interested in going any further and being taken away from this branch. It is a headache. I'd have to travel to headquarters in another town and I like it here [7.6g].*

This model of clustering degreed employees in a single location is designed to increase financial efficiency of service to communities with limited resources. However, the outcome of a model where financial efficiency is the goal deprives some librarians of the job satisfaction that comes from "being conscious of having satisfied a human need… and of having thus created an object corresponding to the need of another man's essential nature" (Marx 1844). Professional degree attainment in rural Northwest Georgia often leads to a "back-office" job in technical services that removes library managers from the

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public they love to serve. Eight of the participants said that the primary reason they pursued a job in a public library was their love of people and/ or books. By staying in a lower paying job at the branch level, these participants are able to reap the intangible rewards that come from performing a job they love.

A state-wide policy mandates that all original cataloging must be completed at the system headquarters in order to ensure consistency and quality of entries into the state-wide catalog [6.1]. At least one degreed employee must work full time at the system headquarters to perform this function. The state also mandates that the system director be a degreed librarian. To fill these two required degreed roles, the state of Georgia pays the salary of at least two degreed personnel in each library system. However, additional state paid positions are awarded based on the population served by the library system. Since all five of the participating library systems serve small rural populations, only two of them qualify for enough state-paid positions to staff their branch libraries with degreed managers/directors. Consequently, there are not jobs that offer sufficient pay and public service responsibilities to encourage non-degreed library managers to pursue professional education.

Two of the participants also oversee multiple branch libraries. These degreed participants often travel between rural communities to assist in the operations of other public libraries that may or may not have an additional full time manager. These degreed participants must be able to manage staff, perform daily operational duties, as well as direct multiple branches, tasks they are better prepared to complete due to their professional education.

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5.1.3 Impact of Academic and Nonacademic Pursuits after High School

The library managers took a variety of paths to professional degree attainment. The most common path to professional librarianship is through the library itself, exemplified by the five of the six degreed study participants who were library support staff when they chose to earn the degree after a number of years working in libraries:

I have been in this system for eighteen years, first as an assistant with no degree. I worked on my bachelor's from (a degree completion program) and then got my master's in '95 [4.4b].

Another route to librarianship is through career change in midlife, when the professional has gained experiences in another field that can be advantageous in a career as a librarian. The following quote by a degreed participant demonstrates the transition to a second career as a professional librarian.

I was an English teacher for a few years but I wanted to get into libraries and right about that time the position came open here. The library manager was retiring she told me I should apply and she helped me get this job even though I didn't have my degree yet. They agreed to let me work while I was going to school [6.3a].

A non-degree participant showed that a career change to librarianship does not always lead to professional degree attainment.

I work mostly for something to do after I retired. [12.10] I ran a beauty salon for thirty years here in town, and after I retired the board came to me and asked if I wanted the job here since I have been involved in the community for so long, you

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know, cutting everyone's hair. And I mean everyone—from school kids to the

mayor, sometimes. [12.12c]

As exemplified by the scenario above, "librarianship is a profession where any experience and knowledge you bring in or pick up along the way comes in handy, making it a great midlife career change for many" (Gordon, 2005).

However, the majority of participants in rural Northwest Georgia see their late entry into library managerial work as a barrier to degree attainment. "I got into the business too old" [12.6f], "I wish I had (earned my degree) when I was younger, but now I'm too old" [9.6f], and "I raised kids instead of going to school so I didn't have time" [10.6f] are all reasons given for choosing not to pursue a professional degree in library science.

Degreed participants also took a variety of educational paths to library management. Five library managers left their rural hometowns to attend a university undergraduate program where they were exposed to professional librarianship. Three of these went on to attend ALA-MLS programs, also on a university campus. A fourth participant returned to rural Northwest Georgia as a school teacher. Years later, this participant made a career change when she was hired as library manager and drove four hours per day, on two or three days per week to attend an on-campus ALA-MLS program in Atlanta. Alternatively, the sixth degreed library manager took a non-traditional approach to higher education by commuting to an undergraduate degree-completion program in another town and then pursuing an ALA-MLS through a satellite TV program in rural Northwest Georgia.

The common characteristic of all six degreed participants is that they earned their undergraduate degree before family responsibilities were a factor. Five of them earned their master's degrees before having a family. The sixth participant commented on the difficult task of balancing professional degree attainment with family responsibilities:

The hardest part was time because I was working forty hour weeks then I had classes—not to mention my family! Classes were one night a week for four hours and they let me make up work time that was missed for classes that might have started earlier in the day [4.6b].

Time was another factor preventing some non-degreed participants from attempting a professional degree program. While the participant in the above scenario had the option of transferring to the library system headquarters where a more flexible work schedule could be arranged, most of the non-degreed participants suggested that is not an option. One reason is the prohibitive distance between the employees' rural community and the system headquarters, which makes commuting impossible on county highways. Additionally, non-degreed library managers love their hometowns and want to serve the information needs of the people there. Since earning an ALA-MLS degree would certainly lead to a professional position in another town or, more likely, in a big city, non-degreed library managers prefer to adjust their lifestyle to a lower paying position to gain greater intangible compensation.

5.2 Factors Shaping Experiences with Professional Degree Attainment

The following section discusses multiple financial, cultural and geographical factors that impede or promote professional degree attainment in terms of specific barriers and incentives that participants reported.

5.2.1 Financial Barriers and Incentives

There current study uncovered two financial factors that affect professional degree attainment in rural Northwest Georgia. The first factor is the disparity between the income of library managers who are state-paid and library managers who are paid by local agencies. The second factor is a financial barrier related the low income of non-degreed library managers.

Earnings for Degreed Participants

The yearly income of degreed library managers/directors in rural Northwest Georgia meets or exceeds the national average. The average starting salary for graduates of ALA accredited MLS degree programs across the nation was $40,118 in 2005 (Maatta 2006). In the southeastern U.S., public libraries continue to offer the lowest average salary of all information institutions with an average at $39,412, an increase of 8% since 2004. Further, the ALA reported significantly lower salaries for women and racial minorities with master's degrees. "Salaries in public libraries, in the Southeast, and for women need to grow in order to be competitive within the marketplace" (Maatta 2006).

Degreed library managers/directors in rural Northwest Georgia receive their income from two different sources. Some librarians are paid on salary by the state while

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others are paid by local agencies. The following quote expresses the incentive that a state-paid position can be to encourage professional degree attainment.

> *As far as an incentive, if you do get your degree, you do benefit salary wise, if you get a state paid position. And that's a good thing, it is a very well paying job. But the state paid positions are allotted based on population so we don't have many here [6.9]*

Georgia has removed the potential for gender discrimination in pay for state-paid professional librarians by creating a very specific salary schedule based on level of education and years of experience. Any newly graduated library professional with an ALA-MLS degree who gets a state-paid position will earn $41,680 in 2007, a figure slightly above the national average.

As expressed previously by a non-degreed participant, competitively paying state paid positions are scarce in rural Northwest Georgia. There is no survey targeting library managers in Georgia, but a 2002 GPLS survey identified two categories of employees that are branch managers or have comparable responsibilities. The first category is reserved for degreed professionals and is generally referred to as the "Librarian I" position. The GPLS explains that this position is reserved for "both experienced and entry-level librarians who may supervise paraprofessional, clerical and service staff and who have an MLS degree in library science." The 2002 survey found that there are one hundred and thirty-one full time professionals serving as "Librarian I" around the state. The 2007 base salary of $41,680 per year increases yearly with experience. Compared to the 2002 national starting salary of $37,456, the remaining degreed managers around the state earn a salary paid by their local communities with an average of $32,000 per year to

start in 2002 depending on their location within the state. All six degreed library managers in the current research are on the state salary schedule, revealing that none of the library systems in rural Northwest Georgia attempt to pay for degreed library managers/directors from local funds. Half of the degreed participants admitted that they are not able to pay salaries for additional degreed librarians with the limited funds provided by local sources.

Earnings for Non-degreed Participants

The second category of employees identified by the GPLS includes non-degreed branch managers, Children's Assistants, and Reference Assistants, under the title "Library Assistant III." The GPLS describes these employees as performing paraprofessional librarian duties, providing services to library patrons, and assisting in management of non-professional staff of a department or branch library. Non-degreed managers have an average locally funded starting salary of $21,400 per year, depending on their location within the state of Georgia (GPLS survey). The average income for general employment across the state was $43,217 at the time of the 2000 US Census, a figure more than double the earnings off non-degreed library managers. The non-degreed library managers participating in the current research earn between $10,000 and $29,000 per year.

The average cost of living for the state of Georgia was $28,937 per year in 2002 (Citysource.com 2007), a figure significantly higher than the average yearly earnings of non-degreed public library managers in the 2002 GPLS survey and in the current research. The median household income for the counties in this study can be found in

Table 4. Income and Poverty of Participating Counties in 2000

County	Per Capita Income [1]	Median Household Income [1]	Very Low-Income for Family of Four (HUD) [2]	Individuals Below Poverty Level [2]
Chattooga	$14,508	$30,664	$23,200	14.3%
Polk	15,617	32,328	23,200	15.5
Walker	15,867	32,406	26,700	12.5
Dade	16,127	35,259	26,700	9.7
Fannin	16,269	30,612	23,200	12.4
Gilmer	17,147	35,140	23,200	12.5
Floyd	17,808	35,615	25,100	14.4
Pickens	19,774	41,387	35,600	9.2

Source 1: 2000 US Census

Source 2: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development 2007

Table 4. The poorest counties per capita are Chattooga, Polk and Walker Counties. These counties have the lowest percentage of citizens with a bachelor's degree or higher and employ the fewest degreed library managers. In these counties, there is a more limited tax base to pay salaries so the only degreed librarians are state-paid. Due to the limited number of degreed librarians that can be afforded in these counties, the library systems cluster their degreed positions at the system headquarters and their branch libraries are staffed with non-degree managers. Some participants from these counties reported that the lack of funds for salaries presents a barrier to professional education. A degreed participant said:

> *I wish could we pay them to be librarians, but at the level of funds available, we*
> *can't even require a college degree [4.7a],*

A non-degreed participant explained:

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We wouldn't necessarily be paid for that degree. Our budget has been so poor the last few years, with the funding agencies not increasing it any time soon. They can barely pay a manager and certainly not a professional [8.10].

In a 2002 issue of the ALA publication *American Libraries,* Madison, New Jersey librarian Abby Kalan uses local and national statistics to explain that public librarians, both degreed and non-degreed, earn low wages that do not reflect their education, experience and dedication in the field. Kalan asks the reader to consider a hypothetical family of four that must be supported on a non-degreed library manager's income.

With average earnings of $21,400 per year for Georgia's Library Assistant III employees, many families will qualify for HUD Section 8 low-income housing assistance because they earn below the average $25,862 average "very-low income" for rural Northwest Georgia (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development 2007). The US Federal Register reported that in 2002, a family of four with an income of $20,650 is at the poverty level (U.S Department of Health and Human Services 2002). Kalan asks the reader to consider how comfortable we should be with the slim difference between the wages for a public library manager and wages that are considered by the federal government to be inadequate to support a family. Kalan amends her severe assessment of unsatisfactory compensation for library employees by pointing out statistics that show wages are increasing each year as states and communities become aware of the gravity of the problem. However, she asserts that if change does not come more quickly, the only staff left to manage public libraries will be those who have some other means of income.

With such meager compensation, it is no wonder that only one of the non-degreed library managers in the current study considered paying tuition for a professional degree

program out of his or her own pocket. The youngest non-degreed participant indicated that she may consider making the financial investment in professional education because she already has some college and a significant amount of time remaining before retirement to reap the benefits of the higher education. The majority of participants said that there is no assistance provided for degree attainment and that their wages do not cover the cost of tuition. A degreed participant mentioned:

There is no support from the individual library systems, so that is an investment that a manager would have to provide to get a degree that may not return a higher paycheck [1.10].

A non-degreed participant commented:

I wish I could give you some hope that you can earn a living at this job, but you just can't. They hire employees part time so they don't give benefits or high enough pay [12.12a].

Non-degreed employees in particular expressed hopelessness with the current situation.

Financial Aid for Professional Education

No participants could name a single funding source of financial aid for degree attainment, though a few mentioned that their local library systems might be willing to work around school schedules or permit use of business hours to do school work, especially when it benefits the library directly.

It depends on the branch and the system, but ours allows employees to do some types of coursework on the clock and is willing to work around a school schedule whenever possible [3.9].

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Additionally, five degreed participants agree that there are no financial incentives to degree attainment in rural Northwest Georgia due to lack of sufficient state-paid positions in the region.

The GPLS has attempted to provide access to a professional degree for anyone interested in Georgia through the ALA-MLS program at the state university in Valdosta. The professional degree program has several characteristics that make it unique in the southeastern US. One characteristic is that the VSU program is the least expensive of all master's level library science degree programs in the southeastern US, at $644 per credit hour for out of state students and just $205 per credit hour for Georgia residents. The out of state tuition for other popular programs mentioned by participants in the current study are the University of Alabama's satellite program in Gadsden which is $937 per credit hour, the University of Tennessee in Knoxville at $1,045 per credit hour, and the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill which costs approximately $997 per credit hour. From a financial perspective, the VSU degree program is much more affordable than any program previously available to residents in rural Northwest Georgia.

Finally, the VSU degree requires relatively few credit hours and those course hours have concentrations in practical education for library professionals. To graduate from the Valdosta program, students must earn thirty-nine credit hours. The University of Alabama requires thirty-six credit hours and both the University of Tennessee and the University of North Carolina have a minimum requirement of forty-two hours. Each University has a different requirement for the distribution of those credit hours. The University of Alabama offers a Master of Library and Information Studies, allowing students to choose classes appropriate for a variety specializations, including work in a

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variety of libraries, information centers, and other information industry occupations. The University of Tennessee offers a similar emphasis for its Master of Science in Information Science with the mission to prepare information professionals for advanced study and analysis and for positions of leadership and participation in the professions of a global information society. The University of North Carolina uniquely offers both a Master of Science in Information Science and a Master of Science in Library Science, the latter of which prepares librarians to perform both public and technical services specific to libraries. Like the UNC program, the VSU Master of Library and Information Science program focuses specifically on preparing librarians rather than professionals who may work in a variety of information professions. The result is that VSU graduates pay for one less class than UTK and UNC graduates and the classes are designed to meet the needs of library professionals in Georgia, which may allow graduates to immediately see returns on their financial investment in job performance.

Despite the tremendous amount of work that has taken place to organize VSU's ALA accredited program, none of the library managers in the current study knew much about the program and two had never heard of its existence. Confusion exists about its accreditation due to the number of years it took for the MLIS program to gain ALA accreditation. A non-degree participant commented:

> *I don't know if they're what's called an accredited school. Right now the only two colleges that are even kinda [sic] close are North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the University of Alabama. They are the only two that would be considered nearby. Valdosta is kinda [sic] far but it might be closer than those others [9.8a].*

And a degreed participant showed her uncertainty about the program:

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I wouldn't recommend it since it is currently only accredited within the state of Georgia, it is too expensive to risk when there are such a limited number of high paying positions available [5.8].

These are currently incorrect statements since the program has been fully accredited since the spring of 2007. The Board of Regents of the University of Georgia approved the creation of the degree program in 1999 but it was not fully operational and accredited until eight years later. Unfortunately, some library managers/directors in the state are still not aware of this fact.

Participants assumed that tuition would be the same as the other, more expensive degree programs in the southeastern US, though at between 61% to 82% the cost of an out of state program, it is can be an excellent personal and professional investment, though not necessarily a financial investment, for public library managers in Northwest Georgia.

It might provide a real sense of personal and professional accomplishment and improve job performance, but the money wouldn't be there to pay for the degree or the great job that is the return [1.9].

Library managers who cannot travel to a distant university campus can earn an inexpensive professional degree through Valdosta's distance education program. This new development permits public library managers to gain competency in serving the information needs of their communities; but only if they know that such an inexpensive program exists. The result of lack of promotion of the new program upon its inception is that no library managers in rural Northwest Georgia have yet to take advantage of the financial incentives that degree attainment can bring.

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5.2.2 Geographic Barriers and Incentives

Distance Education

There is a great potential for distance education programs to overcome geographic barriers to professional degree attainment for rural library managers in Northwest Georgia. Literature published in the 1990s expressed a common view that distance education is inferior to on campus programs due to the lack of personal interaction with professors and peers. However, technological advances have made it possible for students to take part in the academic environment through synchronous and asynchronous discussions. Before Drexel University was the first to use the Internet for degree attainment, several other modes of transmission were attempted in Northwest Georgia with poor results.

> *Ten years ago they had a cohort with Columbia and they experimented with a satellite program for the sixth year degree. I took a class, but at that time what they were requiring us to go on campus from time to time and it that's a long haul. I wouldn't have minded so much if there was a lot of interaction when we were there but one time it was just to take some little multiple choice test. And we had to spend the night over there! But that wasn't the only thing, they didn't do it online, it was satellite and I had a hard time finding a satellite location nearby. I found one at our local RESA but it was hard to coordinate everything with them and [another library in our system] had a satellite but it didn't always work very well. And at that time I had small children. But I think the online thing would have been better, I would have considered sticking with it if it was online [2.10].*

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New degree programs share in the benefits produced by the labor of these pioneers in distance education. Of a more recent satellite degree completion program, one participant said that the degree attainment was only possible due to the addition of real-time communication between the student and the professor.

> *…the satellite TV program in our community allowed it to happen. I attended class by TV and there was a phone number that I could call in questions, and all of the tests were proctored here in Georgia at a central location where all of the students could take it at once without traveling to the campus [4.6d].*

In 1999, Jones International and Capella University began online bachelor's degree programs. In conjunction with one of the twelve universities that have created ALA-MLS programs similar to the ones offered by Drexel and Valdosta State, a rural public library manager in Northwest Georgia could for the first time attain a professional degree without ever traveling to campus for a class.

One barrier to professional degree attainment through distance education programs comes from prejudice towards the quality of distance education. One argument against distance education remains embedded in professional fields due to abuse of correspondence learning that took place before accreditation measures were widely enforced. A degreed participant mentions a second argument against distance education programs:

> *Online programs aren't nearly as effective so I don't recommend them. It was important for me to be immersed in information which online programs don't provide [5.12].*

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While on site programs provide benefits such as immersion in a thoughtful academic environment and personal relationships with professional peers, online programs allow library employees to continue working and applying the concepts learned in class to their unique information environment immediately. Conversely, library employees who do not live near an on campus degree program but want to attend class on campus must quit their jobs to move near the university, losing much opportunity to strengthen their understanding of abstract concepts discussed in class by making immediate practical applications in the work place. The prejudices that continue to plague the reputation of online professional degree programs may continue to disperse with time as technological advances improve the quality of distance education.

Population Shift

Rural Georgia has long battled human capital flight, a trend in which highly educated individuals leave their rural communities in favor of urban places that can ensure higher pay and better job selection. Describing the options for an employee who is pursuing an ALA-MLS degree at the new program at VSU, one non-degreed manager stated:

> *… one of our young ladies who works here in the summer, is planning to go to Valdosta after she finishes college. She won't be able to come back here since we only have the one state paid position, but she can work somewhere in Georgia, maybe Atlanta where there are more possibilities [6.8].*

Georgia as a whole is experiencing a "brain gain." While approximately 15% of Georgia's highly educated citizens leave the state each year, approximately 35% of Georgia's new residents possess college degrees, contributing to a net increase of around

20% of college educated residents from 1995 to 2000 (Deitz 2007). However, U.S. Census data show that between 1970 and 2000, rural Northwest Georgia as a whole continued to lose educated young professionals at an increasing rate (Artz 2003).

Three counties participating in the current study have experienced significant population increases since the 2000 U.S. Census. Fannin County has grown by 12.3%, Gilmer County has grown by 20.1% and Pickens County has grown by 29%, compared to an average growth of 5.82% for the remaining five counties in the region. The three library managers/directors serving in the high growth counties have an ALA accredited Library Science degree. Two of these participants indicated that the new residents of their counties are retirees and highly educated business people who commute to Atlanta. It is likely that rural communities that are comprised of highly educated residents encourage the employment of a professional library manager/director to provide information services to the community. When the population rises, the state offers to pay for additional professional salaries, further increasing job opportunities for degreed library managers/directors.

Alternatively, 66% of the libraries in low growth communities are served by non-degreed participants. A participant explained that there is insufficient incentive for non-degreed participants in low growth counties to pursue professional education because:

> *There aren't professional positions available and they won't get paid for it so why bother getting the degree if you can't get paid for it. Each system is only allowed a certain number of state paid positions. It sounds crass to talk about money, but why bother paying all that money for a degree if you aren't going to get paid? Besides it is an expensive investment. [1.8]*

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The addition of mainstream residents to traditional rural communities is one factor helping rural library managers/directors overcome geographic barriers to education.

5.2.3 Cultural Factors to Professional Degree Attainment

Age, gender and professionalism are three factors were discovered to affect professional degree attainment.

Transition of Generational Culture

The data reveal that participants' ages are directly related to their levels of educational attainment. None of the library managers who are over the age of fifty have completed a bachelor's degree or higher. This finding substantiates what national studies have found about citizens in this age group. The environmental factors such as an above average high school drop-out rate and low rate of college attendance among previous generations have always hindered undergraduate degree attainment in Northwest Georgia. Cultural norms in previous generations placed greater emphasis on the role of women as mothers instead of financial contributors in families. None of the participants in the current research who are over the age of 50 years earned a bachelor's degree in their youth largely because rural culture did not present it as a necessity.

> *I never really thought about school. My big thought was get out of high school,*
> *get some training, get married, have kids. I never really thought about a career*
> *[7.3].*

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Once their children were older or they were prepared to retire from another career, non-degreed participants began their new careers in public libraries. A non-degreed participant remembers:

When I first started I was interested (in professional education), but at that time there was no place in the area to pursue such. The nearest place was in Alabama but it was too far away because I had three children at home [11.6f]

Because were between forty and sixty years of age when they began working in libraries, the six year commitment of time and money for a full time student to earn a professional degree, comprised of four years for an undergraduate degree and two years of graduate level study, made obtaining a professional degree impractical since little time would remain for them to use the education before retirement from library service. Four of the six non-degreed library managers said that they are "too old" to pursue higher education "at this late date." However, online degree attainment may appeal to some current and future generations of library managers who want to remain in their rural communities without excluding professional education, like the youngest of the non-degreed managers, who explained:

If I decide to stay here a long time, if I make this a career choice for the future, I would do that [8.6c].

Conversely, six of the seven participants who are under the age of fifty have earned a master's degree or higher. This finding may corroborate other studies of this generation, often labeled Generation X. In the early 1970s, before the first of the degreed library managers participating in this study graduated from high school and chose to go to college, the U.S. government began pedagogical and financial initiatives for college

attendance. These may have helped students in rural Northwest Georgia overcome the cultural barriers of previous generations to pursue higher education. Instead of making establishment of a family the priority after high school, five of the six younger participants went to college and began careers.

Literature published in the final decades of the twentieth century expressed doubts that ALA-MLS program graduates would be available due to barriers in rural culture. However, encouraged by mainstream culture introduced by television and the Internet, future generations of rural residents are likely to make higher education a priority, increasing the likelihood that degreed librarians are available when professional positions are vacated in the rural environment.

Traditional Rural Culture

Traditional rural culture is greatly influence by isolation from mainstream culture and the experiences associated with the wider world. Ten of the twelve library managers/directors indicated that they have always lived and worked in a rural environment. Another participant has lived and worked in the present rural environment for eighteen years. Participants' responses point out that long immersion in the rural environment provides them a profound understanding of the information needs of local communities; but without the philosophical framework that a professional degree program can provide, it is difficult for non-degreed managers to effectively act on the perceived needs of the community in order to plan for the future. A degreed manager/director explained,

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… it is the background and knowing the whole library culture and how libraries

work, it helps you understand and see the big picture which you really need if you

are going to be a library manager [2.7f].

It is also significant that five of the six degreed participants have experienced

library environments different from those they currently manage while none of the non-

degreed participants have spent a significant amount of time in another library. Degreed

library managers indicated that their exposure to the operations of other libraries was a

significant benefit of their professional degree program.

It exposed me to what goes on in other libraries which gives me greater

perspective on issues of the profession and of library service [4.7c].

The isolation of the traditional rural environment deprives non-degreed library

managers of interaction with other library managers to discuss and observe alternative

methods of operating a rural public library.

Professional Culture

The purpose of question seven was to establish the attitudes of rural library

managers/directors in Northwest Georgia in light of Vavrek's 1989 findings that the

greatest barrier to acquiring professional education is that the majority of

managers/directors don't appreciate professional education. The current research revealed

that only 17% of library managers/directors in rural Northwest Georgia have little regard

for ALA accredited degree programs. An additional 33% misunderstand the purpose of

professional education, answering that it is useful to learn cataloging in order to be

promoted to a job at the system headquarters.

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The remaining 50% of participants have attained a professional degree and while they all answered that it is important to their work because it gives them a broader perspective in the field and helps them approach information problems more effectively, five of the six degreed participants expressed frustration that the current library system does not place high value on degreed library managers. One response to question seven indicated that there is not sufficient funding to permit the hire of degreed managers; three indicated that in light of current environment, vocational training in the field is more important; and two indicated that without mandates from the state library directors, the importance of degreed library managers varies based on the opinion of the local library systems' directors.

It is clear that the participants in the current study value professional education but more must be done by local and state agencies to provide information and funding to encourage degree attainment for valid reasons, including the development of a philosophical framework with which to build library policies and operations.

5.3 Summary

This chapter presented the experiences and perspectives of library mangers in rural Northwest Georgia regarding professional education. It identified financial, geographical and cultural factors that impede or promote professional degree attainment in the region. It is important to note the points of similarity and divergence in the experiences and perspectives between degreed and non-degreed participants.

Both degreed and non-degreed participants reported uncertainty as to the importance of an ALA accredited Library Science degree for rural public library

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managers. Some of the degreed participants expressed discontent with the balance of philosophical and practical aspects of their Library Science degree program, explaining that their degree program did not prepare them for many of the daily tasks of managing a library. Other degreed participants said that a two or four year library science degree program would be more beneficial for rural library managers than a more theoretical graduate degree.

Degreed and non-degreed participants disagreed on the benefits of professional education. Degreed participants explained that the primary benefit of an ALA certified Library Science degree program is the "big picture" of information management, the ability to approach information services and problems from multiple perspectives. The research reveals that 83% of non-degreed managers perceive the primary value of a professional degree to be merely a guarantee of higher pay or some specialized technical training.

The library managers in the current study took a variety of paths to professional degree attainment. Four of the six degreed study participants were library support staff when they chose to earn the degree after a number of years working in libraries. Another degreed participant ended a career in public education to be a professional librarian. However, the majority of participants in rural Northwest Georgia see their late entry into library managerial work as a barrier to degree attainment due to their age.

The disparity between the income of degreed library managers, who are all state-paid employees, and non-degreed library managers, who are all paid by local agencies, demonstrates one significant financial barrier to professional degree attainment in rural Northwest Georgia. This is due to the formula used to determine the number of state-paid

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positions each library system is allotted. Since rural Northwest Georgia has, by definition, a smaller population compared to larger urban systems, the region is allotted few state-paid positions. While such a position can provide a powerful incentive for degree attainment, the scarcity of these positions proves a barrier in the region. Additionally, the low income of the non-degreed library managers participating in the current study is significantly below the average cost of living for the state, a condition that may keep non-degreed library managers from attempting to pay tuition for a professional degree program. The majority of non degreed participants said that there is no assistance provided for degree attainment and that their wages would not cover the cost of tuition.

The GPLS has attempted to provide access to a professional degree for anyone interested in Georgia through the ALA-MLS program at the state university in Valdosta. From a financial perspective, the VSU degree program is much more affordable than any program previously available to residents in rural Northwest Georgia. However, in the first year of its fully accredited status, none of the library managers in this study had substantial knowledge of the program, indicating that VSU is not effectively targeting library managers/directors in northwestern Georgia. The result is confusion about its program format, accreditation status and cost of attendance.

6. CONCLUSION

The following sections provide a synopsis of the research, including the significance of the research, the process and methodology, results, and future research.

6.1 Importance of Research

Previously, little was known about the difference between the experiences of degreed and non-degreed library managers/directors concerning professional degree attainment. The current research revealed that both degreed and non-degreed participants misunderstand of the purpose of an ALA accredited library science degree program, viewing professional education as a means of promotion to higher pay and responsibilities.

All of the degreed participants discussed to some extent the benefit of gaining a broader perspective of information services, provided by their degree program. Half of the degreed participants mentioned some degree of failure by their education program to prepare them for the daily responsibilities of their profession. Five of the non-degreed participants expressed uncertainty as to the purpose of a professional degree, commenting that it would prepare them to perform daily responsibilities such as computer maintenance, assisting library users with forms, and some cataloging. Since 83% of non-degreed participants indicated that their degreed library system director has little influence in the programming and operations for their branch, it would be beneficial for the library managers to have the insight into long term planning and services for their communities that an ALA degree provides.

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The current study confirmed that factors impacting degree attainment which were identified in publications of the last twenty years continue such as financial barriers created by an insufficient tax base. The data also reveal that recent innovation has overcome other barriers such as geographic isolation from professional degree programs which can now be accessed online. Two significant financial factors present barriers to professional degree attainment: insufficient pay for library managers make paying for higher education difficult, and the lack of funds to pay a higher salary once the degree is attained. The remaining geographic barriers are twofold: lack of professional positions in the rural environment and lack of access to affordable undergraduate degree programs which are prerequisite to any of the online graduate degree programs.

Finally, the introduction of mainstream culture through television and the Internet has overcome some cultural barriers to professional degree attainment including gender roles the library managers/directors perform such as becoming mothers in early adulthood leaving little additional time for degree attainment. However, other cultural barriers continue to make degree attainment unlikely for the non-degreed participants in the current study: the local economy encourages the choice to pursue employment opportunities instead of higher education after high school, and the advanced age of library managers when they are hired to their management positions leave little time to complete the necessary education in time to make use of it before retirement.

6.2 Summary of the Results

The GPLS has sponsored measures throughout the state of Georgia that positively impact the education of library managers in the rural Northwest region of the state. The

requirement to have a degreed librarian in any library that serves a community of more than 5,000, the willingness of the state government to provide salaries for at least two degreed librarians in each library system, and the opening of an ALA accredited library degree program with low in-state tuition, which will help local libraries maintain quality information services for their communities.

Cultural factors that existed in rural Northwest Georgia thirty years ago influenced the decisions of the participants who are fifty to fifty-nine years old, not to pursue a bachelor's degree, a choice which prohibits them from attaining an ALA-MLS degree today. Similarly, cultural factors present twenty years ago encouraged college attendance for high school graduates in rural communities. The result is all six of participants who are under the age of fifty pursued a bachelor's degree. Five of the six participants completed college and continued their formal education with an ALA accredited library science degree.

Additionally, one-third of participants mentioned that a young person from their community had contacted their local public library manager/director to learn more about opportunities for employment upon completion of an ALA accredited Library Science degree program. This reveals the existence of a new generation of potential library managers/directors from rural Northwest Georgia who are interested in completing a professional degree to use in public library service.

This study addressed multiple financial, geographical and cultural factors that impede or promote professional degree attainment in rural Northwest Georgia. Historically, library support staff (LSS) in rural Northwest Georgia have not received adequate salaries to pay for undergraduate and graduate degrees without outside help.

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The GPLS initiative to create an affordable distance education professional degree program within the state may remove this barrier due in part to in-state tuition rates that are far less than costs at other universities in the southeastern US. Additionally, the increase in pay that comes from obtaining a state paid librarian position is an incentive to younger library managers who may have the opportunity to achieve such a position in the future.

However, one remaining barrier to professional education is the insufficient number high paying positions in rural Northwest Georgia's public libraries. Other geographic barriers to accessing professional degree programs have largely been overcome by the distance education classes. The newly accredited distance education program at Valdosta State University will provide additional incentives to degree attainment, even though geographic access to jobs that pay sufficient salaries for degreed professionals remains a barrier. Many LSS who earn their ALA-MLS would need to leave the region to find a professional position in urban areas.

Cultural barriers to education include the devaluation of formal education and the deprofessionalization of public librarianship in rural Northwest Georgia. Participants who were over the age of fifty appear to have been part of an generation of students who did not have adequate cultural support to earn an undergraduate degree after high school, as none of them have completed any college courses. Educational reforms that took place across the country in the 1970s and 1980s may have influenced study participants under the age of fifty, as all of them have at least some college, and approximately 83% of them hold advanced degrees.

6.3 Future Research in Rural Librarianship

The current study introduces more questions than it answers. Professional organizations and government agencies are candidates for continuing research on the importance of professional education for rural library managers.

The primary financial barrier to degree attainment for library managers in rural Northwest Georgia is not the cost of the degree program. Rather, the lack of jobs that pay a sufficient salary for a highly educated individual compels future generations of degreed professionals to seek employment in urban areas and prevents the library managers already employed in the region from considering higher education. Government agencies and professional organizations who, like the degreed participants in the current study, feel that professional education improves job performance for library managers/directors can initiate a study to ascertain whether degreed public library managers/directors can meet their information needs more effectively than non-degreed personnel.

The qualitative approach used in the current study would need to be combined with quantitative data to better gain better understanding of the quality of services being provided to the community by degreed and non-degreed library managers/directors. Results confirming that jobs are performed more adequately by degreed managers/directors may encourage funding agencies to increase the quantity and pay of library manager positions in the region. In contrast, results showing that non-degreed library managers are equally qualified to perform the professional duties required of library managers/directors in the region may lead to financial savings for funding agencies that need not pay salaries for degreed librarians.

State and local library organizations need to reevaluate the expectations of the residents of rural Northwest Georgia in the twenty-first century in light of the recent cultural changes mentioned in this study. Different data collection methods may be used to gather more information from a rural audience which has historically been difficult to reach due to geographical and cultural characteristics. The results of such a study would provide funding agencies impetus to increase funding in rural communities where a broad gap is found between the high expectations of potential library users and the current services provided by public libraries.

Finally, state library agencies in Georgia and other states in the Southeastern U.S. can conduct a study to achieve results that are more widely validated and generalized, using the same methods used in the current research can be repeated with a much larger sample. Two potential samples include all of the rural public libraries in the state of Georgia, or all of the rural public libraries in the Tennessee Valley region which includes Northwest Georgia, Northeast Alabama, and parts of Central and East Tennessee. Surveys of these populations would need to be completed through telephone interviews or written questionnaires due to the large geographical area involved. However, the results would be valuable to library professionals who are interested in better serving rural public libraries in the United States.

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APPENDICES

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A. Consent Form

Perspectives of Rural Library Directors Regarding Professional Education:
A Qualitative Study in Northwest Georgia

You are invited to participate in a Masters' thesis study by a student from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. The purpose of the study is to examine the perspectives of rural library directors on factors that impede or facilitate professional degree attainment. Currently, only twenty percent of rural library directors achieve an MLS degree from an ALA accredited institution, compared to 79% of their urban counterparts. Scholars predict this lack of education will harm rural librarianship in the twenty-first century if government and professional organizations do not intervene to provide special support for rural library directors. The results of this study may be used by organizations and agencies who seek to improve the education opportunities for rural library directors.

The interview will consist of a guided discussion of 30-45 minutes. The researcher will make written notes on a sheet that is marked with a randomly determined identification number. With your permission, I will record this interview on an audio tape which is marked with the number which matches the one on the answer sheet. Data will not be linked to your name at any point. After the interview, the tape and answer sheet will be stored in a locked file cabinet until the project is complete. At that time the consent forms will be placed on file at the University for up to three years and the response sheets and tapes will be destroyed.

There are minimal anticipated risks for you to participate. Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty.

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Christina Tracy at (706) 820-7207. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, contact the Office of Research Compliance Officer at (865) 974-3466, or Dr. Bharat Mehra with the School of Information Sciences at (865) 974-5917.

CONSENT
I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I am at least 18 years of age and I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature_____ Date _____

Researcher's signature _____ Date _____

B. Demographics Questionnaire

The following questions are being asked for research purpose. You are not required to answer them, though your answers will help in the data analysis portion of this study.

Check the box that most closely describes your situation:

What is your gender?
□ Male   □ Female

What is your race/ ethnicity?
□ Caucasian   □ African American   □ Native American
□ Asian   □ Hispanic/ Latino
□ Hispanic/ not Latino   □ Other _____

Please indicate the highest level of formal education completed.
□ High School or equivalent □ Some college   □ Associates Degree
□ Bachelor's degree   □ Master's degree
□ Other _____

What is your age?
□ 30-39   □ 40-49   □ 50-59
□ 60-69   □ Other _____

What is your current job title?
_____

What is yearly earning range?
□ $10,000-19,000   □ $20,000-29,000   □ $30,000-39,000
□ $40,000-49,000   □ $50,000+

Thank you for participating in this study.

C. Interview Guide

(After greeting the participant and ensuring that the environment is optimal for concentrating on a discussion, the interviewer will read a short introduction to the study.)

"This study examines the perspectives of rural library managers/directors on factors that impede or facilitate professional degree attainment. In recent years, several organizations, including the Georgia Public Library Service have attempted to provide greater access to professional education for all librarians. However, the rural environment presents unique challenges to education that are not addressed by the programs currently in place. The results of this study may help organizations and agencies to improve the educational opportunities for rural library managers/directors. We will begin the interview with a demographic questionnaire and then discuss your experiences working in rural libraries, including your perspectives on the education of library managers/directors. But before we begin, I'd like you to read and sign this form which assures you that any information collected in the interview will remain confidential."

1. What is your current job title? What are your duties?

2. How long have you been a library director?

3. What motivated you to become a library director?

4. How long and in what capacities have you worked in libraries?

5. How long and in what capacities have you served in rural libraries?

6. Do you hold an ALA accredited MLS degree?
    If Yes:
        a) What institution granted this degree?
        b) Were you living or working in Northwest Georgia while completing the degree?
        c) What factors motivated you to earn this degree?
        d) What challenges did you face while seeking this degree?
    If No:
        e) Have you completed any coursework towards an MLS degree?
        f) Why did you decide not to pursue an MLS degree?
        g) What might encourage you to seek such a degree?

7. Would an ALA accredited MLS degree benefit rural library managers/directors?

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8. Why do you think that the new MLS program in at the state university in Valdosta, when accredited, will impact the education of library employees in Northwest Georgia?

9. What incentives are provided by the local and state library systems for library managers/directors to take classes towards an MLS degree?

10. What barriers, if any, may prevent local librarians from achieving professional degrees?

11. If you were hiring your replacement, how important is having an MLS degree?

12. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

(The interviewer will thank the participant for her time and cooperation and ask if the participant would like to see the results of the study when it is complete. If the answer is "yes," the participant will fill out a separate form with her name and a physical or email address where the results can be sent.)

Yes, I would like to receive a copy of the results for this study.

Name: _____

Address: _____

    _____
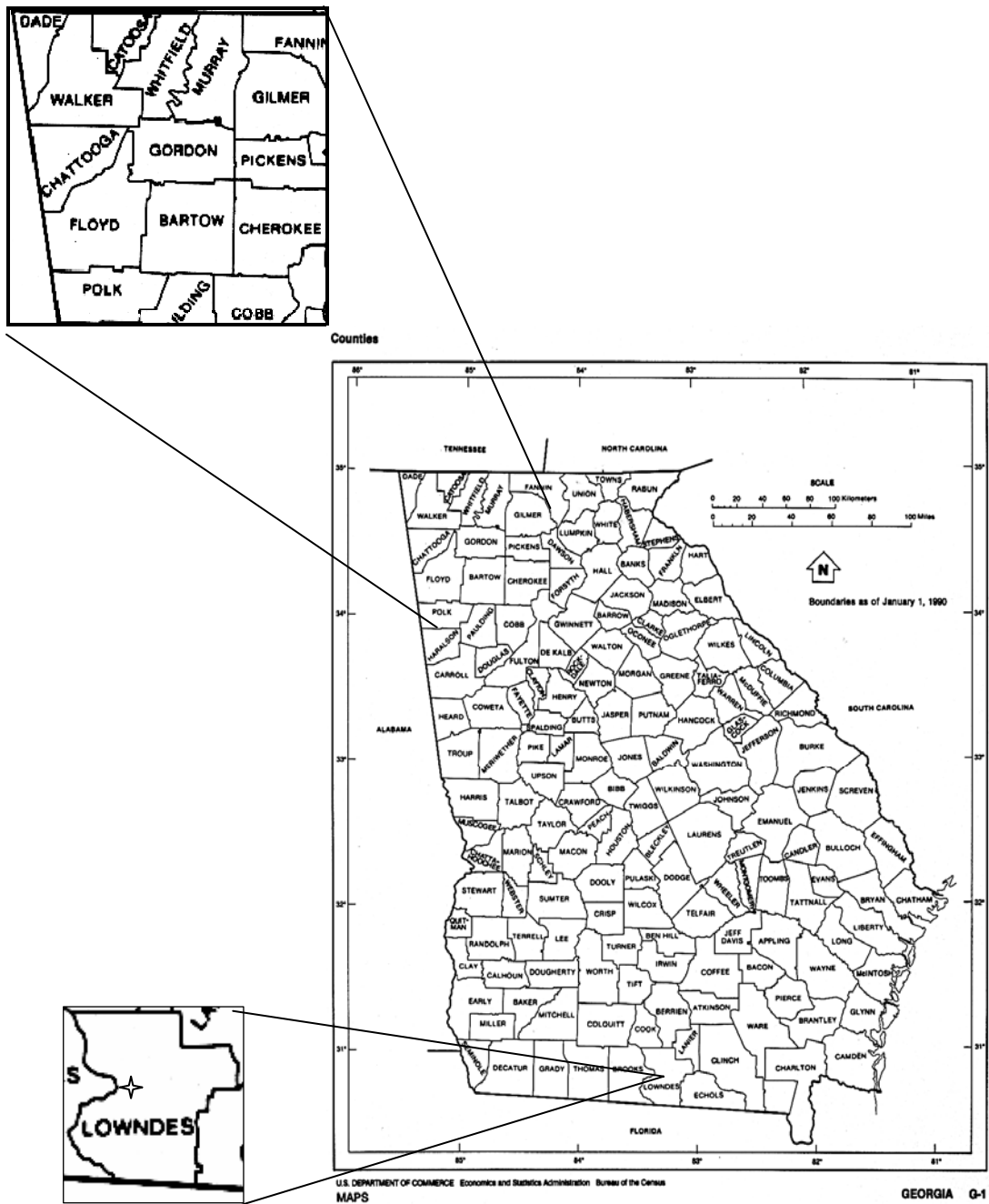
D. Georgia Map

Figure 1. Location of Northwest Georgia and Valdosta State University in Lowndes County

VITA

Christina Tracy was born in Birmingham, Alabama, and has lived in many communities in the southeastern United States. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in English from Covenant College, where she was first exposed to professional librarianship as a student worker in the college's library. Her first professional position was teaching middle school Language Arts, during which time she attended classes to add a Gifted Endorsement to her teaching certificate in addition to classes to earn a Master of Science in Information Sciences from the University of Tennessee. She is currently a happy wife and mother. Her professional aspirations are to serve rural public libraries through management and research opportunities.