

Members shape ACRL's future

By Althea H. Jenkins

Results of the 1993 ACRL member survey

In fall 1993 the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) commissioned Research USA, Inc., to conduct a survey of a sample of its current personal members. The objectives of the survey were to determine attitudes, opinions, and needs of ACRL's members and to assess the effectiveness of programs, services, and products as a basis for planning future direction for the association. This survey is similar to the one conducted in 1989, which allows for comparisons to identify trends for planning purposes.

Methodology

Six hundred names were selected from the ACRL personal membership list on an **nth** name ba-

sis. On September 7, 1993, every name selected was mailed an advance notice postcard from Thomas A. Kirk, ACRL President, asking for members' cooperation. On September 10, 1993, the four-page questionnaire was mailed to each name, together with a cover letter from Research USA, a one-dollar bill, and a stamped return envelope. Second and third mailings of the questionnaire and envelopes were carried out on September 17, 1993, and October 19, 1993. By November 8, 1993, 459 questionnaires had been completed and returned. This represents a 77.7% response rate which, according to Research USA, is a very high rate of return for a mail survey. To assure confidentiality, questionnaires were returned directly to Research USA.

The questionnaire consisted of 30 questions under six headings covering librarians, libraries, and ACRL; current issues of concern for librarians and the profession; membership activities and programs; future membership programs and activities; critical issues for the future; and demographics.

Seventeen of the 30 questions allowed for comparisons with the data collected from the 1989 survey. Most questions were close-ended and several required respondents to rate items by level of importance. Two questions provided respondents the opportunity to make comments and suggestions.

Profile of the typical member

The questions under the heading "About you, your organization, and ACRL" addressed such topics as the librarians' places of employment, involvement in ACRL and other organizations, budget responsibilities, and use of electronic communications.

Place of Employment

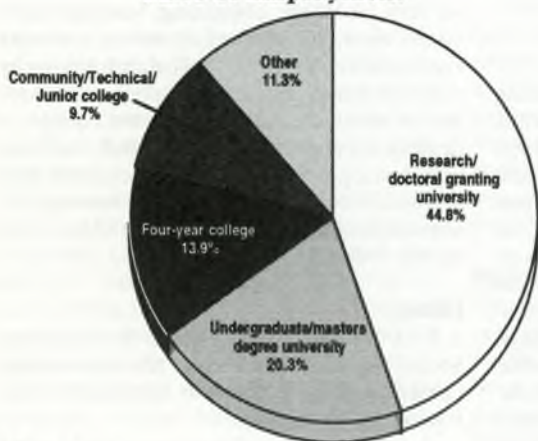


Chart 1.

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"Very Important" Reasons for ACRL Membership

The typical ACRL member, based on averages from the survey, is a Caucasian female. She is 47 years old, has been a member for 10 years, works as an administrator or a public/information librarian in a research/doctoral-granting university, and regularly reads *CE&RL News* and *CE&RL*.

The survey further reveals that members are likely to belong to other library and higher education organizations. Over two-thirds of ACRL members belong to other ALA divisions and a majority belong to their state library association. The member is also likely to have served on an ACRL divisional committee or an ACRL section committee.

Research/doctoral-granting universities (44.8%) and undergraduate master's degree universities (20.3%) are the employment categories for more than half of ACRL members. Four-year colleges (13.9%) and community/junior colleges (9.7%) represent the next largest place of employment (see Chart 1).

The two most important reasons given by members for belonging to ACRL are "to update knowledge of library practice" (63.6%) and "to be professionally involved" (58.3%). Many members placed strong importance on receiving subscriptions to *CE&RL News* (45.6%) and *CE&RL* (44.6%) and to "being able to network with colleagues" (45%) (see Chart 2).

Members were asked to identify the dollar amount of the library budget for which they were responsible, and those items that they were involved in recommending or selecting for their libraries. More than 17% are responsible for budgets of over \$1 million; the average was \$986,000 and the median \$119,500. Over three-fourths (79.2%) make purchasing decisions about books and serials. More than half are also involved in purchasing other items, such as database services (57.3%), computer hardware/software (59.7%), and supplies (50.1%).

Communication has become electronic. Nearly 9 out of 10 ACRL members currently have access to Bitnet or Internet. Members currently use Bitnet or Internet most often for elec-

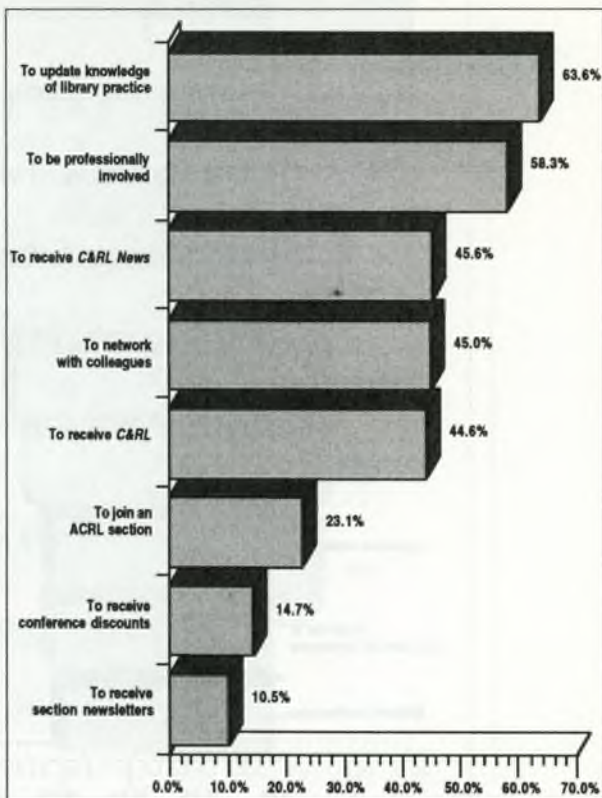


Chart 2.

tronic mail, for participation in listservs, and for telnetting to remote computers.

Changes since 1989

The new survey reveals several trends that have developed since 1989. Among these are:

- The greatest number of members are still employed in research/doctoral-granting universities. The number of ACRL members employed in four-year colleges has declined (-9.8%), while the number of members employed in community colleges increased (+1.8%).

- The greatest increases in type of employment since 1989 occurred in collection development (22%), bibliographic instruction (21%), and public/information services (20%).

- The number of years that members have been with ACRL is increasing, with the average in 1993 being 10 years, representing a 2% increase in four years.

Most Valuable ACRL Activities and Programs

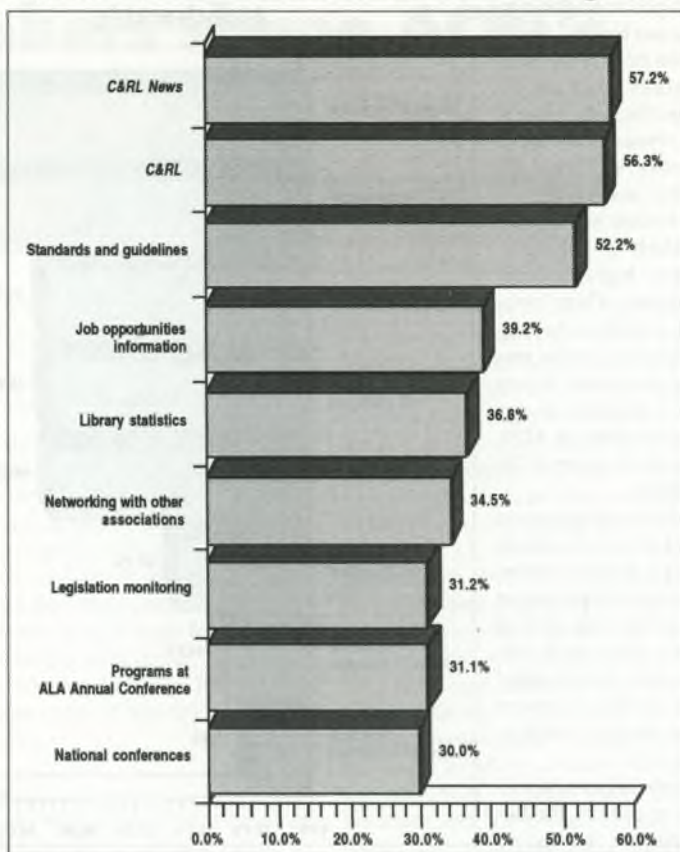


Chart 3.

- The ALA division with the largest number of ACRL members in 1993 is RASD (31%). In 1989 ALCTS was the division with the largest number of ACRL members (30%). The division with the greatest decline in ACRL members since 1989 is LITA with 18% in 1993 versus 25% in 1989, a 7% difference.

- ACRL members have greater responsibility for purchasing decisions than in 1989. In addition to decisions about books, serials, database services, supplies, furniture, and equipment, they make decisions about document-delivery services, licensing services, computer hardware and software, automated systems, and audiovisual materials.

- Members' primary concerns in 1989 were serials pricing and access to information. In 1993 their concerns shifted to keeping current with technology and access to electronic communication.

- Members' rating of ACRL's activities, programs, services, and products followed a pattern consistent with 1989. When rating the value of the 17 items listed in the questionnaire, greatest value was placed on two of ACRL's publications, *C&RL News* (57.2%) and *C&RL* (56.3%). A majority (52.2%) also placed "great value" on ACRL's standards and guidelines (see Chart 3).

- Over three-fourths of the 1993 members were interested in taking part in ACRL's educational activities. The majority want these programs to help them update their knowledge about existing and emerging networks and networked resources and services, a departure from the 1989 response where the majority wanted programs about management issues.

- As was true in 1989, members identified videotapes as the preferred off-site delivery format for educational activities.

Leading Issues of Concern to Librarians

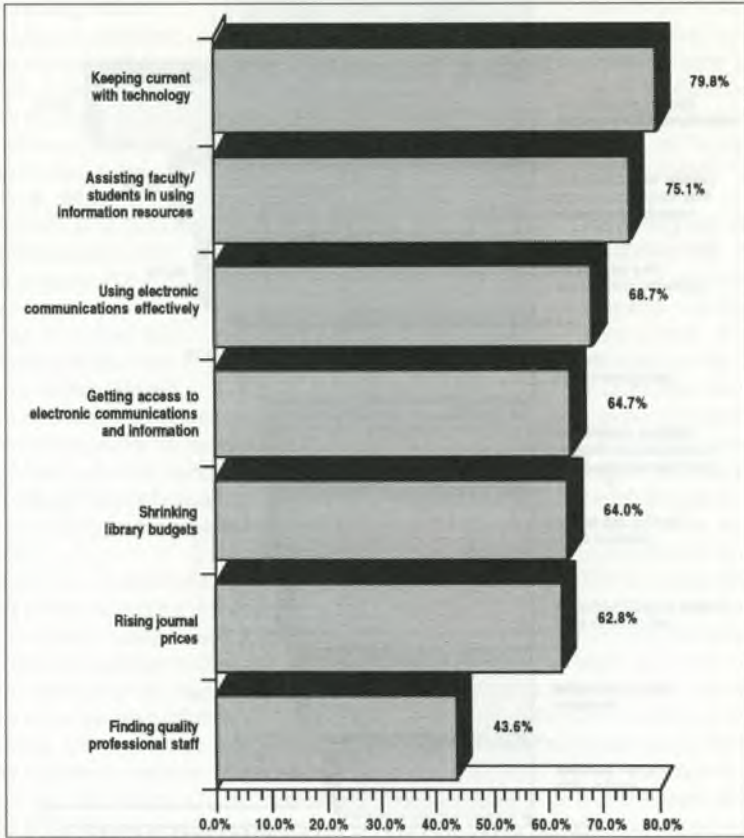


Chart 4.

- The male-female ratio widened, with females increasing their representation by 7% since 1989.

- Reported ages show a move from the 35–44 age range to the 45–54 age range. Just under half the members are in the latter group.

Key issues of concern to members

The survey solicited opinions about issues of concern to librarians and libraries. Seventeen issues were identified, and respondents rated these from “very critical” to “not at all critical.” A majority of the respondents identified as “very critical” keeping current with technology (79.8%), assisting faculty and students in making use of information resources (75.1%), and using electronic communications effectively (68.7%) (see Chart 4).

More than three-fourths (78.4%) of the members responding replied that they were interested in taking part in ACRL educational activi-

ties in the future. Most wanted these activities to help them in the following ways: updating information on existing and emerging networks and networked resources and services (73.7%); providing increased understanding of how various disciplines are developing and using networked information (59.3%); and planning services for the networked environment (54.6%) (see Chart 6). They want the activity in their region (44%), at ALA Annual Conferences (39%), or at their state association conferences (38%). Among off-site delivery formats, they prefer videotapes (58.8%) or computer conferencing through e-mail and electronic bulletin boards (55.1%).

The last section of the survey dealt with issues facing ACRL and academic libraries and librarians in the future. Two questions in this section solicited written comments and suggestions about the “single most critical issue facing libraries and librarians within the next three

Ways in Which ACRL Educational Activities Should Help Members

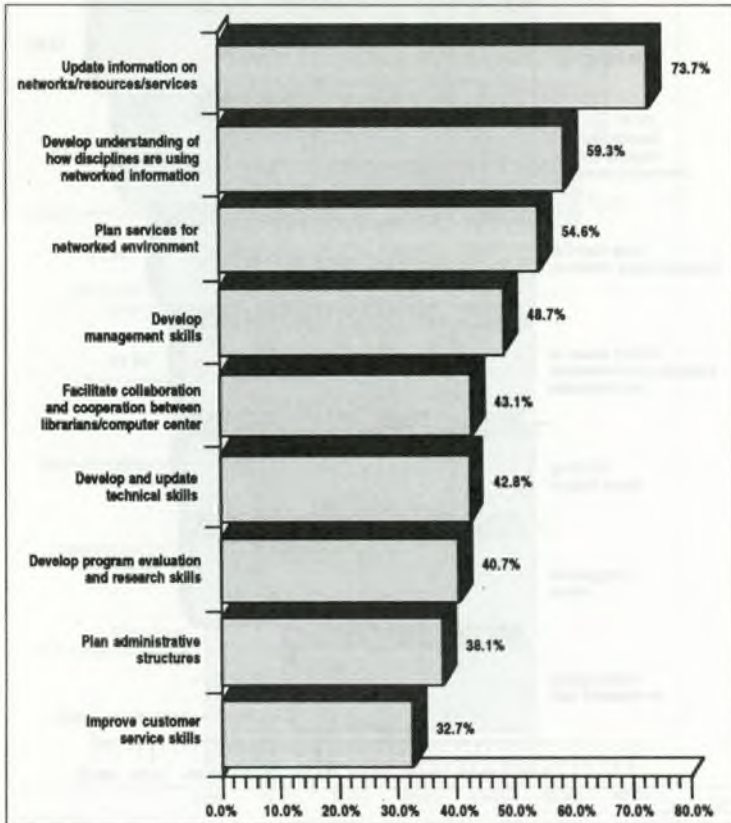


Chart 5.

years," and "what ACRL could do to help with the issue." More than 300 comments and suggestions were made that were classified under six topics: technological change, changes in the profession, library education, professional development, library funding, and positioning the profession. The suggestions members made in response to what ACRL could do to help with these issues sends a clear message that they look to their professional organizations not only to provide leadership, but to help them resolve the day-to-day issues that confront them.

Summary and conclusion

As was true with the 1989 ACRL membership survey, the 1993 survey provided the association with information about members and their needs, and confirmed that its programs and ser-

vices are valued, and that many membership needs are being met. This information will be used by the association for planning as the Board of Directors, its committees, sections, and chapters review, update, and develop current and new programs and services. It will also serve to inform ACRL's colleagues (vendor community) about the membership.

At the Midwinter planning session for the ACRL leadership a summary of the survey results was distributed to participants and used as background information in discussing present and future direction for the association.

The Board will continue to use the survey results in setting its priorities and updating the Strategic Plan. The association is grateful to those who took the time to contribute answers and opinions. ■