

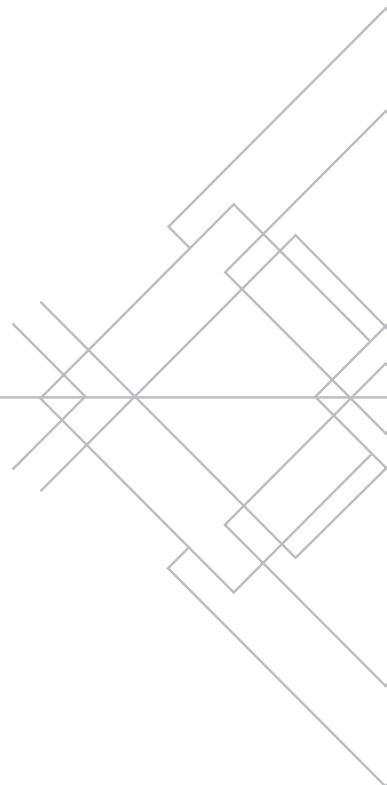


**Mc  
Graw  
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Education**

# The Changing Role of Libraries



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## Executive Summary

*In contrast to previous [research](#) implying that librarians and faculty need to be more collegial and collaborative, a new survey of approximately 1,000 participants sponsored by McGraw-Hill Education indicates the librarian-faculty relationship is strong. However, a disconnect exists between what faculty perceives is the role of a library and what usage statistics from libraries show. This discrepancy in perceived value and actual usage is the real issue: There is misalignment in what makes libraries most useful, and therefore misalignment in how their success should be measured and how budgets should be allocated.*

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### **Key Finding: The Divide Between Faculty and Librarians is Not as Significant as Previously Reported**

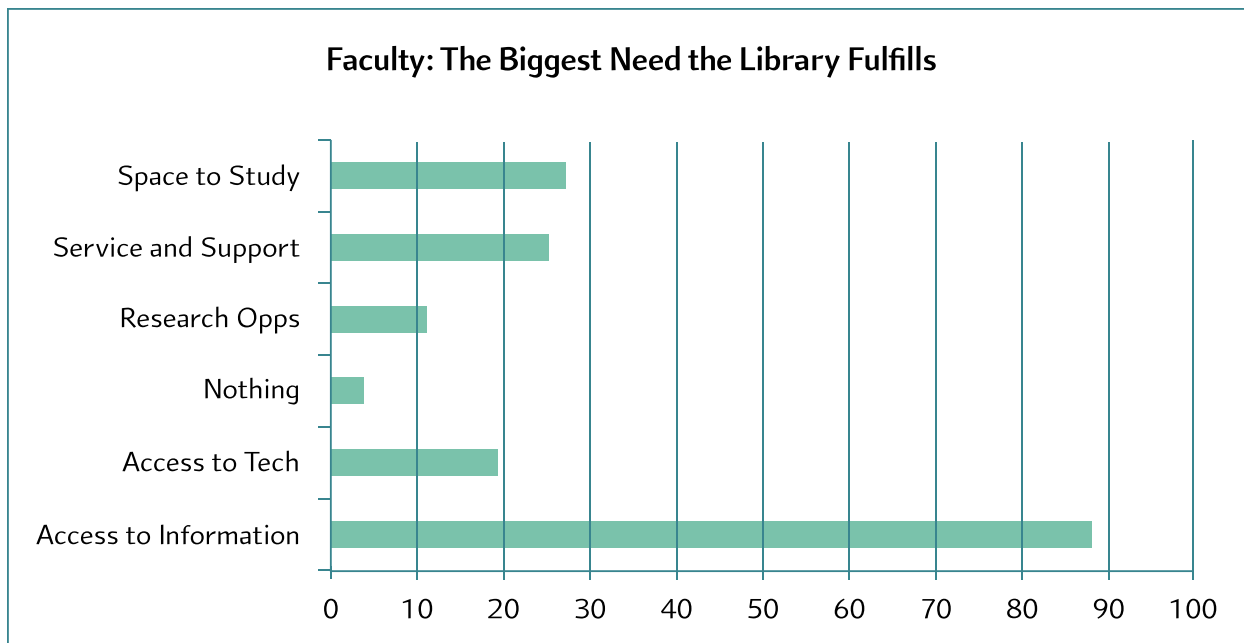
While other [research](#) and literature on this subject have suggested a disconnect between faculty and librarians, comments by participants indicate the issue is not between librarians and faculty, but exists at a higher level.

Faculty who participated in the survey scored their libraries very highly on many measures, which demonstrates a high level of confidence and support. Faculty are about 3% more likely than librarians to state that their library adequately meets the needs of their communities, as indicated by an average score of 4.02 out of 5. Librarians only scored themselves a 3.89 out of 5, suggesting they are not as satisfied with their impact on the community. Faculty scored

librarians a 4.3 out of 5 on their ability to effectively get the resources the community needs, which approximates the score librarians gave themselves: 4.27.

Yet there's more work to be done: Librarians are 7% less likely than faculty to respond that their employers fully support the library. However, while faculty said their institutions are supportive, they note that this does not always extend to financial resources.

The situation in higher education is slightly better: Librarians in higher education were 6% more likely than the general librarian population to claim that the library is able to adequately serve community/patrons. Many respondents commented in the survey that the school administration could be more supportive, particularly when it came to allocating resources.



**Key Finding: Libraries in K-12 Schools Report Less Assistance from their Organizations than Higher Education Libraries**

Participants who work in higher education institutions are 14% more likely than participants working in K-12 schools to indicate that their organization gives the library the resources they need. Participants in K-12 schools only rated the support of their organizations a 3.63 out of 5, which is about 5% lower than the average response. These librarians often commented that their space was being used for testing or other purposes, and that they had additional responsibilities such as maintaining the inventory of technology for the school. Many faculty in K-12 responded that they didn't have a librarian at all or only had one librarian for the entire district.

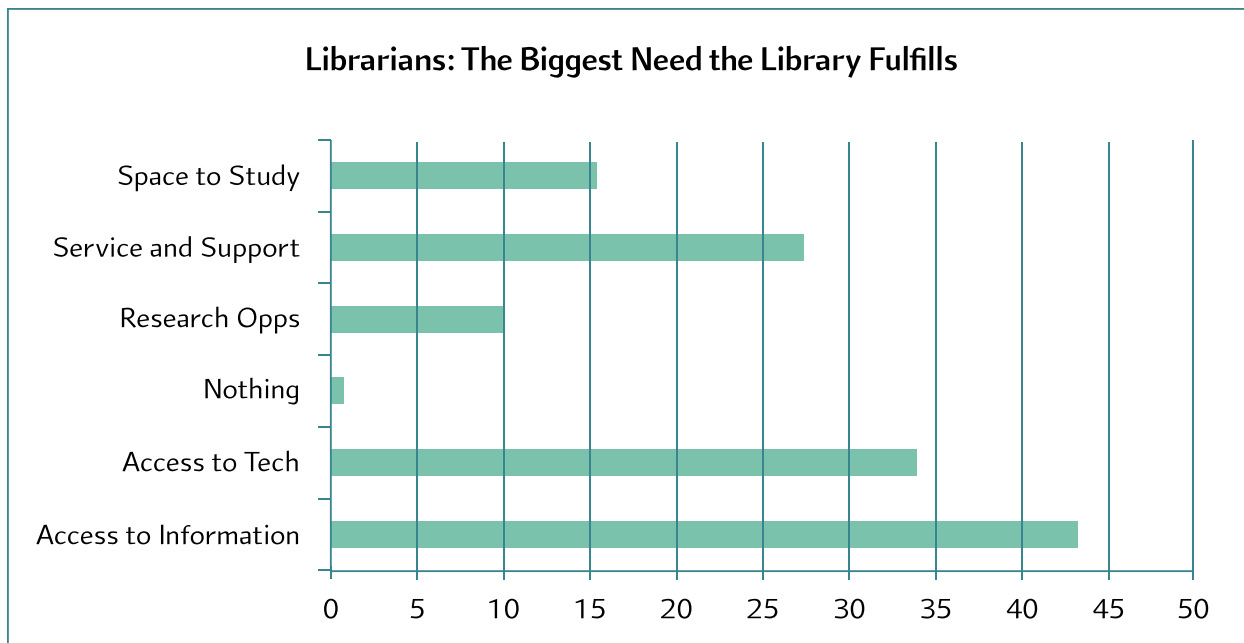
**Key Finding: Some Faculty and Students Frustrated by the Inaccessibility of Physical Materials and Media**

There seemed to be a fairly clear and strong divide between patrons who use the electronic resources and the ones who prefer hardcopy materials. While many libraries have the resources available, either

behind a desk, in storage, or through interlibrary loans, not having the stacks readily available was of concern to many faculty participants. Some faculty went so far as to rate taking books offsite as the biggest concern for libraries going forward, though other faculty and students are more understanding. They reported having quick and easy access to digital sources through interlibrary loans.

This open perspective indicates how opinions are changing. A 2015 study by Pew Research titled *Libraries at the Crossroads* reports growing interest in encouraging libraries to stock fewer books and create more room for community and technology spaces. A full 30% polled said libraries should “definitely” be doing this (up from 20% back in 2012) and 40% said “maybe” they should (up from 39% in 2012). In addition, less people are against it; only 25% of those polled felt strongly against reducing book collections (down from 36% in 2012).

Some librarians are clearly very satisfied and proud of their off-campus delivery system, pointing out that the average shelf-to-desk service is within 24 hours for books and between 48 and 72 hours for article delivery.



Regardless of where they stand on physical books versus digital resources, faculty seem to be united on their opinion of access to key journals.

by keeping a close watch on statistics and usage and working with faculty to find something more cost-effective.

**Key Finding: Losing Access to Databases Results in Less Usage by Faculty**

When asked to name the biggest need that the library fills, 88% of faculty cited access to eBooks, databases, journals, and other resources. In fact, faculty are twice as likely as librarians to cite access to information as the primary need libraries fulfill. Yet, the number and quality of good scientific databases were reported to be limited due to lack of adequate state funding. In fact, several librarians commented that full access to journals, articles, and government reports were one of the most important roles libraries fulfill for their communities, but that dramatic cuts in budgets made it difficult to keep up with demand. This access was particularly crucial in STEM fields where up-to-date information is more critical.

Several respondents who felt pessimistic about the future of libraries specifically cited cuts in journal subscriptions as a concern. Many libraries, however, are finding ways to deal with these issues

**Key Finding: Librarians and Faculty Differ in What Library Services They Value**

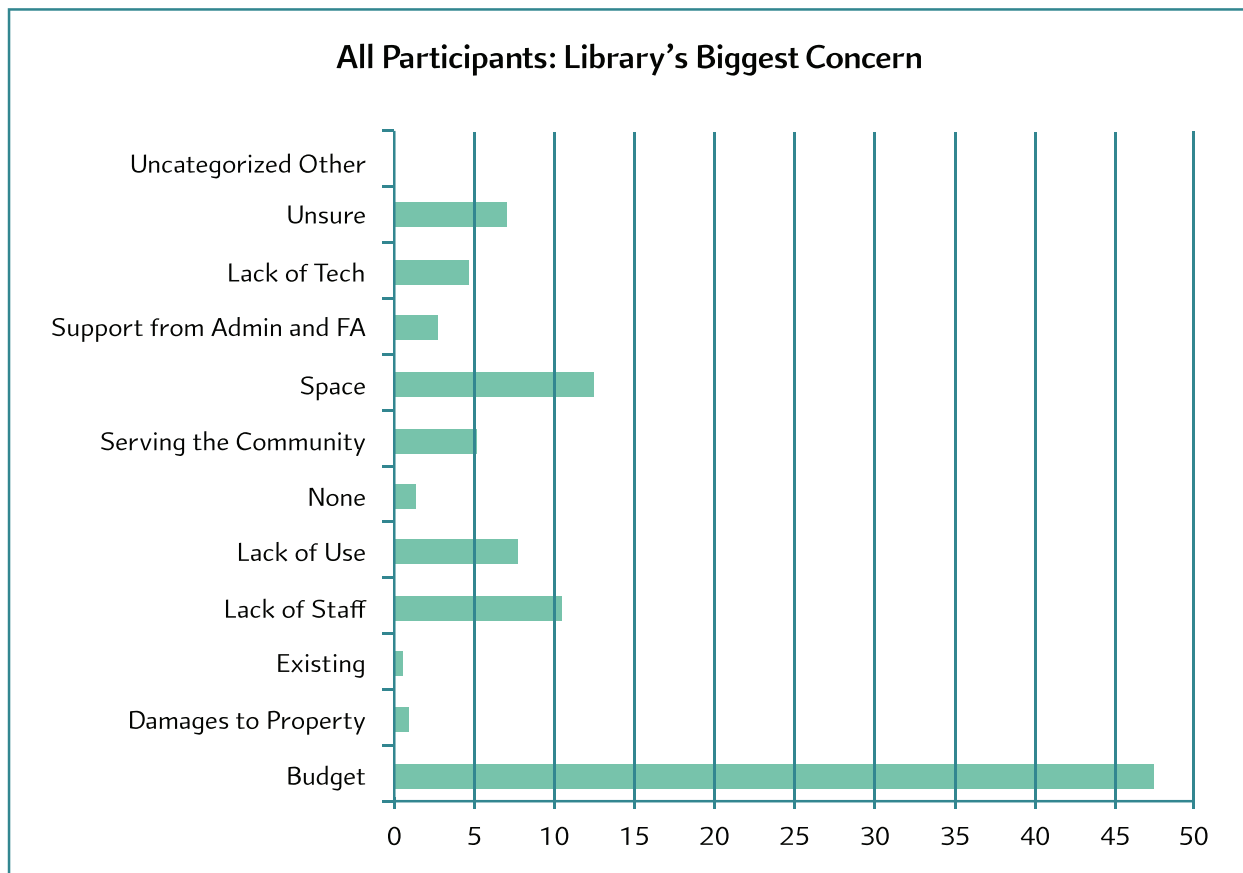
When asked to identify the most important or ‘biggest’ need libraries fulfill, librarians’ answers vary:

- 43% of respondents said “access to information”
- 34% said “access to technology”
- 10% said “research opportunities”
- 27% said “services and programs”
- 15% said “space to study and collaborate”

When asked the same question, faculty responses were significantly different:

- 88% felt the library’s primary purpose was offering “access to information”
- 19.5% believed the library’s mission was “access to technology”
- 4% said “nothing”
- 11% said “research opportunities”
- 25% said “services and programs”
- 27% said “space to study and collaborate”

While 43% of librarians agreed with faculty that access to information is the primary function



libraries serve, librarians are far more likely to cite other services as critical. For example, librarians cited access to technology as a primary function of the library at a 74% higher rate than faculty. Librarians are also 10% more likely to respond that services and programs are the primary need they fulfill for their patrons. In the comments, faculty acknowledged the importance of information skills training—helping students hone their basic research abilities. But the importance of programs was mentioned far less often, and more than 50% of faculty were unable to guess how many programs their library offers, choosing to respond “unknown.”

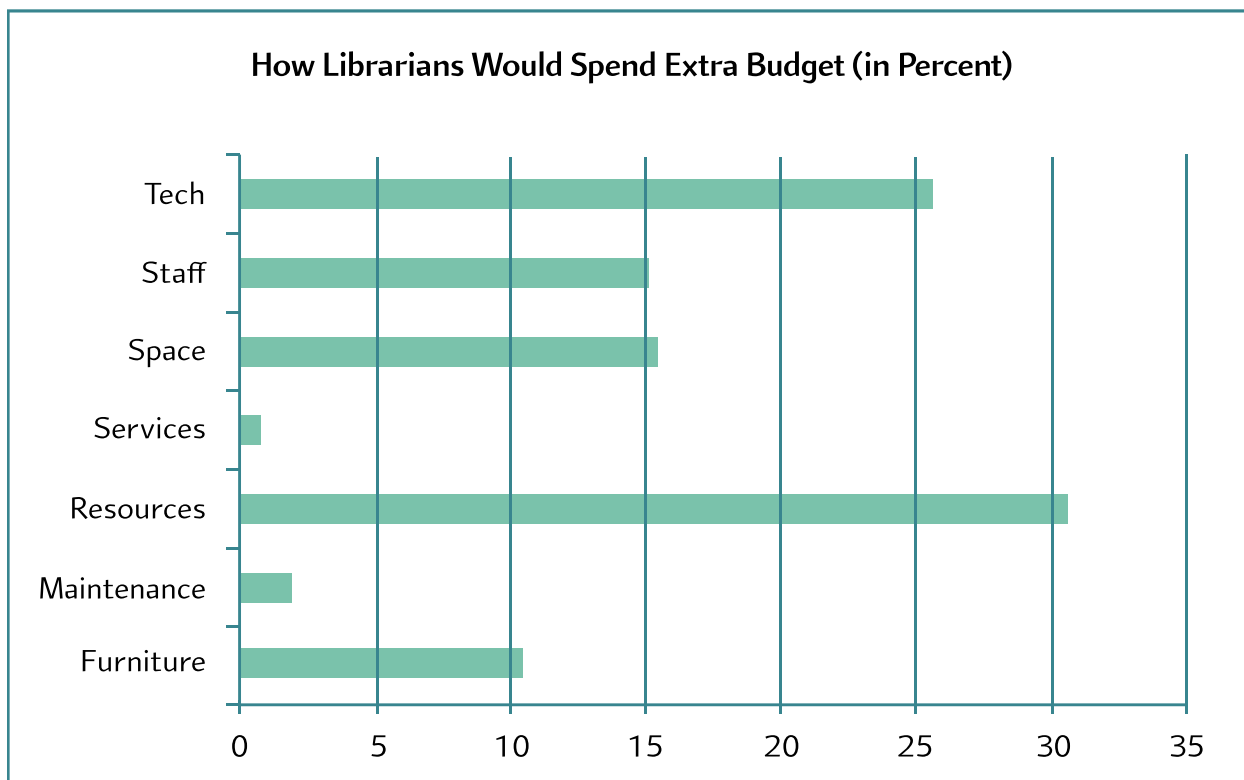
When asked what the library should purchase if given unlimited access to budget, faculty are 73% more likely than librarians to suggest purchasing additional resources, specifically eBooks, access to journals, and online databases. Faculty are also 76% more likely to say that space for collaborative

research, studying, and intellectual exchange is a critical need the library fulfills.

Librarians are 74% more likely than faculty to spend additional funds on technology and staff, which corresponds to their response to the question of the biggest need the library fulfills.

**Key Finding: K-12 Emphasizes Access to Technology Four Times as Often as Higher Education**

In higher education and at medical schools, access to technology did not seem to constitute a major need of students and faculty. In K-12 schools, 39.2% of respondents cited access to technology as important, whereas only 10% of participants from a higher education setting agreed. This is perhaps an indication that younger students tend not to have equal access to technology, and librarians and faculty see their role as critical to facilitate equal access to education and technology.



This corresponds to findings from Pew Research that indicated that patrons and librarians value access to technology, particularly in socioeconomically challenged areas where access to technology is more limited.

Some librarians, when looking into the future, see this inequality as temporary. As technology becomes cheaper and more accessible, the technological divide between classes will be less pronounced. This led to fear among a few librarians that libraries will be downsized or seen as obsolete.

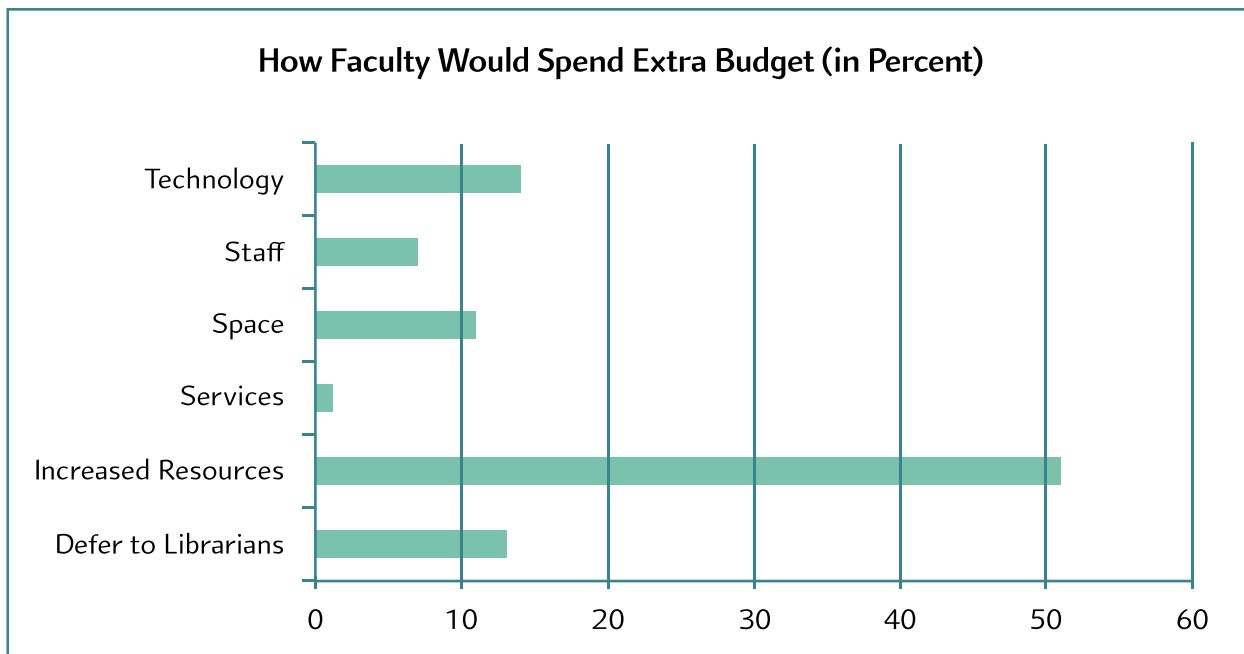
Students in higher education seemed more likely to have the technology they need, and technology lending programs in higher education did not fare well as technology was rapidly replaced. Staying current and relevant was noted in the comments of both faculty and libraries, and perhaps explains why only 14% of faculty advocate investing more money in technology. A few faculty members made comments about the technology going out-of-date so quickly it hardly warrants investing in if the budget is limited.

#### Key Finding: Lack of Staff Is a Key Concern Among Librarians

Extreme budget cuts at some libraries put the librarian to student ratio close to 1:1400. That kind of ratio makes it extremely difficult to adequately serve students. Librarians are keenly aware of the discrepancy between what they could be doing and what they are able to accomplish, which is perhaps why they were more than twice as likely to cite lack of staff as their primary concern. K-12 libraries were particularly hard hit, but lack of staff is a serious issue even in higher education. Several higher education faculty commented that librarians are doing a good job, but they were spread very thin. A reduced library staff also leads to less accessibility for students.

#### Key Finding: Budget Concerns High Across the Board

When asked the biggest concern of libraries, 47% of total respondents answered “budget” or “lack of funding.” Looking deeper into the data, librarians are 21% more likely than faculty to cite budgets as



a key concern. Most librarians reported either dramatic cuts in budgets or flat budgets that do not allow for inflationary adjustments. Some libraries reported as much as a 50% reduction in budget over the course of the last 15 years.

**Key Finding: Adding Staff is Not at the Top of Librarians’ Wish List**

Despite concerns about staff cuts, when asked what they would invest in if given an unlimited budget, librarians were split in their responses:

- 29% said they would spend it on additional resources such as eBooks, access to journals and databases, and other materials
- 24% would spend it on additional technology
- 15% said they would add more space
- 14.6% said they would add more staff
- 10% specifically mentioned replacing furniture or renovating the meeting spaces

Enhancing access to resources and additional technology were covered earlier in this white paper. In third place was the need to add space: universally, 13% of participants cited lack of space as a primary concern, regardless of job title.

In comparison, this is how faculty would spend additional funds if the library were offered carte blanche:

- 13% defer the question to librarians
- 51% would increase access to resources
- 1.2% would increase services
- 11% would increase physical space
- 7% would increase the staff
- 14% would add technology

**Key Finding: A Discrepancy Exists Between What Faculty Regards as the Purpose of Libraries and the Most Common Requests as Reported by Librarians**

It’s not surprising that librarians are more knowledgeable about the types of requests they receive. But, interestingly, the faculty’s perception of how people use the library is not in sync with what librarians report. When asked about the most common library requests:

- Faculty perceived reference requests to be twice as high as librarians indicate
- Librarians rated requests for access to materials as 28% higher than faculty
- Librarians ranked technology requests as twice as important as faculty

- Librarians reported twice as much interest in programs as faculty

These differences in perception may account for the contrasting approaches to how faculty and librarians would spend additional funds, as well as how they rate the library's effectiveness at meeting expectations of the community they serve.

### Conclusion

Librarians consistently pointed out in the comments that they felt the need to prove their value over and over again. The issue instead may be that decision-makers and patrons don't agree on what makes librarians valuable. This should come as no surprise given how quickly the role libraries play in education is changing—it's difficult to please all constituencies. Without buy-in and agreement on

performance measures, though, libraries will continue to struggle with acquiring more resources.

### About the Study

The study had 996 participants, including roughly 400 librarians, 450 faculty, and 150 "Other" (consisting mostly of patrons such as students, teaching assistants, and administrators) and ran from July 19 through August 10, 2016. Below is an overview of participants' affiliations:

- 45.83% in higher education
- 14.93% from a medical setting (medical school, teaching hospital, etc)
- 24.51% from K-12 schools
- 7.31% from public libraries
- .31% from special libraries
- 7.11% responded "Other"