

Elizabeth Brown and Jeannette E. Pierce

2020 ACRL Academic Library Trends and Statistics Survey

Highlights and key EDI findings

The annual ACRL Academic Library Trends and Statistics Survey is the largest of its kind and offers the most comprehensive picture of academic library budgets, staffing, teaching, services, collections, and more. The data facilitates benchmarking, assessment of impact over time, tracking of new trends, and demonstration of academic library value. The survey is generally open from September through February each year to align with the Integrated Postsecondary Data System (IPEDS) collection. Libraries completing the survey can easily download their IPEDS responses to share with their local IPEDS keyholder. The Survey Editorial Board sincerely thanks all 1,672 libraries that contributed to the 2020 survey. The overall response rate was 49.8% with 52.1% of U.S. libraries responding.

Data in this article was published in *2020 ACRL Academic Library Trends and Statistics* and is available by subscription to *Benchmark: Library Metrics and Trends*, a new tool launched in 2021 by ACRL and Public Library Association (PLA).^{1,2} Subscribing libraries have access to reporting and visualization tools, including the opportunity to easily create customized peer comparisons. Benchmark also offers dashboard visualizations aligned with principles in the ACRL Standards for Libraries in Higher Education.³ Academic libraries completing the survey have free access to their own survey responses and selected aggregate data within Benchmark.⁴

COVID-19 and academic libraries

The 2020 survey gathered data for fiscal year 2019-20 and captures the impact of COVID-19 on academic libraries by asking two COVID-19-specific questions, including the number of weeks during the fiscal year that the library was closed when it otherwise would have been open. The main library was considered physically closed when faculty, students, and campus employees (library users) could not enter the building, regardless of access by library staff. More than 80% of libraries closed with 15 weeks being the average number reported. The survey also asks about the number of weeks the library implemented limited occupancy prac-

Elizabeth Brown is director of assessment and subject librarian for chemistry, mathematics, physics, and astronomy at Binghamton University Libraries-SUNY, email: ebrown@binghamton.edu, and a member of the ACRL Academic Library Trends and Statistics Survey Editorial Board, Jeannette E. Pierce is associate university librarian for research, access, and instructional services, and interim associate university librarian for university archives, special collections, and digital services at the University of Missouri, email: piercejea@missouri.edu, and a member of the ACRL Academic Library Trends and Statistics Survey Editorial Board

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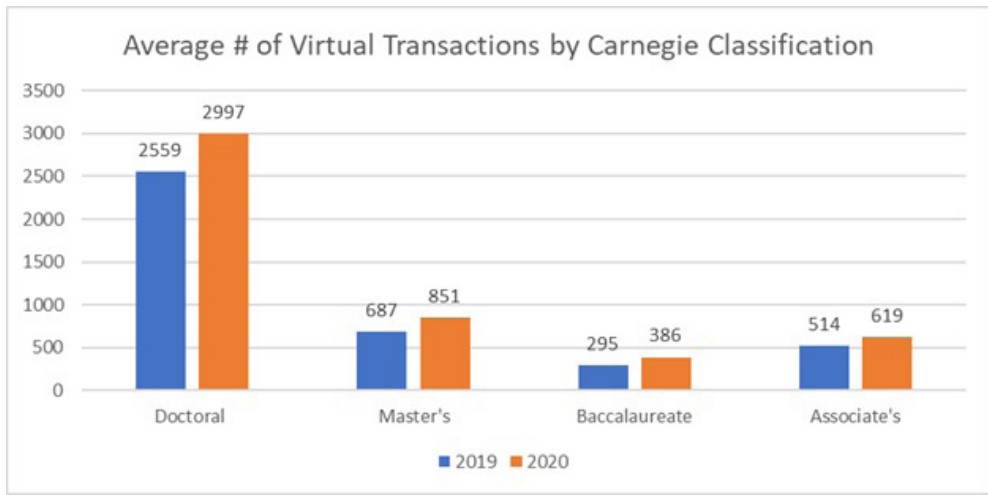


Chart 1: Average Virtual Transactions by Carnegie Classification, 2019-2020.⁵ period during the fiscal year. The 2021 survey includes these same questions. Next year's survey data will provide additional insight into the impact of COVID-19 on budget, staffing, and services.

tics for users, which are broadly defined as reduced hours, limits on number of users, appointment-only services, visitor time limits, room closures, etc. Forty percent of libraries implemented limited occupancy practices for some

Trends in reference and instruction

Support for teaching and learning through collections, reference, and instructional outreach is core to the mission of academic libraries. Academic libraries collectively reported more than 6.7 million

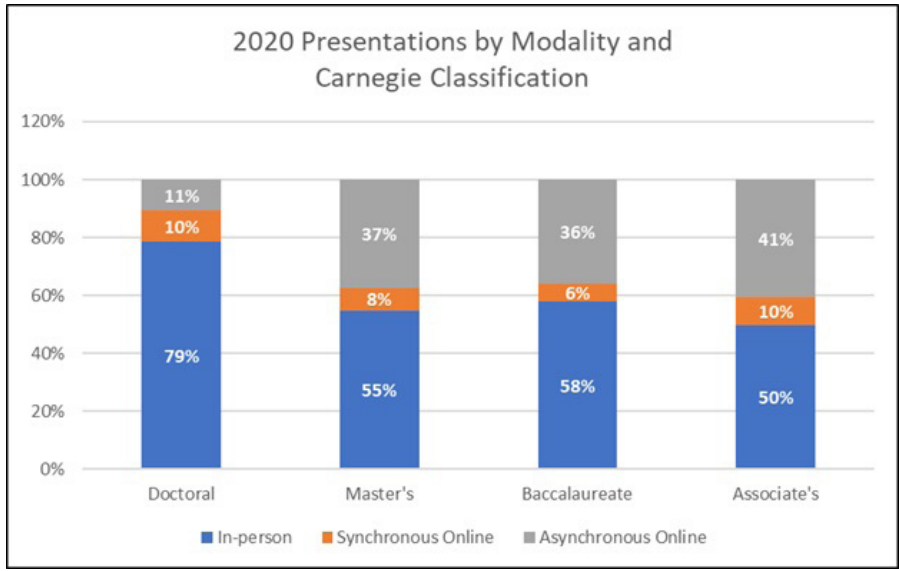


Chart 2: 2020 Presentations by Modality and Carnegie Classification.⁶

reference transactions. Transactions involve the knowledge, use, recommendation, interpretation, or instruction in the use of any information sources other than schedules, floor plans, handbooks, and policy statements. While total transactions continued a gradual decline, the number of reported virtual transactions increased across all Carnegie Classifications, particularly doc-

toral institutions, which saw virtual transactions as a percentage of total transactions increase from 22% in the 2019 survey to 33% in the 2020 survey. Academic libraries also reported more than 600,500 consultations with patrons. Consultations are defined as one-on-one or small group appointments outside of the classroom or a service point.

Academic libraries collectively reported more than 375,000 group presentations with over 7 million total attendees. Group presentations planned, provided, or facilitated by library staff can include information literacy instruction as well as cultural, recreational, or other educational presentations. COVID-19 created an urgency to include questions that recognize asynchronous support

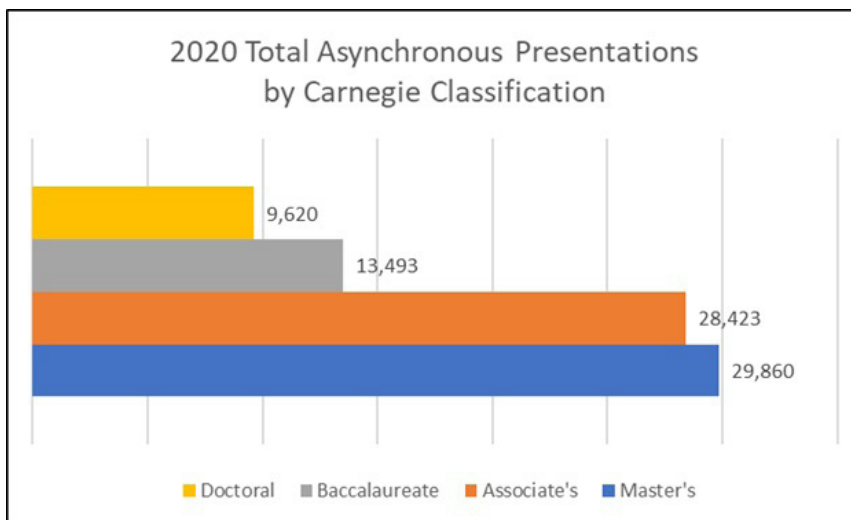


Chart 3: 2020 Total Asynchronous Presentations by Carnegie Classification.

for curriculum and learning. In response, the Editorial Board introduced questions asking for the number of asynchronous presentations provided and the number of participants reached. *Asynchronous presentations* are defined as a recorded online session, tutorial, video, or other interactive educational module created in a digital/electronic format. The Editorial Board recognizes that not all libraries are ready to provide asynchronous presentation data and hopes this will become easier to report in

the future. In the 2020 survey, doctoral institutions averaged the highest total number of presentations, while master's and associate's institutions averaged the highest number of asynchronous presentations.

EDI initiatives

Each year the Editorial Board selects a trend as an additional topic for inclusion in the survey. The 2020 Trends questions look at what academic libraries are doing to support equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI), which is a core commitment for ACRL, ALA, and many university and college campuses. Twenty-seven percent (359) of the 1,327 libraries completing this part of the survey have formal, written goals for EDI, with doctoral institutions being the highest at close to 50% (153). For those libraries with written EDI goals, the top six focus areas across all Carnegie classifications were:

1. Fostering an inclusive climate (89%)
2. Library collections (88%)
3. Accessibility (78%)
4. Improving workplace culture (73%)
5. Recruiting a diverse workforce (71%)
6. Library events and/or programming (69%)

The survey also looks at what academic libraries are doing in support of EDI, regardless of whether they have written goals. The top six responses across all Carnegie Classifications demonstrate academic libraries use a variety of approaches to address EDI programmatically including:

1. Attending programming and/or events related to EDI (89%)
2. Supporting textbook affordability initiatives (85%)
3. Supporting staff participation in professional development for EDI (80%)
4. Collecting and preserving materials related to underrepresented or marginalized groups (78%)

5. Collecting materials related to teaching and/or research in EDI (69%)
6. Conducting periodic review of library space to ensure accessibility for other-abled individuals (66%)

Other questions examine hiring and retention practices related to EDI, including strategies libraries are using to hire and recruit staff from underrepresented groups.

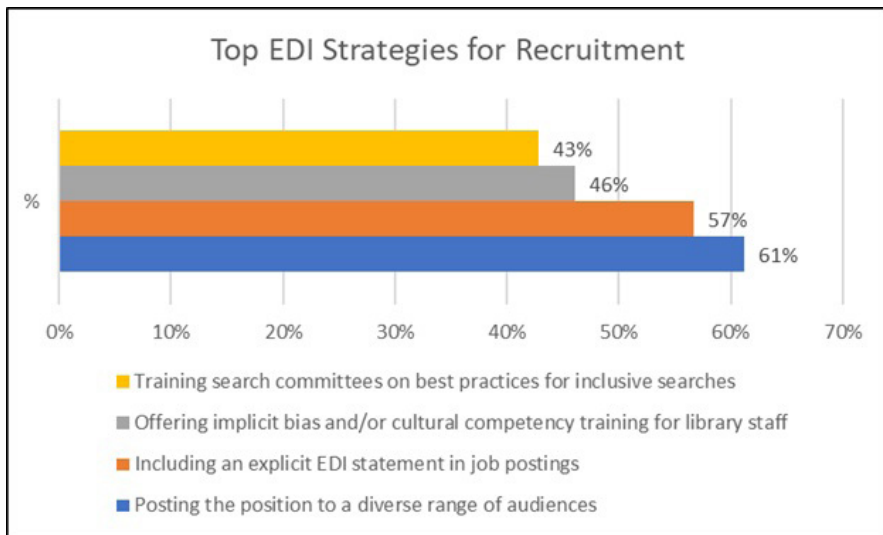


Chart 4: Top EDI Strategies for Recruitment.⁷

The top EDI strategies for staff retention included fostering an inclusive workplace culture and working to dismantle systemic racism in the organization. Other popular strategies included providing mentorship programs for new hires and creating action plans for retaining underrepresented employees. A significant percentage (34%) of institutions that completed this part of the survey reported making no intentional efforts to retain staff from underrepresented

groups. Deeper analysis by Carnegie Classification, institutional size, and student demographics may shed more insight on retention strategies.

The 2020 Trends questions on EDI were developed and released in 2019. At the same time, the ALA Committee on Diversity was working independently to develop the DEI Scorecard for Library and Information Organizations, which was released in April 2021.⁸ This scorecard was designed to assist libraries in evaluating their efforts to address diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), and to assist in strengthening DEI-related practices. The DEI Scorecard aims to promote accountability and engagement via five measures: embeddedness of DEI into library culture; staff training and education; staff recruitment, hiring, retention, and promotion; library budget priorities; and library data practices.^{9,10} Applying the DEI Scorecard rubric to the 2020 Trends questions offers a useful framework for understanding how libraries are implementing EDI initiatives.¹¹

Cultural Embeddedness: Many of the responses to the 2020 Trends questions provide insight into embeddedness in academic library culture, with 27% of academic libraries having formal written goals for EDI that include working to foster an inclusive climate and working to improve workplace culture. Clearly libraries are considering embeddedness as a key component of success; however, it is unclear how many have integrated EDI into their strategic planning, which is the highest level of embeddedness on the DEI Scorecard.

EDI Activities: The rubric includes data practices, with conducting collection audits, leading research on EDI, and analyzing accessibility of library space as examples. However, none of these examples ranked among the top six responses to the Trends questions on EDI activities, suggesting that libraries may find it challenging to undertake them. Although budget priorities for EDI are not directly addressed in the Trends questions, future EDI surveys will attempt to collect such

data. Collecting materials, creating programming, and staff development incurs costs and staff time, and future EDI Trends surveys can seek to provide a more comprehensive assessment of the extent and priority of such budgeting.

Recruitment, Hiring, Retention, and Promotion: Two 2020 Trends questions focus on staff recruitment and retention. Based on survey responses, there appears to be more emphasis on recruitment rather than retention. The top responses are uniformly high (more than 65% overall) for multiple aspects of the search process. Retention efforts focus on familiar strategies, such as mentoring programs and fostering inclusivity in workplace culture. Training and education are represented in two of the top six responses to the 2020 Trends question on hiring strategies. In particular, implicit bias training for staff was a top answer for this question. It is unclear how often implicit bias training is conducted, which is the highest level for this rubric for the DEI Scorecard.

For organizations that have undertaken EDI-related initiatives and are exploring and analyzing EDI issues, the 2020 Trends questions provide a pathway to promote, expand, or reconsider existing practices and help demonstrate engagement and success with EDI. The DEI Scorecard categories can further assess EDI efforts and provide a framework to communicate facets of EDI initiatives with nonlibraries. Both of these tools can inform strategic planning for EDI.

Conclusion

Based on this comparison of the EDI Trends questions and the DEI Scorecard,¹¹ there is growing support for documenting and clarifying the evolving nature of diversity, equity, and inclusion activities within academic libraries. Academic libraries' instructional activities are similarly undergoing changes, in some cases due to the impact of COVID-19 and increasing reliance on hybrid and online instruction. Both trends are expected to evolve and continue in future years. The Academic Library Trends & Statistics Board encourages all academic libraries to complete the 2022 survey which will launch in September and to make use of the trends and statistics data for planning, benchmarking, and advocating for the value of academic libraries at our institutions.

Notes

1. ACRL, "Benchmark," last modified 2022, <https://www.ala.org/acrl/proftools/benchmark>.
2. ACRL, *2020 ACRL Academic Library Trends and Statistics for Carnegie Classifications: Associates of Arts Colleges, Baccalaureate Colleges, Masters Colleges and Institutions, Doctorate Granting Institutions* (Chicago: American Librarian Association, 2021).
3. ACRL, "Standards for Libraries in Higher Education," last modified February 2018, <https://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/standardslibraries>.
4. Subscription discounts are available to ACRL organizational members and libraries that contribute to the ACRL Academic Library Trends and Statistics survey.
5. Data only includes libraries that reported virtual transactions separately from total reference transactions.
6. This chart excludes data from libraries unable to report physical and online sessions separately.
7. This chart looks at the aggregate results for doctoral, master's, baccalaureate, and associate's institutions.
8. ALA, "Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Scorecard for Library and Information Organizations," April 2021, <https://www.ala.org/aboutala/sites/ala.org.aboutala/files/content/2021%20>

EQUITY%20SCORECARD%20FOR%20LIBRARY%20AND%20INFORMATION%20ORGANIZATIONS.pdf.

9. ALA, “Core Values of Librarianship,” last modified January 2019, <https://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/corevalues>.

10. The scorecard and supplemental questions were shaped by ALA’s Core Values of Librarianship and ACRL Diversity Standards: Cultural Competency for Academic Libraries.

11. Ideally, future EDI trends surveys will reference this DEI Scorecard. We hope to see an EDI survey more fully incorporate this DEI Scorecard. ♪