

THE IMPACT OF BUDGET CUTS ON COLORADO ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

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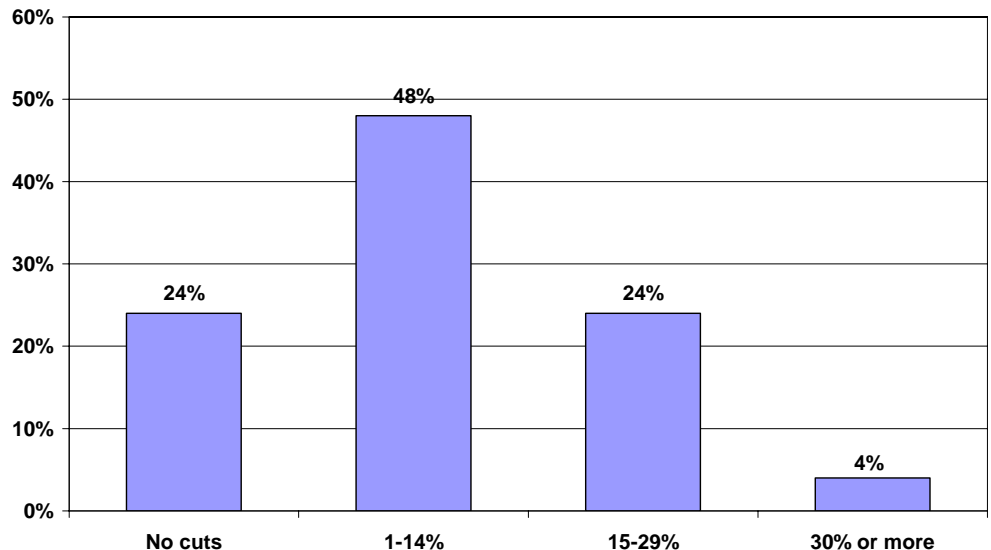
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Colorado's libraries have been heavily hit by budget cuts that have coincided with a generally grim economy the last few years. Academic libraries have felt a greater impact than those in other sectors.

In all, twenty-five of thirty-three libraries in public or non-profit colleges or universities in Colorado responded to the survey. Eighteen of these reported direct financial budget cuts of some sort since July 1, 2002. The total amount lost by these eighteen libraries was \$4,676,991, or an average of over \$250,000 for each affected library. Obviously, some libraries lost much more than that – with three reporting cuts upwards of one million dollars – and many reported smaller cuts. Given the range of library budgets, it is

probably more appropriate to look at the percent of budgets that are being cut. Chart 1 shows that over three-quarters of academic libraries reported budget cuts at some level. Over one-quarter of them reported cuts representing over 15 percent of their total budgets.

Chart 1: Percentage of Academic Libraries Reporting Budget Cuts, by Size of Cut



Public service hours and staffing levels at academic libraries have been severely reduced. Twelve of the twenty-five responding libraries reported that their libraries are open fewer hours due to budget cuts. These libraries are now open 105 fewer weekly hours than they were on July 1, 2002, an average of nearly nine hours less service per library, per week. Seven academic libraries have reported losing 12 full-time library

We lost approximately 1/4 of our budget for materials and lost one library position (out of 2) with no plans to replace that position this year.
- Trinidad State Junior College

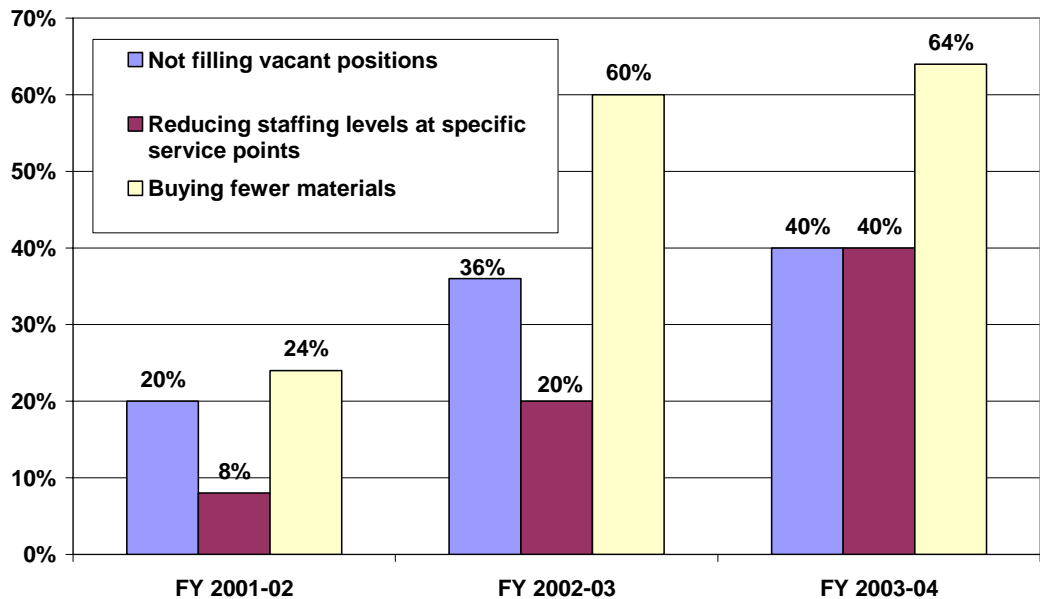
positions – nearly two positions per affected library. In addition, 30 full-time non-librarian positions have been cut from eight of the responding libraries – representing nearly 4 full-time staff members from each library.

In addition to reduced service hours, academic libraries are using several methods to attempt to defray the impact of budget cuts. Chart 2 illustrates the rising use of three

specific strategies: leaving vacant positions open, reducing staffing at service points, and buying fewer materials. All three of these strategies were used more often in fiscal year 2002-03 than in the previous year, and more often still in 2003-04, to the point that at least 40 percent of academic libraries are using each strategy. Most dramatic is the fact that for FY 2003-04 nearly

two-thirds of responding academic libraries purchased fewer materials in an attempt to save money, compared with only 24 percent using this strategy in 2001-02. Two-fifths of academic libraries have reduced staffing levels at specific service points, and the same amount left vacant positions unfilled in 2003-04.

Chart 2: Percentage of Academic Libraries Using Specific Strategies, by Fiscal Year



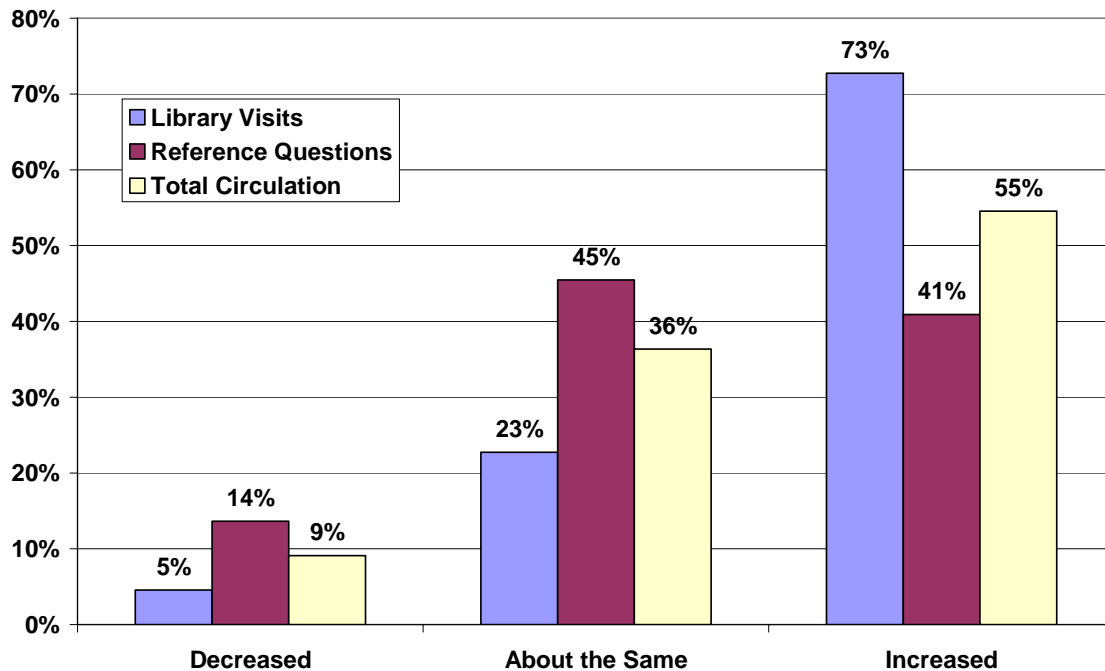
It is significant to note that staffing is being reduced at specific service points, particularly in light of the fact that academic libraries are reporting that library usage is continuing to rise. When asked to indicate changes in specific statistics, large percentages of academic libraries reported that three significant service statistics are on the rise (see Chart 3). The number of library visits has increased for nearly three-fourths of academic libraries, while only five percent reported a decrease in this number. Reference questions are being posed at the

Librarians and support staff are feeling the stress of wanting and needing to provide more but are spread very thin. We are making more use of volunteers and cross training is common.
- Auraria Library

same rate or higher in 86 percent of academic libraries, and more than half of the academic libraries surveyed reported higher circulation than in previous years, with fewer than ten percent claiming drops in circulation.

Nonetheless, it is important to note that a significant number of respondents did cite decreases in these areas. Perhaps most notable is the fact that only five percent of academic libraries responded that their number of library visits was down, but nearly three times as many said that their reference questions have decreased over the last few years. Also, nine percent reported dips in total circulation. Similarly, a much larger percentage of



Chart 3: Percentage of Academic Libraries Reporting Trends in Library Outputs

libraries reported an increase in visits than in the other two areas. These statistics suggest a change in usage patterns of academic libraries – apparently students are still coming through the doors, but they are doing more at the library than checking out books and asking questions. Likely possibilities include increasing reliance upon non-circulating items and electronic resources, two types of library usage for which there are little or no statistics.

In addition to the budget cuts of 5.3% we have realized an increase in student enrollment of 30% without resources to support the extra students.

- UCCS Kramer Library

Increase in library usage is generally a positive for the libraries providing the services, but it can be a disturbing trend when this jump in library outputs (circulation, visits, reference questions) is combined with declines in library inputs (staffing, service hours, materials). It will be difficult for academic libraries to continue to provide the high level of output service that they have traditionally offered without financial backing. Sadly, that backing is tending to look more tenuous by the day.

For more information on library cuts in Colorado, see <http://www.lrs.org/closer.asp> and http://www.lrs.org/documents/fastfacts/202_budget_cuts.pdf.

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