



Evidence Summary

Survey of Canadian Academic Librarians Outlines Integration of Traditional and Emerging Services

A Review of:

Ducas, A., Michaud-Oystryk, N., & Speare, M. (2020). Reinventing ourselves: New and emerging roles of academic librarians in Canadian research-intensive universities. *College & Research Libraries*, 81(1), 43–65. <https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.81.1.43>

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Abstract

Objective – To identify new and emerging roles for librarians and understand how those new roles impact their confidence, training needs, and job satisfaction. To understand how librarians conceptualize the impact of these new roles on the academic enterprise.

Design – Electronic survey.

Setting – Academic research libraries at Canadian research-intensive universities.

Subjects – 205 academic librarians.

Methods – An electronic survey was distributed to all librarians working at the 15 research-intensive universities in Canada. Archivists were included in this population, but senior administrators, such as university librarians, deans, and associate administrators, were not included. The 38-question survey was produced in English and French. Five focus areas for emerging skills were drawn from the literature and a review of job postings. Librarians were asked about their participation in particular activities associated with the different focus areas and about their training and confidence in those areas. The survey was sent to 743 librarians and had a 27% response rate with a total of 205 complete responses.

Librarians participated from each of the 15 research universities and institutional response rates ranged from 14% to 51%. Survey Monkey was used to distribute the online survey. Cronbach's alpha was used to measure reliability for each section of the survey and ranged from .735 in the confidence area to .934 in the job satisfaction area, indicating sufficient internal consistency. The data were analyzed using SPSS and RStudio.

Main Results – In the general area of research support, a majority (75%) of participants reported that they provided information discovery services like consultations and literature reviews, 28% engaged in grant application support, 27% provided assistance with systematic reviews, 26% provided bibliometric services, and 23% provided data management services. In the teaching and learning area, 78% of participants provided classroom teaching to students, 75% provided one-on-one instruction, 48% created tutorials, 47% taught workshops for faculty, and 43% conducted copyright consultations. Only around half of participants offered digital scholarship services, and copyright consultations were the most frequently offered service in this area, with 36% of participants indicating that they offered this service. The area of user experience had the highest number of respondents, and the top services offered in this area included liaison services for staff and faculty (87%), library services assessment (46%), and student engagement initiatives (41%). In the scholarly communication area, 49% of respondents indicated that they provided consultation on alternative publishing models, including open access, and 41% provided copyright and intellectual property services.

The majority of librarians were confident that they could perform their duties in the five focus areas. Teaching and learning had the highest confidence rate, with 75% of respondents indicating that they felt confident or very confident in their roles. Digital scholarship had the lowest confidence rating, with only 50% indicating that they felt confident or very confident about these roles. The survey also asked participants about their

training and skills acquisition in the five areas. Most participants indicated that they acquired these skills through professional work experience and self-teaching. Based on the calculations from the survey focusing on participation in new and traditional roles, 13% of librarian participants performed only new roles, 44% performed only traditional roles, and 44% performed some new and some traditional roles. Additionally, 45% of librarians spent the majority of their time delivering traditional services, 19% delivering new services, and 36% dividing their time between new and traditional services. Job satisfaction and new or traditional roles were also examined, and statistically significant results indicated that librarians performing new roles were more satisfied with assigned duties ($p = 0.009084$), more satisfied with opportunities for challenge ($p = 0.02499$), and less satisfied with opportunities for independent action ($p = 0.02904$). Librarians performing new roles perceived a higher impact on scholarly communication ($p = 0.02621$) and supporting researchers ($p = 0.0002126$) than those performing traditional roles. Librarians performing new roles perceived a lower impact on contributing to student success ($p = 0.003686$) and supporting teaching and learning at the classroom level ($p = 0.01473$) than librarians performing traditional roles.

Conclusion – Results demonstrate that librarians are still engaged in traditional roles, but new roles are emerging particularly in the areas of copyright and publishing, bibliometrics, online learning initiatives, and new communication strategies. Job satisfaction and confidence in these roles are similar between traditional and emerging roles. Overall, participants felt that they had a significant impact on the academic enterprise when performing new or traditional roles but that the roles had different areas of impact. This study is meant to be a baseline for future investigations in the trends and developments of roles for Canadian librarians. The survey and data are available from the University of Manitoba's Dataverse repository: <https://doi.org/10.5203/FK2/RHOFFU>

Commentary

This study focuses on the new and emerging roles for Canadian academic librarians. The results represent a strong foundation of traditional library services, services that have evolved to meet emerging needs, and newly developed services that expand the role of the library. Though librarians reported feeling confident and satisfied by both new and traditional roles, the free response section of the survey demonstrates a diversity of opinions about the role of new services in the work of academic libraries. Some comments emphasized the importance of specialization and expertise in librarianship, while others advocated for greater institutional integration and collaboration within and beyond the library. The comments are aligned with the issues around hybrid roles in libraries raised by Cox and Corral (2013).

The survey population included librarians at the 15 research-intensive universities in Canada. The survey collected data from 27% of the eligible population. The respondents represented all 15 universities and had diverse specializations and a range of experience levels. While the small population size and lack of randomization mean that the study is not broadly generalizable, the population is sufficient to meet the goals of the researchers in establishing a baseline for librarians' roles in Canadian academic universities that further studies can develop. The instrument and results have been published open access to facilitate this process. Glynn (2006) notes that publishing the instrument is critical to replication.

Because of the broad goals of this study, the questions and results focus on a diversity of service types in academic libraries. The researchers endeavored toward straightforward language, though terms for new service strategies may have been novel for some participants, particularly in the research support area, which filtered on service classification before asking participants to select the service action. Interviews or work time studies might expand on this research to help develop a deeper understanding of how

librarians divide time between new and traditional roles. While this study focused only on research institutions, future research may want to address libraries of other types or focus on the experiences of librarians through qualitative methods.

This study is important both for establishing an understanding of emerging and developing roles for academic librarians and how these roles are applied in libraries. This study found that 44% of librarians provided both traditional and emerging services and that librarians predominantly learned new roles through self-study and on-the-job practice. This indication of the complexity and continuous development of academic library roles is intriguing, and further research into the way librarians manage this process may help stakeholders support this development toward the library roles of the future. This study may be of particular use to library administrators developing and supporting librarians in providing emerging services.

References

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