

Competency Sets of Library Support Staff Certification Program by ALA-APA and Extensive Survey

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We have studied the Library Support Staff Certification Program (LSSCP) developed by American Library Association's Allied Professional Association (ALA-APA). It is a national program for library support staff (LSS) to demonstrate their competencies and become a Certified Library Support Staff.

The program focuses on academic and public libraries as the largest and more homogeneous constituencies of LSS. It consists of three required courses (Foundations of Library Services, Communication and Teamwork, and Technology) and seven elective courses (Access Services, Adult Readers' Advisory Services, Cataloging and Classification, Collections, Reference and Information Services, Supervision and Management, and Youth Services). These seven courses are called competency sets and are supplied with detailed and concrete syllabuses by ALA-APA.

Though these courses are developed with consultation of ALA Library Support Staff Interests Round, ALA Committee on Education, Association of College and Research Libraries, Public Libraries Association and other ALA divisions, we have found that ALA-APA also made an extensive survey of over 3,500 respondents (professionals and LSS in both academic and public libraries) to find out what kinds of opinions they had concerning competencies for LSS.

The survey consists of twelve competency sets: areas of work within libraries that LSS engage in. Three competency sets are general to all library work. The other nine are more functionally specialized. Within each competency set, there are two sets of statements.

One was stated in terms of knowledge: LSS should know X. The other was stated in terms of behavior or skills: LSS should be able to do Y. Over all more than 200 statements were made. For each statement, the rating scale was, (1) “not important”, (2) “important”, and (3) “very important”. As a result of the survey, most items were rated between important and very important; the average rating across all respondents, all items and all areas was 2.42.

Applegate compared these ALA-APA’s competency sets for LSS with a set of competences for MLS professionals. She insists that there are three main points to keep in mind when considering how the competencies relate to each other: scope of application, level of specificity, and fictional or recreational “information.” She also states as follows:

1. Only three LSS competency sets are required of all LSS while the MLS competences are designed for professionals in all libraries and information agencies (not just public or academic), and all are considered important.
2. The two sets have different levels of specificity. LSS competency language tends to be more specific with concrete examples.