

## Education for Music Librarianship

By: [Sonia Archer-Capuzzo](#)

Archer-Capuzzo, S. (2023). Education for Music Librarianship. *Notes*, 80(1), 109-115.  
<https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/not.2023.a905321>

This article was published in the Music Library Association's journal, *Notes* volume 80, issue 1, September 2023, and pages 109-115. The version of record is available at [https://muse.jhu.edu/article/905321#info\\_wrap](https://muse.jhu.edu/article/905321#info_wrap) & <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/not.2023.a905321>. This material may not be copied or reposted without written permission of MLA.

**\*\*\*© Music Library Association. Reprinted with permission. No further reproduction is authorized without written permission from the Music Library Association. This version of the document is not the version of record. Figures and/or pictures may be missing from this format of the document. \*\*\***

### **Abstract:**

In her 2000 essay on music librarianship education, Morrow wrote that "the basic qualifications needed for entry into the music library profession fall into three categories: general library training, music background, and knowledge of the unique issues of a music library."<sup>1</sup> In many ways, this is still the case, though one can argue that each category has become more complex within the last twenty-plus years. Multiple factors have combined to create a music information environment that challenges students, early career professionals, and seasoned veterans alike, including evolving technologies; changes in music and library/information (LIS) curricula; and issues of equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility (EDIA).

**Keywords:** library education | Music librarianship | music librarianship education

### **Article:**

In her 2000 essay on music librarianship education, Morrow wrote that "the basic qualifications needed for entry into the music library profession fall into three categories: general library training, music background, and knowledge of the unique issues of a music library."<sup>1</sup> In many ways, this is still the case, though one can argue that each category has become more complex within the last twenty-plus years. Multiple factors have combined to create a music information environment that challenges students, early career professionals, and seasoned veterans alike, including evolving technologies; changes in music and library/information (LIS) curricula; and issues of equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility (EDIA).

In this essay, I will explore three primary ways in which music librarianship instruction is currently delivered: through 1) classes in LIS programs, 2) practicums/internships, and 3) professional development opportunities for music library professionals.<sup>2</sup> After a brief survey of the literature since Morrow's essay to provide context, I will explore where we are now in music librarianship education and look ahead to the challenges and opportunities that we may face in the future.

Basic introductions to music-specific LIS courses and programs of study can be found in Morrow's 2000 essay in *Notes* and in the music librarianship education chapters in the *Careers*

in *Music Librarianship/Libraries* volumes.<sup>3</sup> Surveying these works shows the evolution of music librarianship education from the late 1990s, when most instruction was done in person and emphasized traditional Western art music education and materials, to the early 2020s when a number of programs offered online courses and were expanding curricula to explore a broader range of musics and materials.

Several articles cover specific aspects of music librarianship education, most notably online course delivery.<sup>4</sup> New topics in LIS education, such as experiential learning (often through internships/practicums), have been discussed among music librarianship instructors for years and are now receiving increasing attention in the literature.<sup>5</sup>

Writings about music librarianship professional development opportunities are less common than those about graduate studies, but there are a few.<sup>6</sup> As with LIS education, they trace a move from in-person delivery of instruction, mainly at professional conferences, to predominantly online delivery available throughout the year.

### Music Librarianship Education Today

In 2000, MLA’s core competencies of music librarians<sup>7</sup> focused primarily on physical collections of Western art music materials in (predominantly academic) libraries. A new list of core competencies was published in 2019, with more emphasis on technology and the diverse music information landscape.<sup>8</sup> As can be seen in Table 1, most of the earlier competencies were simply altered to reflect new priorities, practices, and materials, but a few new ones were added, and in one case, principles of two earlier competencies were combined. The new competencies also acknowledged that music library professionals need varying degrees of proficiency in different areas and so included “basic” and “expert” competency levels (not listed in Table 1).

Table 1: Core Competency Comparison

Core Competencies 2000	Core Competencies 2019
Professional ethos	{Ability to manage and lead}
Training and education	Knowledge of music
Reference and research	{Research support and instructional skills} Access services skills
Collection Development	Knowledge of collection development practices in music
Collection organization	Resource identification, organization, and maintenance skills
Library management	Ability to manage and lead
Information and audio technology and systems	Technology skills
Teaching	{Research support and instructional skills} Knowledge of copyright issues Knowledge of archival standards and practices

{ } indicate that the 2019 competency shares elements with more than one earlier competency.

The changes in the core competencies reflected the dynamic music library and music librarianship education landscapes. Developments in the latter can also be seen by examining course and degree offerings from LIS programs. In 2000, Morrow stated that, of fifty-six

accredited library schools in the United States, twelve offered double, joint, or dual master's degrees in music and librarianship; three schools offered a concentration in music librarianship as part of a library master's degree; and thirty-six offered music librarianship courses or practicums. This was a marked increase from the statistics provided by Young in 1984, when only three United States universities offered joint master's degrees, three offered an MLS with music librarianship specialization, and four offered a course in music librarianship or music bibliography.<sup>9</sup>

As of late 2022, there were sixty-six American Library Association (ALA)-accredited LIS programs in the United States and Canada.<sup>10</sup> Of these, twenty-six were listed in the MLA "Library School Directory" as offering some sort of music librarianship course, practicum, or concentration.<sup>11</sup> Four schools offered a music librarianship concentration as part of the LIS degree, while seven (all in the United States) offered dual degrees in music and LIS. Thirteen schools indicated that they offered courses in music librarianship. Overall, the number of schools where students can expect to study music librarianship to some degree has shrunk over the past twenty years, though there are still far more options than were available in the 1980s. This decrease may be offset by the fact that ten of the institutions listed in the MLA Directory offer at least some courses online, potentially allowing students from other institutions to study music librarianship. Additionally, several schools indicated that they offered workshops (some online) for continuing education in music librarianship, opening up more education opportunities for students and professionals.

In 2000, Morrow discussed the potential of "long distance learning" as a tool with "the capacity to provide instruction on all aspects of music librarianship to a wide-ranging audience."<sup>12</sup> By 2014, Wagstaff profiled several music librarianship courses that were offered fully online, and that number has grown.<sup>13</sup> While a number of challenges exist with online music librarianship courses (e.g., access to physical music library resources),<sup>14</sup> they also offer the opportunity for more students from a variety of locations to study music librarianship and connect with professionals from all over the world.

Music librarianship courses are no longer just for those who wish to become music librarians. Wagstaff grouped his students into two categories, the "dedicated" and the "curious."<sup>15</sup> Many students simply wish to learn more about music materials in libraries and archives. Others wish to be prepared to work with music materials if the opportunity arises as part of a non-music-focused job. For these students, an introductory course might be their only preparation for dealing with complex music materials. For those who wish to be music librarians, these courses can serve as an introduction but will not be sufficient preparation on their own for work in the field.

Experiential learning and mentorship can be even more important to the educational experience of future music library professionals than any single course. Guided experience, such as a practicum, is often the best way for students to learn about complex topics and tasks. Especially since the COVID-19 pandemic began in 2020, what constitutes a practicum has expanded. Students now have more opportunities to do partially or fully online practicums, allowing them to explore music librarianship even if they do not live near a music library. Creating independent study courses is another highly customizable way in which LIS students can learn more about music librarianship, often focusing their studies on a specific area of the field, like cataloging or archives. Finally, mentoring, whether through interactions with music library professionals during practicums, while attending conferences, or in classes, is an essential

part of getting started in the music library field and is made easier by the ability of students to interact with mentors online.

In 2000, Morrow wrote about workshops offered in conjunction with conferences. Today, MLA offers an increasingly varied number of webinars and e-courses throughout the year (many in cooperation with ALA), potentially improving access to educational opportunities in music librarianship for students and professionals alike. By utilizing the online environment, MLA is able to connect experts in the field with those who need training without limiting instruction delivery by location or time (most webinars are recorded for later viewing, and most e-courses are offered asynchronously). However, a monetary hurdle can still prevent some from taking advantage of these opportunities. While potential students are no longer required to travel to receive instruction (an advantage especially for students, early career librarians, and paraprofessionals/staff), not all interested parties can afford to pay registration fees. Thus, while online instruction has broken down a number of barriers to music librarianship education, it has not solved all of the potential problems.

### **Challenges, Opportunities, and the Future**

In the last twenty years, technology has improved our ability to deliver music librarianship instruction across time and space. However, technology has also laid bare the many inequities in music librarianship education, primarily dealing with monetary challenges faced by individuals, institutions, and communities.

Another challenge that we have only just begun grappling with on a wide scale in the music library and music librarianship education communities is that of EDIA in music studies. As music programs begin to diversify their curricula to include more genres created by more diverse musicians, our collections must follow suit. Morrow wrote in 2000 that “today’s aspiring music librarian needs to become knowledgeable about a wider variety of resources and collections than were available in previous decades.”<sup>16</sup> This variety has increased exponentially in the last twenty years, requiring a reevaluation not only of the items in our collections, but also of what music libraries are, how they are used, and whom they should serve.

Music librarianship educators will have to face a number of challenges in the coming years. We will likely need to train music catalogers to organize different musical formats. We will need to focus on how librarians should direct collection development in a changing academic landscape. Our instruction on materials conservation will likely move beyond sewing scores and storing discs to exploring how oral traditions, digital objects, and more can be preserved. Integrating more information about popular music, music technology, and varied types of musical notation will become part of our instruction. Instructors may find inspiration beyond the dominant academic music libraries by investigating public libraries, where the focus has shifted from housing content for passive patron consumption to providing experiences that involve active patron participation and creation. This means that the emphasis moves from providing collections of CDs and books about music to linking patrons with local and global music scenes. This more active participation by patrons could be parlayed into new opportunities in the future, like crowdsourced metadata in a linked data environment, but how we would deal with the new challenges and opportunities presented by this and other advances will need to be addressed in training.

In the future, we may see a shift in priorities in music librarianship instruction. As LIS programs face pressure from universities to fill courses, music librarianship courses will necessarily market themselves to more “curious” students and more students beyond the course’s

home institution. Instructors will have to emphasize transferable skills and broad knowledge of topics to market courses to general students while providing ways for more specialized students to learn more, often through independent studies and practicums. Instructors will likely also find themselves counseling specialized students in the same transferable skills. Market saturation is a very real concern in music librarianship, and while it is crucial that we prepare students for the field, it is also important that we prepare them to work in a wide variety of areas beyond the music specialty.

With the growing availability of professional development online, we may also see a shift in how students prepare to be music library professionals in the future. Rather than depending on a dual degree program, music concentration, or music librarianship course, will future students instead get an LIS degree wherever it is cheapest or most convenient and then simply use professional development opportunities to fill the gaps? Will some students forgo the LIS degree altogether? Music librarianship has changed rapidly over the past twenty years, necessitating frequently updated professional development opportunities in a variety of areas, including collection development, cataloging, and technology. There has been some discussion in MLA about what role the organization could play in providing instruction for professionals and students going forward. Would an MLA certificate in music librarianship become one of the (perhaps cheaper and more accessible) ways people gain and show expertise in the field?

Since 2000, music librarianship education has changed. Morrow's three categories of qualification—general library training, music background, and knowledge of the unique characteristics of music libraries—still apply, but they are more complicated. General library training via an LIS program focuses less on specific materials and more on technology, instruction, and patron experience. As the musics in our libraries expand, so too, I believe, will the general idea of what constitutes a “music background.” Just as a master's in musicology is no longer required for many music librarian positions, it could follow that soon “equivalent experience” to a master's (or even a bachelor's?) in music might be more common.<sup>17</sup> Music libraries, archives, and collections still have many unique aspects, but what those aspects are has changed. For example, many music library professionals spend more time now thinking about local repositories of digital recital recordings and advocating for preservation of streaming audio than about which CDs to purchase.

Much of our instruction has shifted to an online environment, improving access for many but certainly not all. The subjects music librarians must be proficient in have changed and multiplied and will continue to do so as we try to build more just and equitable collections and experiences. The types of materials collected and services provided by music libraries have evolved. These changes have created many challenges for music library professionals, students, and instructors, but they have also provided opportunities many of us did not imagine twenty years ago. I have no doubt that the pace of change will necessitate further reevaluations of music librarianship education over the next twenty years.<sup>18</sup>

### Footnotes

1. Jean Morrow, “Education for Music Librarianship,” *Notes* 56, no.3 (2000); 655.
2. For ease of syntax, I will use the phrase “(music) library professionals” to lump together all those who work in music libraries, music archives, and other music information institutions, whether their institution labels them as “librarian,” “paraprofessional,” or something else.

3. Morrow, "Education for Music Librarianship"; Jean Morrow, "Preparing to be a Music Librarian," in *Careers in Music Librarianship II: Traditions and Transitions*, ed. Paula Elliott and Linda Blair (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2004), 29–39; John Wagstaff, "Training and Education in Music Librarianship," in *Careers in Music Librarianship III: Reality and Reinvention*, ed. Susanna Cleveland and Joe C. Clark (Middleton, WI: Music Library Association and A-R Editions, 2014), 21–48; and Maristella Feustle, "Training and Education of Music Librarians," in *Careers in Music Libraries IV*, ed. Misti Shaw and Susannah Cleveland (Middleton, WI: Music Library Association and A-R Editions, 2022), 83–98.
4. Judith L. Marley, "Education for Music Librarianship within the United States: Needs and Opinions of Graduate/Practitioners," *Fontes Artis Musicae* 49, no. 3 (2002): 139–72; Jennifer Oates, "Music Librarianship Education: Problems and Solutions," *Music Reference Services Quarterly* 8, no. 3 (2004): 1–24; John Wagstaff, "Spreading the Message: Teaching Music Librarianship by Distance-Learning," *Fontes Artis Musicae* 58, no. 2 (2011): 165–76; and Sonia Archer-Capuzzo, "Can You Hear Me? Teaching Music Librarianship Online," *Music Reference Services Quarterly* 20, no. 2 (2017): 91–110.
5. Mallory Sajewski, "Pre-Professional and Co-Curricular Music Library Experiences," in Shaw and Cleveland, *Careers in Music Libraries IV*, 100–14; and Christine Edwards, "Mentor, Mentee: Creating and Sustaining Mutually Beneficial Mentorships," in Shaw and Cleveland, *Careers in Music Libraries IV*, 246–61.
6. Morrow, "Education for Music Librarianship"; Holling Smith-Borne, "The Music Library Association's Educational Outreach Program," *Fontes Artis Musicae* 60, no. 3 (2013): 187–93; Holling Smith-Borne and Mark A. Puente, "Staying Current: Keeping Skills and Knowledge Relevant in a Dynamic Professional Landscape," in Cleveland and Clark, *Careers in Music Librarianship III*, 165–80; and Holling Smith-Borne, "Staying Current," in Shaw and Cleveland, *Careers in Music Libraries IV*, 364–80.
7. Morrow, "Preparing to Be a Music Librarian," 35-38.
8. "Core Competencies for Music Librarians and Music Library Professionals," Music Library Association, 2019, [https://www.musiclibraryassoc.org/resource/resmgr/docs/core\\_competencies\\_2019.pdf](https://www.musiclibraryassoc.org/resource/resmgr/docs/core_competencies_2019.pdf).
9. J. Bradford Young, "Education for Music Librarianship," *Notes* 40, no.3 (1984); 510-28.
10. "Searchable DB of ALA Accredited Programs," American Library Association, accessed 20 December 2022, [https://www.ala.org/cfapps/lisdir/lisdir\\_search.cfm](https://www.ala.org/cfapps/lisdir/lisdir_search.cfm).
11. "Directory of Library School Offerings in Music Librarianship," 11<sup>th</sup> ed., Music Library Association, 2018, <https://www.musiclibraryassoc.org/page/LibSchoolDirectoryI>.
12. Morrow, "Education for Music Librarianship," 659-60.
13. Wagstaff, "Training and Education in Music Librarianship."

14. Feustle, "Training and Education of Music Librarians", 91.
15. Wagstaff, "Training and Education in Music Librarianship," 23
16. Morrow, "Education for Music Librarianship," 657.
17. Based on a survey of the required and preferred qualifications of candidates for jobs listed on MLA's jobs list as of 25 March 2023, this trend looks to already be underway. Of the approximately one dozen jobs listed, most required or preferred an MLIS or equivalent, but only one required a master's in music, two required a bachelor's, two required some sort of music degree, and another seven preferred a music degree or knowledge of music.
18. Thank you to the members of the MLA Music Librarianship Educators Interest Group, especially Karen Berry McCool and Elizabeth Berndt, for their assistance in raising and thinking about many of the issues discussed in this paper.