ASK ELLEN – what subject for second Masters degree? (guest writer Susanne Markgren)

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Dear Readers, I am very happy to welcome a guest writer for the Q&A today (a first for “Ask Ellen”!):

Susanne Markgren is Digital Services Librarian at Purchase College, SUNY, and is also an adjunct faculty member at Manhattanville College. She is one of the knowledgeable “Library Career People” and writes for their excellent job-hunting and career Q&A blog: http://www.lisjobs.com/careerqa_blog/.

Q: I have a question about the requirement that many academic libraries have in their job postings for a second subject Masters (for tenure or for consideration.) Are some subject areas valued over others? Or does every degree have equal weight? I’m also wondering whether an interdisciplinary or Liberal Studies M.A. is considered a “subject” Masters, and if so, is it also valued in the same way that a degree in Science would be?

A: The answer to this question is… it depends on the job. A certain subject degree can be valued more for a specific job, because that job deals with that specific subject. A library might be looking for a reference and instruction librarian, but that librarian might also need to be a subject specialist in history, or political science, or mathematics. Usually, if a specific subject is preferred, it will be listed in the job ad. If the ad does not specify, but just states “second masters required” or preferred, then no, it shouldn’t matter what subject area that degree is in.

Some subject masters may be in more demand than others, but that doesn’t mean that they hold more weight or are valued over others. My sense is that more librarians have second masters in the humanities (e.g., English Literature, history) than in the sciences (e.g., biology, chemistry), so those who have a second masters in the sciences might have an easier time finding a job where they can use their second masters degree.

An interdisciplinary masters degree is not valued any less, and in fact, may be useful to have because it might provide more exposure to and expertise in multiple subjects, so a job candidate may be able to use it to his/her advantage if a certain job requires a specific subject degree. In relation to promotion and tenure, a second masters degree, as long as it is from an accredited institution, counts as a second masters degree, no matter what subject or discipline it comes from.

If you are contemplating getting a second masters degree, my advice is to go for something that you want to study, something that interests you, and something that you think will be useful to you as a librarian – and this may not be a typical, straightforward subject degree (or it may be).
While many academic tenure-track librarian positions require a second masters degree, some will allow you to get that degree while working at their institution (and they pay for it, or most of it!). This might be something to look into, if you are concerned about footing the bill yourself. These positions will usually state in their job ads that a second masters is required for promotion and tenure. When you apply for these positions, you should say in your cover letter that you are very interested in pursuing a second masters degree. An advantage to getting your second masters degree “on-the-job” (other than financially) is that you may be able to tailor it more to your specific job and the needs of the library. A disadvantage is that you are limited to that institution’s (or system’s) offerings.

Many thanks to Susanne for guest-writing for this Q&A!

More about Susanne here: http://smarkgren.wordpress.com/

Stay tuned for other guest writers, speakers, panelists and more in the months ahead~

FYI: Informative (and snarky and funny and irreverent) blog on resume and job hunting DON'T'S: http://www.resumeroasts.blogspot.com

Thank you,

Ellen Mehling
Director, Westchester Program and Internships
ellen.mehling@liu.edu