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Assessing the Professional Development Needs of Distance Librarians in Academic Libraries

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Abstract

Professional development is essential for academic librarians to keep current with skills, knowledge, and competencies in rapidly changing times. The authors surveyed distance librarians in academic libraries to determine their professional development needs. Respondents were asked to indicate which professional development activities they are currently participating in and those they are likely to engage in within the next five years. Findings from the survey will inform library administrators, distance librarians, and professional associations of the professional development needs of distance librarians.

Introduction

The *ACRL Statement on Professional Development* (2000) affirmed that professional development is essential for academic librarians to keep current with skills, knowledge, and competencies in rapidly changing times*.* That effort is a shared responsibility among individual librarians, library institutions, and professional associations (ACRL, 2000). When the Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL) surveyed its members in 2000, responses revealed that librarians consider professional development to be very important, and that ACRL members also seek professional development opportunities from other library organizations (Cast & Cary, 2001). When ACRL began its strategic planning process in 2003, the organization again sought input

from division members. Input obtained from focus groups, surveys, phone interviews, and leadership council sessions indicated that professional development was the service that ACRL members value the most (Petrowski, 2004).

The ACRL Statement on Professional Development sets a context for change: "Technology is reshaping the world of learning and of scholarly communication, and the effects on academic and research librarians are profound" (ACRL, 2000, p. 933). To address these multiple changes, academic librarians face learning new skills and knowledge to perform their jobs.

Distance librarian Burich observed, "As new technologies are introduced, often it is the distance learning community that first incorporates them into its instructional delivery options" (2004, p. 32). The *Guidelines for Distance Learning Library Services* briefly mention the concept of professional development in the Personnel section, by stating that the higher education institution should provide "opportunities for continuing growth and development… including continuing education, professional education, and participation in professional and staff organizations" (ACRL, 2004, Personnel section, para. 2). The authors of this study wanted to know, what are the professional needs of distance librarians? This question formed the basis of the authors' investigation. Findings from the study will inform library administrators, distance librarians, and professional associations of the professional development needs of distance librarians at the present time and anticipated needs within the next five years.

Literature Review

While the library literature includes numerous articles on professional development for librarians, many of the articles provide an overview of the topic, offer suggestions to practicing librarians, or focus on the needs of tenure-track librarians. Although many articles are research based, an empirically based study of distance librarians' professional development needs, to the authors' knowledge, has not been addressed.

Stone (1969), in a seminal study on professional development of librarians, looked at factors that motivate librarians to pursue professional development after receiving their graduate degree. Stone examined factors that are both most important and those that are deterrents to professional development activities. She surveyed library school graduates from the classes of 1956 and 1961, with final data based on returns from 138 librarians. The Stone study addressed respondents' activities to upgrade their "knowledge, abilities, competencies and understanding in [their] field of work or specialization," (p. 21) particularly from the aspect of an individual's motivation to develop professionally.

Havener and Stolt (1994) examined the topic from the perspective of whether formal institutional support made a difference in the extent to which professional development was sought. The authors studied data from a 1991 survey of academic librarians in Oklahoma. White (2001) discussed how professional development activities benefit reference librarians, particularly those in tenure-leading positions. The article by Flatley and Weber (2004) enumerated a variety of professional development opportunities that new academic librarians might consider. An article by Jones (2002) offered advice to novice distance librarians, based on the results from queries Jones posted on two distance education-related listservs. Practicing distance librarians suggested a number of professional development opportunities.

Methodology

For the purposes of this research study, the authors used the following definition of professional development:

> [the] further study undertaken during employment by a person trained and educated in a profession, sometimes at the initiative of the employer but also through voluntary attendance at conferences, workshops, seminars, or enrollment in postgraduate courses, particularly important in professions that have a rapidly changing knowledge base. (Reitz, 2004, P section, para. professional development)

The authors' research is based on a survey of distance librarian practitioners currently employed in academic libraries. The research questions included: What professional development opportunities do distance librarians seek? What unmet professional development needs do distance librarians have? What challenges do distance librarians face in obtaining professional development? What knowledge or skill sets will distance librarians need in the next five years?

The authors identified activities that fall broadly under the concept of professional development. The survey instrument consisted of 11 questions, some with multiple parts. Six questions were partially close-ended, offering the opportunity to mark suggested responses. Five questions were completely open-ended. All but two of the questions provided an option for respondents to expand their answer or add comments.

The survey was submitted to the University's Institutional Review Board for required approval. Following approval, survey questions were formatted using Flashlight Online software to create the test instrument. The authors pre-tested the survey and cover letter with five librarians from three different units within the libraries. The librarians had different academic backgrounds and a range of years of experience in libraries.

An e-mail message was sent to OFFCAMP, an electronic discussion list-serv for distance librarians, on November 14, 2005. As of that date there were 657 registrants on OFFCAMP. While the majority of OFFCAMP registrants are from North America, particularly the United States, a number of other countries are also represented. The e-mail message consisted of a cover letter outlining the research and inviting distance librarians in academic libraries to participate in the study. The message provided a deadline date for completing the survey, which could be accessed via a Web link from the e-mail message. A reminder e-mail was sent prior to the deadline. A final message was sent to the listserv stating that the deadline date had been extended. The survey was closed as of December 1, 2005.

The survey was anonymous as it did not ask questions that could identi-fy individuals, institutions, or e-mail addresses. When each Web survey was submitted, the data was sent to a secure server operated by Flashlight On-line. Both raw and compiled data were collected and made available to the re-searchers. The researchers later analyzed the raw data.

Results

In response to the e-mail message seeking participation in the survey, 103 surveys were submitted through the Flashlight Online Web link. Below are the questions asked in the survey and answer results. Many respondents used the comments box to expand on their responses. A synopsis of these com-ments is included, with the occasional quote.

Q1. What percentage of your current job duties relates to distance library services?

The portion of job duties relating to distance library services ranges wide-ly among the respondents. The most frequent responses in descending order were 25% (15), 50% (13), 100% (12), 60% (9), 90% (8), and 20% (8).

At the low end, two respondents indicated 5%, two indicated 10%, and six indicated 15% of their job is distance library services. The range of answers ran from 0% (one response) to 100% (12 responses), with 54% as the average.

Q2. Job Duties – Mark all that apply to your current distance librarian job duties.

34	Circulation functions
64	Collection development
47	Document delivery
64	Electronic resources
82	Instructional design (such as tutorials or course modules)
92	Library instruction
98	Reference
81	Web page design/updating

The most frequently noted job duties are reference and library instruc-tion. Nearly all of the respondents (95%) indicated that reference activities are included as part of their distance librarian duties. Five individuals mention participating in virtual reference or coordinating reference services. Eighty-nine percent noted duties related to library instruction. Two reported that they sometimes travel to off-campus sites for library instruction. Several teach col-lege classes. One librarian teaches three subject-specific classes for under-graduate and graduate students, while another has served as instructor for an asynchronous credit course in information literacy.

Distance librarians' work often involves electronic resources, instructional design, or Web page design/updating. Eighty percent of respondents reported job duties related to instructional design, while 79% perform Web page design or updating for distance learners. Sixty-two percent reported duties associated with electronic resources. One librarian has a number of job responsibilities--EZ Proxy support and maintenance, federated search set up and rollout, and End Note distribution, instruction, and support.

 Collection development in support of distance learners is an activity re-ported by 62% of respondents. Nine librarians indicated that they serve as liai-sons or subject specialists. Several are subject specialists for business, educa-tion, and forensic sciences. Not surprisingly, some stated that they are liaisons to their campus unit involving continuing education or services for distance students. One individual is liaison for the courseware systems management groups on campus.

Some respondents indicated that their job duties for distance learners in-cluded document delivery or circulation functions. Slightly fewer than half indicated their position included document delivery for distant learners, and one-third noted circulation activities.

Eighteen respondents replied that their job duties included marketing or outreach functions. Librarians reported mail and e-mail communication to stu-dents and in-person contact with students at off-campus sites. Other job duties can include outreach activities with distance faculty, administrative staff, and the community. One person reported communication with students, faculty, the campus distance learning unit, IT staff, Web designers, and other academ-ic librarians around the state. Others indicated membership on campus com-mittees, attendance at relevant meetings, and advocacy promotion activities related to distance education.

There were 59 optional comments. Survey respondents reported other job duties beyond typical distance librarians. Some duties are managerial in nature, such as department chair, head of a branch library, and supervisor of other distance librarians. One respondent also serves as library director. Several librarians mentioned administrative duties such as strategic planning, accreditation and licensure issues, budgetary responsibilities, and policy development for extended library services. The occasional specialized duty includes faculty professional development and copyright specialist for the library.

Q3. For how many years have your job duties involved library services to distance learners?

Answers to this question ranged from a low of three months to a high of 30 years.

Respondents average six years of job duties that include library services to distance learners, while the mean equals five years. The most frequent responses were 1, 2, 4, and 5 years. One respondent had been on the job for three months, another for four months.

Years followed by numbers of responses:

1 (9)	1.5 (1)	2 (12)	3 (7)	4 (12)	4.5 (1)
5 (15)	5.5 (4)	6 (7)	7 (3)	8 (7)	9 (2)
10 (6)	11 (3)	12 (1)	12.5 (1)	13 (1)	14–15 (2)
16 (1)	17 (2)	18 —	19 (1)	20 (1)	30 (1)

Q4. Type of institution in which you are currently employed.

45	Research university
39	Four-year college or university
8	Community college
3	Medical or special library
8	Other

Most distance librarians are currently employed at research universities (44%) or four-year colleges or universities (38%). In addition, eight respondents (7%) indicated they work at community colleges, while three respondents are employed at medical or special libraries. Only eight individuals stated they work in other types of institutions.

There were 27 open-ended comments. Some of the comments specified private college, religious affiliation, small state university, Canadian university, and large, private Mexican university. One individual reported working for a university system and not for a specific library. Another is employed by a community college district that provides distance learning space to six ma-

jor state universities offering undergraduate and graduate degrees. One librarian serves students from three institutions--research university, four-year college, and community college.

Q5. How important have the following been in addressing your professional development needs as a distance librarian?

Professional journal articles
42 Essential   45 Important   15 Somewhat Important   1 Not Important

Professional monographs
10 Essential   43 Important   37 Somewhat Important   11 Not Important

Listserv targeting distance librarians (such as OFFCAMP)
51 Essential   42 Important   9 Somewhat Important   0 Not Important

Distance Learning conferences (such as the Off-Campus Library Services Conference)
45 Essential   36 Important   17 Somewhat Important   4 Not Important

Workshops or staff development programs offered by your library
 9 Essential   23 Important   36 Somewhat Important   33 Not Important

Workshops offered by your college or university
6 Essential   30 Important   40 Somewhat Important   26 Not Important

Library/Information Science classes taken before completing your Master's degree program
3 Essential   21 Important   30 Somewhat Important   47 Not Important

Library/Information Science classes taken after completing your Master's degree program [If not applicable, leave blank]
5 Essential   14 Important   10 Somewhat Important   28 Not Important

College or university classes
3 Essential   11 Important   25 Somewhat Important   50 Not Important

One half of all respondents considered listservs targeting distance librarians to be essential in addressing their professional development needs. Overall, listservs received the highest ratings with 91% of respondents stating that they are either essential or important to them. Nine percent rated listservs as somewhat important. No respondents considered listservs as unimportant for professional development. The ratings are likely influenced by the fact that the survey was solicited via listserv.

Eighty-five percent of distance librarians who responded to the survey reported that professional journal articles are essential or important for their

professional development. One librarian reported reading business literature, especially management journals, and articles and monographs on leadership.

Forty-three percent of respondents rated monographs as important, 37% as somewhat important, and only 10% as essential. One librarian reported reading not only books but also dissertations and education documents found in ERIC. It appears that monographs may not be as important as journal articles to distance librarians.

Seventy-nine percent of respondents viewed distance learning conferences as being essential (44%) or important (35%) in addressing their professional development needs. One librarian said, "Unfortunately, I have not been able to travel to any of the off campus library services conferences due to poor travel funding. However, I hope to go to the one in 2006. I think conferences would be extremely helpful!" Others reported attendance at regional conferences or conferences and workshops offered by state library associations. One librarian noted that the Association of Christian Librarians' annual conference often has workshops pertinent to distance library services. Another respondent reported finding the programs and discussions at ALA conferences useful. One individual stated that reading conference papers is a way to keep current.

Survey respondents did not find workshops as useful in meeting professional development needs in comparison to listservs, professional literature, and distance learning conferences. Workshops, whether offered by the library or the university, were rated essential or important by only one third of the librarians. One fourth indicated that workshops offered by their university are not important in addressing their professional development needs, while one third stated that those offered by their library are not important in meeting their needs. A respondent said, "My library rarely offers workshops or staff development programs, but does support travel to off-site locations for professional development." Others reported attendance at workshops offered by professional association and vendors demonstrating new software. Another individual attends consortial meetings specific to distance services.

In general, classes ranked lowest in meeting professional development needs. Approximately 50% of respondents rated library/information sciences classes and university classes taken after completion of the master's degree as not important in addressing professional development needs. However, one respondent commented, "I obtained my MLS in 1978, so the concept of distance learning was hardly discussed. This year I earned an advanced certificate in management of libraries using a combination of videoconferencing and online classes." Another respondent reported current enrollment in a PhD education program.

Respondents provided 35 comments related to meeting professional development needs. Three respondents indicated that blogs are very useful. One individual stated:

> Blogs, especially those of other distance librarians, have been extremely important to me, possibly more so than any other source. A blog has the currency of good journals or news sources, the analysis of a journal article, and the response possibilities of a listserv.

Many respondents noted the value of informal networking with peers or mentors. Others mentioned cross training in other areas of the library, on the job experience, and training related to technology, communication, ITV, and Blackboard. Two librarians answered from the perspective of personal experience as distance learners. One stated, "I learned a lot by being a distance learner, and being poorly served."

Q6. Consider possible core activities that you believe will benefit you as a distance librarian in the next five years. How important is it for you to increase your knowledge in the following areas?

Budget/finances
25 Very Important 43 Somewhat Important 25 Not Important 8 Have already achieved

Human resources personnel
24 Very Important 37 Somewhat Important 33 Not Important 6 Have already achieved

Management training
20 Very Important 52 Somewhat Important 23 Not Important 7 Have already achieved

Marketing/public relations
65 Very Important 30 Somewhat Important 6 Not Important 2 Have already achieved

Supervisory skills
16 Very Important 46 Somewhat Important 29 Not Important 10 Have already achieved

Instructional design
80 Very Important 20 Somewhat Important 2 Not Important 1 Have already achieved

Web page design
58 Very Important 35 Somewhat Important 6 Not Important 4 Have already achieved

Nearly all distance librarians believe it is important to increase their knowledge of technology in the next five years. Seventy-eight percent of respondents feel it is very important to expand their instructional design skills. More than half, 56%, believe that it is very important to increase their skills in Web page design.

Many of the 18 comments centered on the need to keep current with technology. One respondent stated that it is essential to understand new technologies that can be used in online instruction, such as RoboDemo, Impatica, and Soft Chalk. These tools can be used in creating tutorials, research guides, and reusable learning objects. Another distance librarian supported learning XML, Cold Fusion, RoboDemo or View Lets to aid in managing complex tutorials, design online questionnaires, and online testing. Another respondent valued skills in compressed video, chat, and voice-over IP.

Nearly two-thirds of the respondents believe it is very important to increase their knowledge of marketing or public relations. A respondent stated, "Marketing is a current passion and I'm active in several aspects of it."

In terms of core activities, ratings for budget/finances, human resources personnel, management training, and supervisory skills were evenly divided between very important, somewhat important, or not important.

Several respondents commented that leadership, assessment and evaluation skills, data analysis, and strategic planning would be useful for the future. One individual stated that training in these areas is not as important as it is unlikely that her institution will have the financial resources to fund additional distance librarians. Another respondent remarked that some of these skills were covered in the advanced certificate program.

Respondents were asked to mark "have already achieved" for the listed core activities. Fewer than 10% of the respondents indicated they had already gained knowledge or competency in any of these areas. One reason for this might be that half of the survey respondents have distance librarian experience for six or fewer years.

Q7. What knowledge or skills do you think will be important for distance librarians to possess in the next five years?

Many thoughtful comments were offered in response to this question. Technology knowledge and skills, particularly those related to instructional and Web page design, were mentioned most often. Distance learning pedagogy is another frequently mentioned theme, as is marketing and outreach. Other comments centered on administrative or management skills. Communication and interpersonal skills were deemed important by some respondents. Such comments reflected findings from Jones (2002) who reported from her study that respondents recommended developing instructional technology skills and learning the course management software adopted by the local campus.

Technology knowledge or skills facilitating the teaching of students via distance media is thought to be essential for librarians, currently and in the future. One librarian stated that technology and instructional design knowledge and skills are needed to improve services to meet students' wants and needs. That librarian commented, "Currently, I don't think libraries do this very well when faced with what our competition is doing."

Many respondents stated that knowledge of instructional or Web page design will continue to be important in the future. Several respondents believe that distance librarians need a basic knowledge of Web design and application skills. This will be a job requirement, rather than an option, in coming years, one librarian averred. Online tutorial development is also noted as a necessary skill for distance librarians. Another commented that distance librarians should be knowledgeable about software to create online instructional materials in a variety of multimedia formats. One respondent stated that distance librarians will need a mastery of rich media instruction production, such as short videos and screen casts or pod casts. Distance librarians will need a basic understanding of course management software and its integration with the library's electronic platform and resources.

One respondent stated that all technology skills possible will be needed, as well as creativity in applying new technologies to distance education. Distance librarians should have a basic understanding of games and gaming and know how these can be used for information literacy instruction. Also required will be knowledge of instant messaging, blogging, RSS feeds, wireless technologies, and the use of cell phones as a learning technology.

A familiarity with integrating access to electronic sources including e-journals, e-books, databases, and Internet sites will continue to be needed. An understanding of how to use technology to improve access and services will be essential.

Some indicated that administrative or management training and knowledge will continue to be necessary in the future. Forecasting, strategic planning, budgeting skills, and contract or license negotiation skills will be useful. Assessment and data analysis skills are also considered essential for distance librarians.

Not surprisingly, communication and collaboration skills also ranked as important. Distance librarians require the ability to team with other professionals inside and outside the library to deliver services and resources. Communication will necessitate a variety of delivery methods including in-person, phone, e-mail, chat, videoconferencing, and technologies yet to make it to the mainstream markets. Advocacy skills to work with vendors to improve electronic interfaces will be required of distance librarians.

Significant knowledge of marketing and outreach skills were also viewed as important by many respondents. Librarians should take advantage of op-

portunities to partner and collaborate with faculty teaching distance courses as well as other campus staff who work with distance students. It was noted that distance librarians need an understanding of marketing, which means product development, not just publicity. Public relations skills are necessary to increase awareness of the services offered.

When asked what knowledge or skills each thought important for distance librarians to possess in the next five years, one respondent stated "everything." Another individual commented, "Nothing new, but distance librarians have to be very adaptable and quick to spot the best ways to serve their clientele." Two respondents indicated that diverse language skills would be useful. One answered that "the idea of distance librarianship as a separate service must be on the way out." A somewhat similar statement was made by a respondent who said that the "ability to 'integrate' services for distance students with those for on-campus students to benefit both populations" was necessary.

Q8. What challenges do you face in obtaining professional development for distance learning? Mark as many as apply.

89	Time constraints at work
37	Obligations outside the job
55	Insufficient funding to attend conferences/workshops
40	Insufficient funding to take online workshops/seminars
32	Insufficient funding to take "for credit" classes
44	Limited choice of distance learning offerings that relate to my job

Respondents were asked to mark as many of the responses that applied to them. There were 21 optional comments. Eighty-six percent of distance librarians experience time constraints at work. Three individuals commented that they have other job duties unrelated to distance learning services. One respondent stated, "Working at a small institution with so many responsibilities means having trouble finding time for any professional development, let alone for distance learning." One respondent indicated that other library staff do not completely understand the needs of a satellite campus and the time it takes.

Half of the options that respondents could mark pertained to funding considerations. Fifty-five individuals reported insufficient funding to attend conferences or workshops. Forty perceive funding to attend online workshops or seminars to be a challenge. Thirty-two respondents believe there is insufficient funding to take for-credit classes. One respondent reported, "While our university doesn't fund all conferences, I am willing to use personal funds. However, I can't possibly attend all the conferences I'd like to. I make frequent use of free online seminars."

Forty-four respondents believe that limited choice of distance learning offerings that relate to their jobs is a challenge. One individual from a small university reported that it is difficult to find relevant training since often training is focused on the needs of larger institutions. Another librarian noted it is difficult to determine which training will be of most benefit to the particular position. Sometimes, training opportunities provide a "rehash what those of us who have been doing this for a while already know." One respondent desired additional offerings on management specific to distance services.

Three respondents commented there are limited professional development opportunities in their geographic area. One believed that since there are relatively few distance librarians, professional development only takes place at national conferences and online. This respondent would prefer such activity be done on a regional level.

Thirty-seven respondents noted that obligations outside the job are challenges to acquiring professional development. However, none of the optional comments address what these obligations might be. Perhaps these might relate to inadequate funding, the travel that would be required, or perceived limited time outside the job.

Several librarians reported that there is limited administrative support for professional development. One respondent believed there is a lack of recognition of the importance of continuing education for librarians at her institution. Similarly, one respondent believed there is limited awareness, prioritization, and administrative support of distance learning. A third reported unwillingness at the institutional level to fund development that is perceived as unnecessary, and commented, "I think I need the development, they don't. I have to fund it myself, although they allow me to do it within the workday."

One individual was allowed ample time and funding for professional development. However, this comment stands out because this is the only remark of such a nature.

Q9. What would be of most benefit to you personally when trying to meet your professional development needs?

When responding to this question, one respondent stated,

> A cadre of computer/digital savvy, professional librarians (law, science, med, generalists), instructional designers, online educators from small and large institutions, K-12 educators and librarians, finishing library school students and profs, and tech geeks coming together at an online conference (via web casts i.e., learning times) addressing topics coming from this survey!

Many of the 72 responses pertained to funding, time, and instruction. Others related to networking and professional development opportunities. One individual was uncertain what would benefit her most.

A perceived lack of time is a common theme. One librarian indicated a need for "a 48-hour day." Some would like to spend additional time on distance learning duties but also have other job responsibilities. Others would use extra time for professional reading, getting away to concentrate on learning, networking with colleagues, or working on the research prior to publishing. One librarian would use extra time to participate in online sessions without interruptions. Another would use extra time to work with colleagues on skill-building and practice projects. Two others raised the possibility of telecommuting as a means to save time.

Funding concerns are an issue for many librarians. Comments indicated an interest in free or low-cost professional development opportunities or an increased level of institutional funding. Some librarians would use additional monies for professional travel and costs associated with research, conferences, workshops, and classes or training.

A few respondents reported that increased administrative support would be useful to them. Three respondents said it would be helpful to have increased staffing in their offices. Another said it would be of benefit to have reliable computing equipment and infrastructure.

A significant number of comments related to instructional needs. Many individuals indicated a preference for online conferences, workshops, and classes. Several were proponents of anytime, anywhere learning. One individual stated,

> Put all classes/courses/workshops/seminars, etc. online. Some of us live in the middle of nowhere with small budgets and do not have the time or money to physically go anywhere. We are in the business of supporting distance education so we should be able to get all of our professional development needs met via distance education technology.

Respondents reported a wide range of needs. Two respondents would like to take self-paced classes or training. Others prefer to leave the worksite for training or education, which they want at local, in-state, or perhaps regional locations. One respondent preferred programs and articles that focus on specific issues rather than general topics. Another appreciated the Madison distance education conference and MERLOT (Multimedia Educational Resource for Learning and Online Teaching). Two individuals indicated they would benefit from additional professional reading. One respondent suggested a database containing professional development opportunities and a calendar of workshops and conferences.

Ten librarians indicated that networking with distance colleagues would be beneficial. One said, "I'd just like to hear more success stories about how other librarians have provided different kinds of services to distance learners and how others can replicate their successes." A respondent noted that these discussions could take place in a variety of venues including OFFCAMP, conferences, newsletters, and Web sites.

Q10. How likely are you to take advantage of the following opportunities or activities during the next five years?

Live Web casts
    60 Very Likely   26 Likely   14 Somewhat Likely   3 Not Likely

Interactive Web courses/seminars
    57 Very Likely   26 Likely   17 Somewhat Likely   3 Not Likely

Virtual attendance at conferences
    36 Very Likely   21 Likely   31 Somewhat Likely   14 Not Likely

RSS (Really Simple Syndication)
    36 Very Likely   19 Likely   25 Somewhat Likely   16 Not Likely

Journal alert services
    40 Very Likely   32 Likely   25 Somewhat Likely 5 Not Likely

Reading professional journals
    70 Very Likely   26 Likely   7 Somewhat Likely   0 Not Likely

Reading monographs
    38 Very Likely   33 Likely   24 Somewhat Likely   8 Not Likely

Listservs
    83 Very Likely   14 Likely   5 Somewhat Likely   1 Not Likely

Blogs
    32 Very Likely   29 Likely   37 Somewhat Likely   4 Not Likely

Networking with colleagues
    73 Very Likely   24 Likely   5 Somewhat Likely   1 Not Likely

Programs at the American Library Association annual conferences
    33 Very Likely   22 Likely   25 Somewhat Likely   23 Not Likely

Association of College and Research Libraries conferences
    34 Very Likely   24 Likely   30 Somewhat Likely   15 Not Likely

Off-Campus Library Services conferences
    48 Very Likely   31 Likely   15 Somewhat Likely   8 Not Likely

Regional or state library conferences
    45 Very Likely   34 Likely   16 Somewhat Likely   7 Not Likely

Preconferences for library conferences
    18 Very Likely   23 Likely   42 Somewhat Likely   18 Not Likely

Q11. Do you have additional comments related to the survey?

There were 19 comments. Comments related to lack of funding to attend conferences or online workshops, finding time to develop instructional materials, networking, and balancing different job roles or duties. Lack of administrative support and lack of office space is problematic for one respondent. One individual stated that "distance librarians need to be leaders to do their jobs really well, so leadership training should be part of any offerings for them."

Three individuals asked that survey results be shared. One respondent asked for wide dissemination of results to share with administrators. One comment reported that the survey was very "American centered."

Conclusion

Professional development is essential for academic librarians to keep current with skills, knowledge, and competencies in rapidly changing times. The results from this study can inform library administrators, distance librarians, and associations of the professional development needs of distance librarians. The findings from the authors' survey reveal practitioners' assessment of anticipated knowledge and skills in the next five years. Specific activities that support obtaining knowledge and skills are rated by preference. The authors also provide a brief profile of academic distance librarians.

Profile of a Distance Librarian Working in an Academic Library

- Over 80% of respondents are employed by research universities or four-year colleges or universities.

- On average, the distance librarian has six years of experience in the position.

- Distance learning job responsibilities typically represent half of the respondent's assignments.

The most common job responsibilities are reference and library instruction. Document delivery or circulation functions are less frequently reported, while instructional design and Web page responsibilities are apparently becoming more common.

Preferences of Distance Librarians

- Listservs targeting distance librarians, distance learning conferences, and professional journal articles are the most important in meeting professional development needs.

- Professional monographs are less important than journal articles.

- Distance librarians will likely continue to use listservs, read professional journals, and network with colleagues in the next five years.

- Blogs, which provide currency, analysis, and quick communication, are increasing in importance.

- Core activities that will be most important in the next five years are instructional design, Web page design, and marketing/public relations.

- Knowledge or skills that will be important in the next five years are instructional technology and Web page design.

A big challenge that distance librarians face in obtaining professional development for distance learning is time constraints. Sufficient funding is also a concern. One librarian commented that when institutions do not provide funds for courses or travel to conferences, resources such as listservs and online access to professional journals are important. Access to relevant professional development opportunities is essential in meeting the needs of distance librarians.

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