

LIBRARIANSHIP IN COLORADO ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

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Retirement, Retention, and Recruitment: The Future of Librarianship in Colorado, a recent study conducted by the LRS, asked 1,241 respondents from around the state about their jobs, their libraries, and their career plans. This issue of Fast Facts examines the data provided by the 91 academic librarian respondents – defined as those having a Master of Library Science degree (MLS) or equivalent and working in a Colorado college or university library.

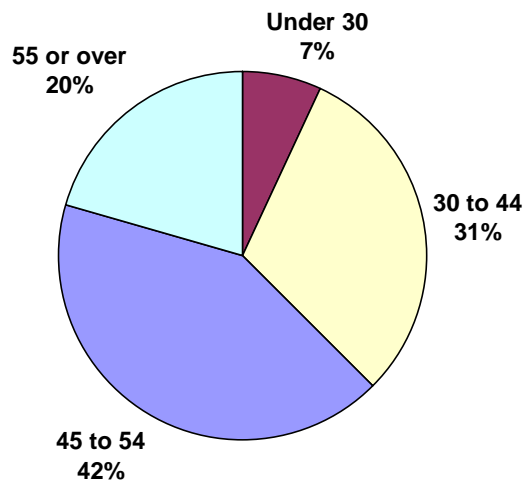
Given the distribution of colleges and universities around the state, it is not surprising that the majority of academic librarian respondents resided in the metropolitan areas along the Front Range. Nine out of ten indicated they lived in a metropolitan area (90%) and more than 4 out of 5 lived along the Front Range (87%). The mountains and Western Slope account for 10 percent of respondents and the Eastern Plains for 3 percent.

Proportionally, academic respondents were slightly younger than librarian respondents from other types of libraries with 7 percent

Highlights from Academic Librarian Respondents

- More than 1 in 3 were under 45.
- 1 in 3 have more than 20 years experience working in a library.
- 2 in 3 worked or volunteered in a library or school prior to pursuing a library degree.
- Over 4 in 5 indicated they had served in a professional leadership role(s) in the last five years.
- More than half said service to others and/or intellectual challenge made librarianship an attractive profession.
- 9 in 10 cited “low financial compensation” as a factor discouraging potential librarians.
- Almost 1 in 2 indicated that salaries or benefits had been frozen or cut at their workplace in the last year.

Chart 1
Colorado Academic Librarian Respondents - Distribution by Age



under 30 years of age and 31 percent ages 30 to 44. That means well over one-third of academic librarian respondents were under 45. However, it also means approximately two-thirds were age 45 or older. The largest group was 45 to 54 years old with 2 in 5 reporting being in this age range. (See Chart 1.)

Academic librarians responding to the survey are retiring in smaller numbers than librarian respondents from other types of libraries. Only 1 in 10 said they were planning to retire in the next five years. This is consistent with this being a comparatively younger group of respondents.



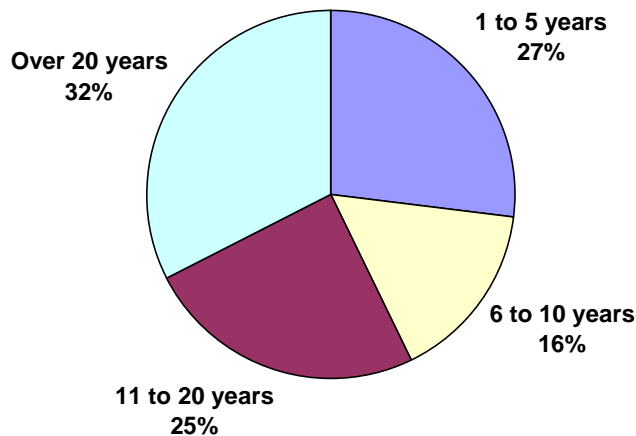
Respondents in this group were more likely than other librarians responding to the survey to be male. One in five respondents in this group were male, whereas about 1 in 15 school and public librarian respondents were male. Approximately 1 in 8 respondents from special libraries were male. (See Table 1.)

Table 1
Colorado Academic Librarian Respondents –
Gender of Librarian Respondents by Type of Library

| Type of Library | Female | Male |
|-----------------|--------|------|
| Academic | 79% | 21% |
| Public | 93% | 7% |
| School | 94% | 6% |
| Special | 88% | 12% |

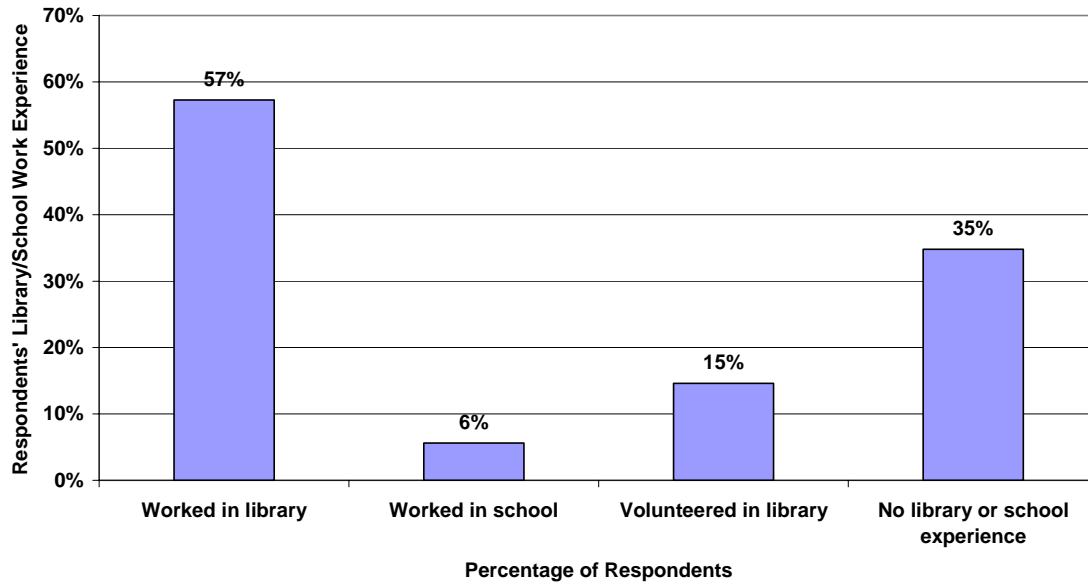
Almost 1 in 3 academic librarians (32%) responding to the survey had more than 20 years experience working in a library. Another 1 in 4 had 11 to 20 years library work experience (25%). Perhaps reflecting the relative youth of these respondents, the second largest group had 1 to 5 years experience (27%). (See Chart 2.)

Chart 2
Colorado Academic Librarian Respondents -
Distribution by Years of Library Employment



Two-thirds of respondents indicated that they had worked or volunteered in a library or school prior to pursuing an MLS or equivalent library credential (i.e., 35% had no library or school experience). Predictably, well over half had worked in a library before pursuing a library credential (57%), whereas only 1 in 17 had worked in a school (6%). (See Chart 3.)

Chart 3
Colorado Public Librarian Respondents - Work Experience Prior to Pursuing a Graduate Degree in Library Science or a School Library Media Endorsement



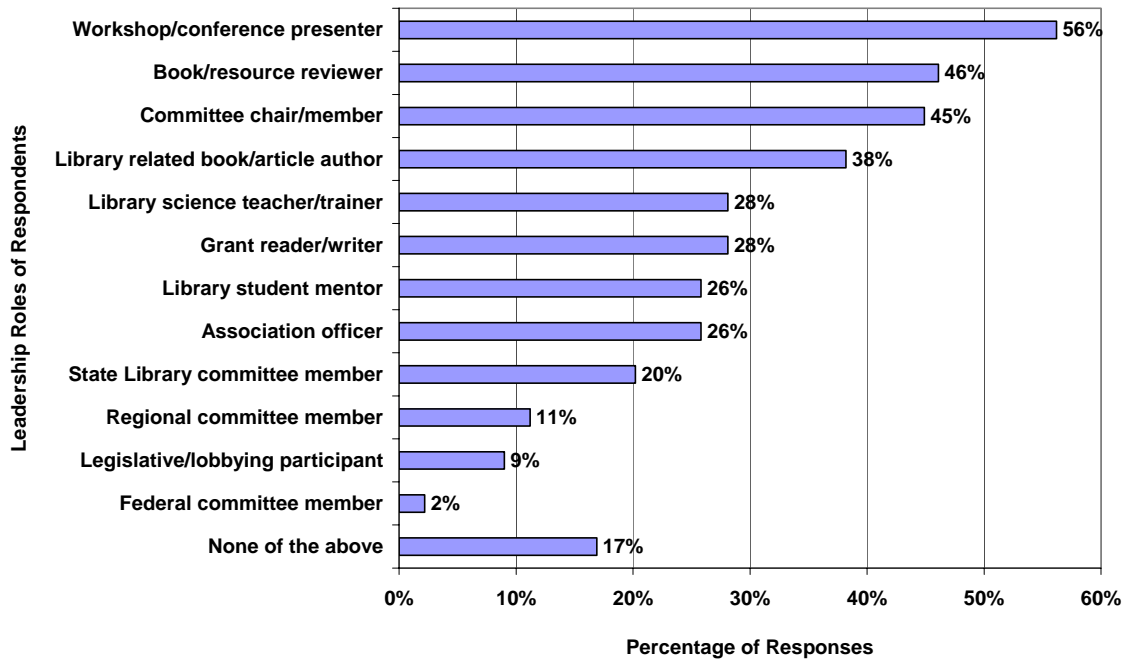
Academic librarian respondents are particularly active in their profession. More than 4 out of 5 indicated they had served in a professional leadership role in the last five years (i.e., 17% marked none of the above). Well over half had been a workshop or conference presenter (56%). In addition, close to half had been a book/resource reviewer (46%) and/or a committee chair/member (45%). Undoubtedly driven somewhat by the publish or perish requirement of tenured faculty, more than a third of these survey respondents said they had authored a library-related book or article (38%). (See Chart 4.)

Librarianship has a future in Colorado, but some positions will be threatened by employers who are willing to accept lower levels of performance for lower pay to address budget problems. Librarians have been relatively successful demonstrating that their libraries make a difference, but haven't always done a good job of demonstrating that they themselves make a difference. That needs to change.

– Academic Librarian



Chart 4
Colorado Academic Librarian Respondents -
Professional Leadership Roles



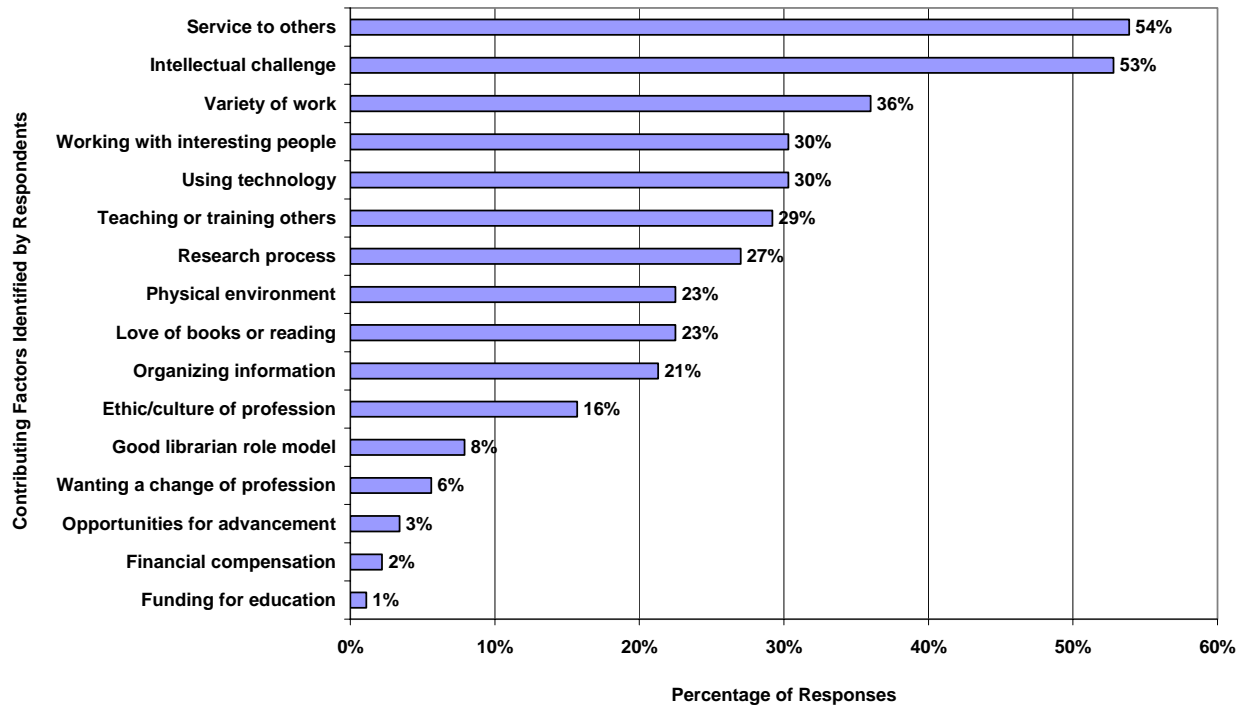
More than half of academics found service to others (54%) and intellectual challenge (53%) factors that make librarianship an attractive profession – well ahead of other factors. Over a third indicated variety of work (36%). Interestingly, only 23 percent indicated love of books or reading, close to half the percentage for all responding librarians combined (42%). (See Chart 5.)

“I think being a librarian in the state of Colorado is an exciting position to be in. From an academic standpoint the future is all about technology and online education.”
 – Academic Librarian

“We need to get the message across to younger people that librarianship is an exciting and challenging field.”
 – Academic Librarian



Chart 5
Colorado Academic Librarian Respondents -
Factors That Make Librarianship an Attractive Profession



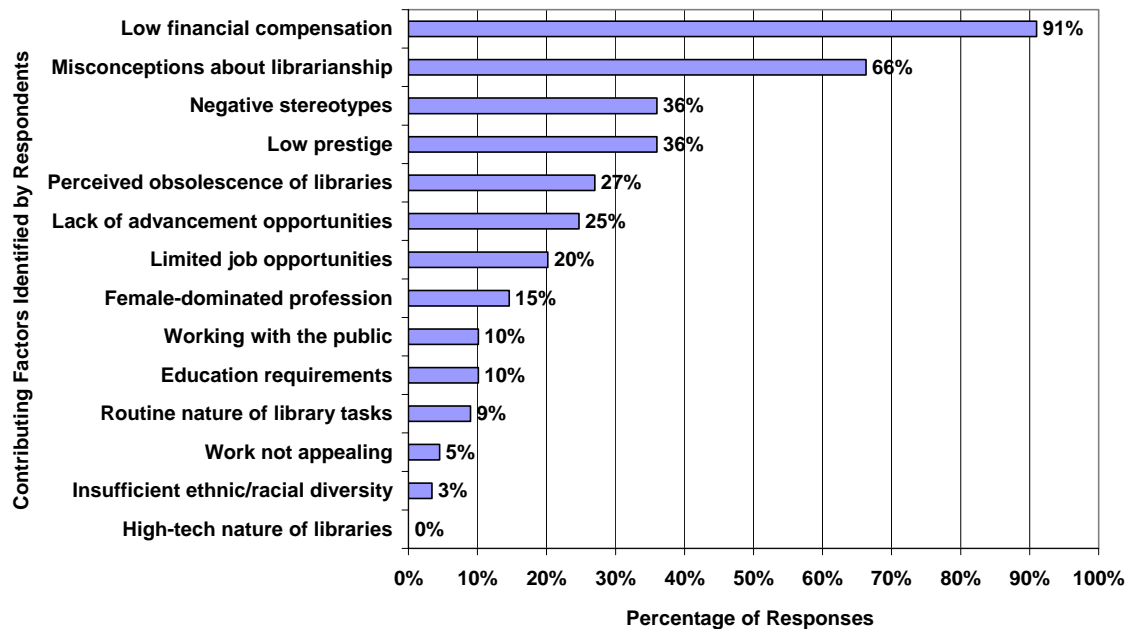
Overwhelmingly, academic librarian respondents indicated low financial compensation as a factor discouraging potential librarians. In fact, 9 out of 10 academics cited this factor, whereas 3 out of 4 librarian respondents from all library types chose it. Two-thirds of academic respondents said misconceptions about librarianship (66%) and one-third cited low prestige (36%) and/or negative stereotypes (36%) as discouraging factors. None of the factors related to the work itself or the lack of diversity among staff were cited in significant numbers. (See Chart 6.)

We need strong marketing of the critical importance of libraries and librarians in our technological society. If the perception of our value and our expertise increases, then it will help us gain more appropriate compensation... We have numerous obstacles to overcome. One obstacle is that only a small percentage of the public avail themselves of our services. Another is that people take libraries for granted, like they do water and electrical service.

– Academic Librarian



Chart 6
Colorado Academic Librarian Respondents -
Factors that Discourage a Career in Librarianship



The majority of academic librarians answering the survey said they had no change of plans (55%) when asked how the economic downturn had affected their careers. Similarly, staying in their current library job was chosen by 1 in 3 respondents (32%). Plans to retire later was indicated by 1 in 7 respondents (14%). (See Table 2.)

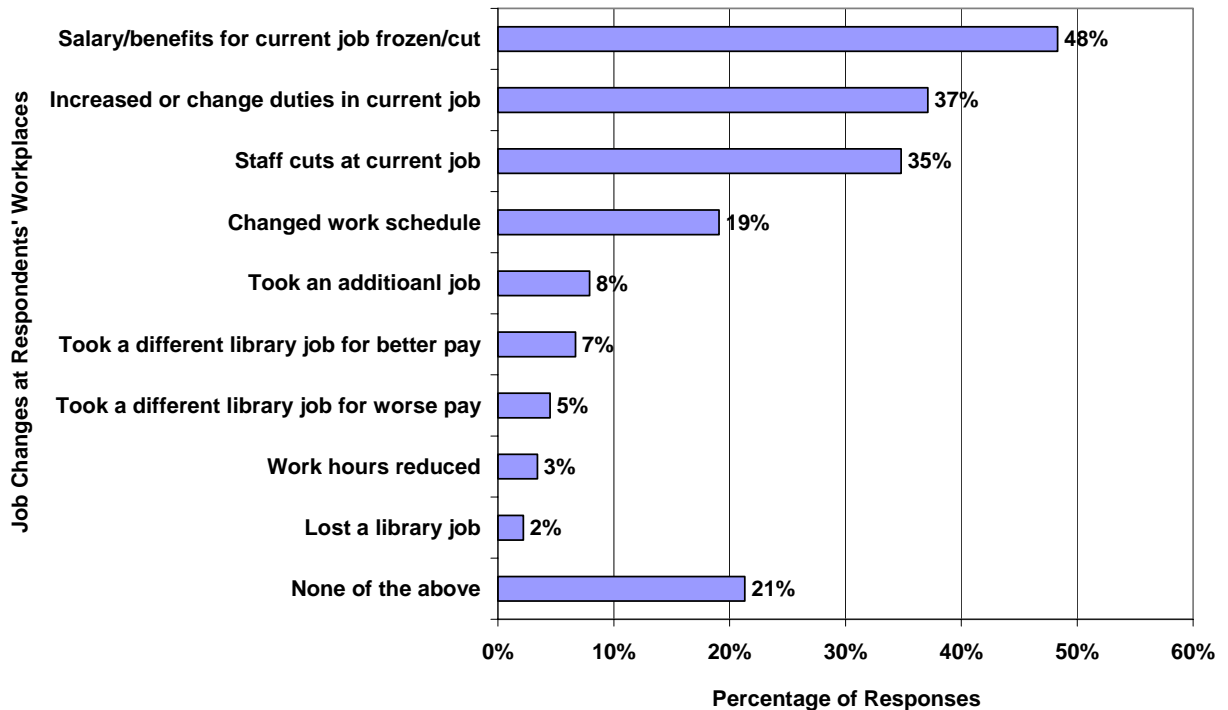
Table 2
Colorado Academic Librarian Respondents –
Affects of the Economic Downturn on Respondents’ Career Plans

| | |
|---|-----|
| No change of plans | 55% |
| Stay in current library job | 32% |
| Retire later | 14% |
| Seek another library job | 5% |
| Retire earlier | 2% |
| Leave the library field | 1% |
| Return to school for non-library degree | 1% |
| Retrain in different library specialty | 0% |
| Return for MLS or media endorsement | 0% |

When asked about the changes in their workplaces in the last year, almost half of respondents indicated that salaries or benefits had been frozen or cut (48%). Over one-third had experienced an increase or change in job duties (37%) and/or staff cuts (35%). It can be surmised that at least some of these changes can be attributed to the funding cuts experienced at colleges and universities in Colorado. One in five of these respondents indicated none of the changes listed (21%). (See Chart 7.)



Chart 7
Colorado Academic Librarian Respondents -
Changes at Their Workplaces in the Last Year



The academic librarian respondents were a slightly younger group and were planning to retire in smaller numbers than those from other library types. They were more apt to be male than their counterparts from other types of libraries and they were very active in their profession. Many found librarianship appealing because of the service to others and the intellectual challenge of the work. Conversely, they overwhelmingly felt low financial compensation was a factor that discourages potential librarians.

Although not retiring in the high proportions of respondents from other types of libraries, academic librarians will undoubtedly face the same recruitment issues as their colleagues. It seems clear that the work librarians do is appealing to this group; however, the pay and benefits are not. In addition to feeling poorly compensated, these respondents felt that librarians and their work were not accurately perceived by potential new recruits into the profession.

The complete report, *Retirement, Retention, and Recruitment: The Future of Librarianship in Colorado*, can be found at LRS.org.

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