

2022 ACRL Academic Library Trends and Statistics Survey

Highlights and Key Findings

Each year, ACRL's Academic Library Trends and Statistics Survey provides data that can help the profession understand how academic libraries provide and demonstrate their impact and value to their users, institutions, and communities. Findings from the 2022 survey continued this tradition while also supplying additional insight into how library services and use continued to evolve.

The 2022 survey collected data from 1,533 academic libraries¹ in two main areas. First, a standard set of questions related to collections (including titles held, volumes, and electronic books); expenditures (library materials, salaries, and wages, etc.); library services; and staffing. For the Library Trends section, a one-time set of survey questions focused on the anticipation of post-pandemic changes in library activity, professional development, flexible/remote work arrangements, and hiring procedures.

The highlights and insights below from each area are based on data from ACRL's Benchmark: Library Metrics and Trends tool (<https://librarybenchmark.org/>). Academic libraries completing the survey have free access to their own survey responses and selected aggregate data. Benchmark subscribers can leverage data outputs to perform institution-specific analysis for benchmarking, self-studies, budgeting, strategic planning, annual reports, and grant applications.

The Academic Library Trends and Statistics Survey Editorial Board thanks the academic libraries that participated, including the 155 first-time contributors. The response rate increased from 42%² to 44.4%.

Standard Survey Question Data

The ACRL survey collects data for a standard set of questions related to expenditures, staffing, information and other services, collections, and more. This set includes all questions in the IPEDS Academic Library Component (<https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/report-your-data/resource-center-academic-libraries>), with instructions and definitions completely aligned. Academic libraries' responses to these longitudinal questions can demonstrate consistency, disruption, or, in some cases, a surprising combination of the two.

Academic libraries' total expenditures had decreased about 7% over the previous three-year period (2019–2021) but increased by 6.6% from 2021 to 2022. The average salaries

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Average US academic library expenditures by type, 2019-2022

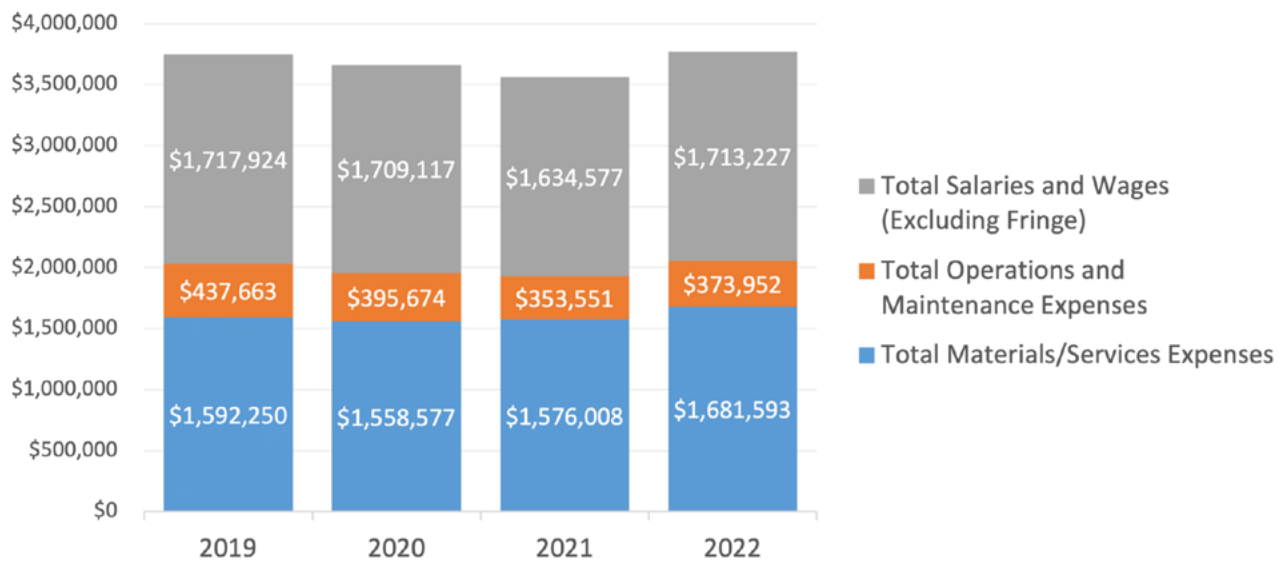


Figure 1. Average US academic library expenditures, 2019, 2021, 2022

Average staffing levels (FTE), 2019-2022

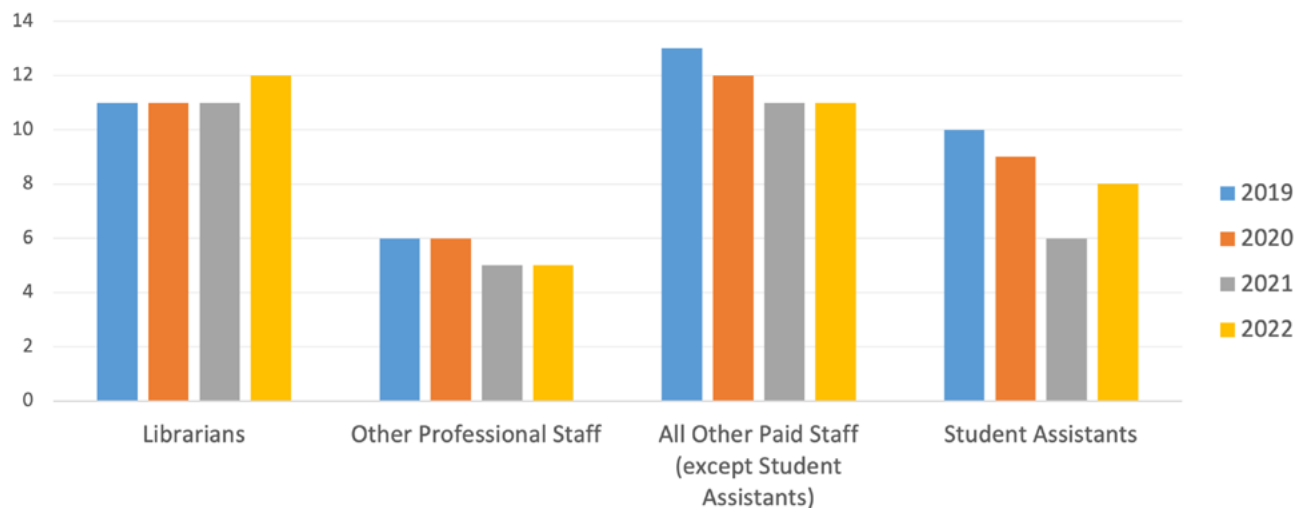


Figure 2. Average staffing levels, 2019, 2021, and 2022

and wages increased about 4.9% from the previous year, operations and maintenance expenditures rose by 5.8%, and materials/services expenditures rose 7.3% on average, with the average expenditures shown in figure 1. This was a notable reversal of post-pandemic trends and is also reflected in staffing levels, as the average number of librarians and student staff ticked back up slightly from 2021, although other staffing levels remained steady (as seen in figure 2).

One of the most notable developments in library expenditures can be seen in the average percentage of total library expenditures spent on ongoing commitments to subscriptions when broken down by Carnegie Class (figure 3). The percentages have remained steady for Doctoral Universities, Associate’s Colleges, and Two-Year Institutions before, during, and after the pandemic. However, this percentage peaked for Master’s Colleges during the pandemic, rising to 37% from 32%, and now has fallen back down to 31% in 2022. An

Average percentage of total library expenditures spent on ongoing commitments to subscriptions by Carnegie classification 2019-2022

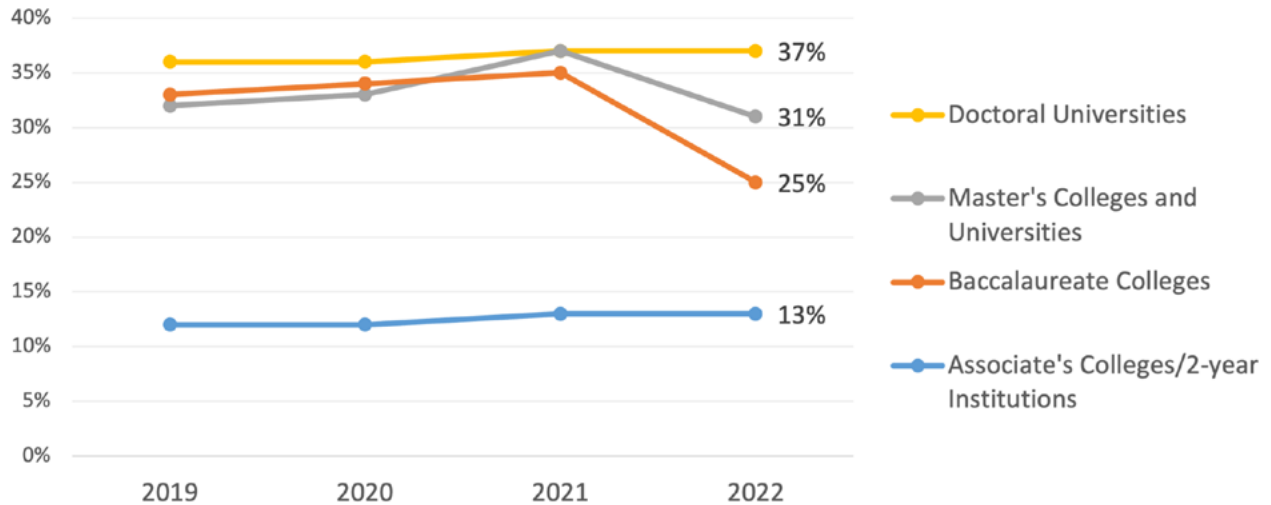


Figure 3. Average percentage of total library expenditures spent on ongoing commitments to subscriptions by Carnegie Class 2019–2022

Modality of 2022 presentations by Carnegie classification

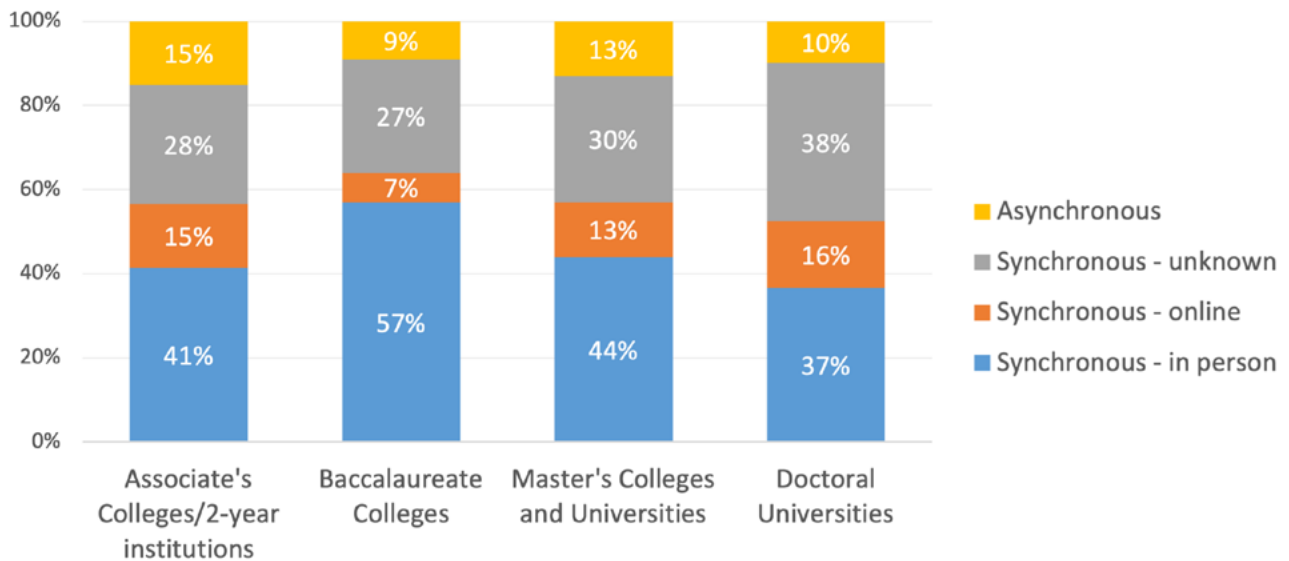


Figure 4. Modality of 2022 presentations by Carnegie Classification

even more stark difference is the drop for Baccalaureate Colleges, which had been slowly increasing the percentage spent on ongoing commitments to subscriptions over the last few years, culminating in 2021’s 35% mark. In 2022, this number plunged to 25%, and this seems like a ripe area for further investigation.

Regarding services, there was some confusion about reporting transactions and consultations separately or as a combined number. The number of institutions reporting these as a combined number rose 10%. There were some data issues that caused uncertainty as to whether transactions and consultations are rising or falling over time. There was a dramatic decrease in the percentage of total information services to individuals delivered virtually, dropping from 61% in 2021 to only 17% in 2022.

Anticipated changes in activity over the next three years

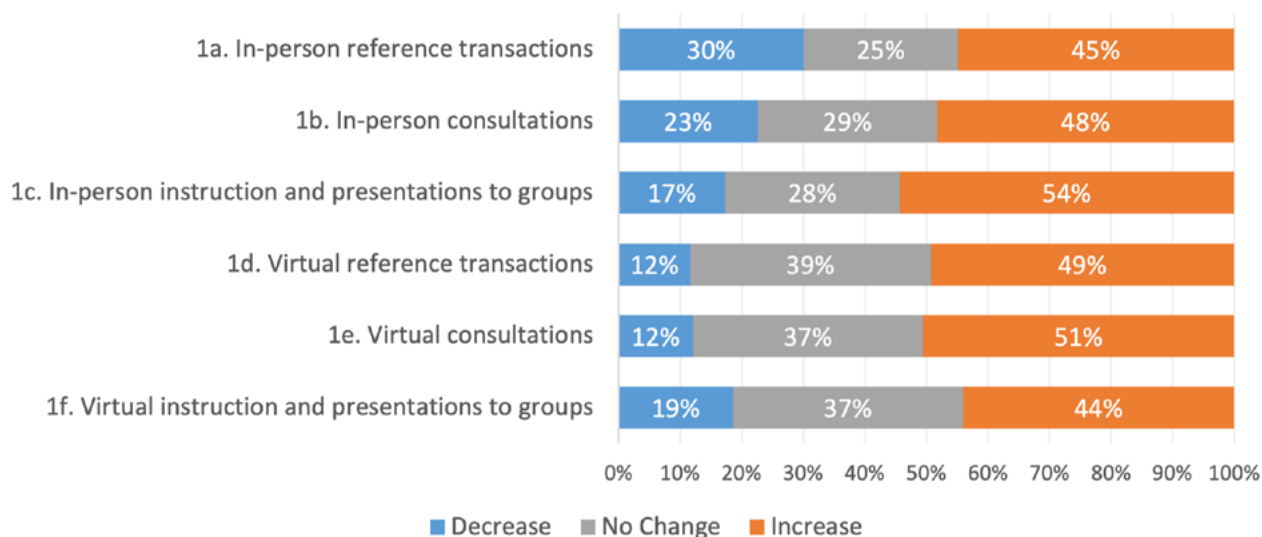


Figure 5. Anticipated changes in activity over the next three years

Presentation activity rose sharply from 2021 to 2022, although the total numbers still lag behind pre-pandemic levels. The number of presentations rose by 25% to a total number of 377,825, while overall attendance increased by 23% to a reported level of 5,685,008. Asynchronous instruction and online synchronous instruction made up a significant percentage of activity, ranging from 16% among Baccalaureate Colleges to 30% at two-year institutions. Figure 4 shows the breakdown of the percentage of each modality by Carnegie Classification.

Library Trends Questions on Post-Pandemic Professional Development and Landscape

Every year, the ACRL survey contains a short set of questions to gather and share information on more recent developments or “Trends.” In the Trends section for 2022, questions were posed to gauge respondents’ anticipation of post-pandemic changes in library activity, professional development, flexible/remote work arrangements, and hiring procedures. Notably, respondents expected activity to increase more than decrease, with the highest level of confidence for in-person presentations (figure 5). For professional development format, employee preference for virtual or in-person format far outweighed expectations of mandates.

Virtual or in-person preference per employee led with 44% against only 9% preference for in-person wherever available. The budget for professional development was mostly expected to stay the same (57%), but a slight advantage for decrease (19%) over increase (13%) suggests some level of pessimism. As for the possible change in hiring practices, only 27% of respondents stated that no flexible work arrangements would be offered, whereas 42% offered hybrid work schedules and 37% offered flexible work hours (figure 6). Also, only 27% of employers noted that hybrid/remote work options would be explicitly listed in job ads. The anecdotal evidence that the editorial board had heard regarding the tightness of the labor market seemed to be supported specifically in candidate pools. In hiring new employees, only 4% of respondents felt that the pools were larger, while 46% reported that the pools were smaller.

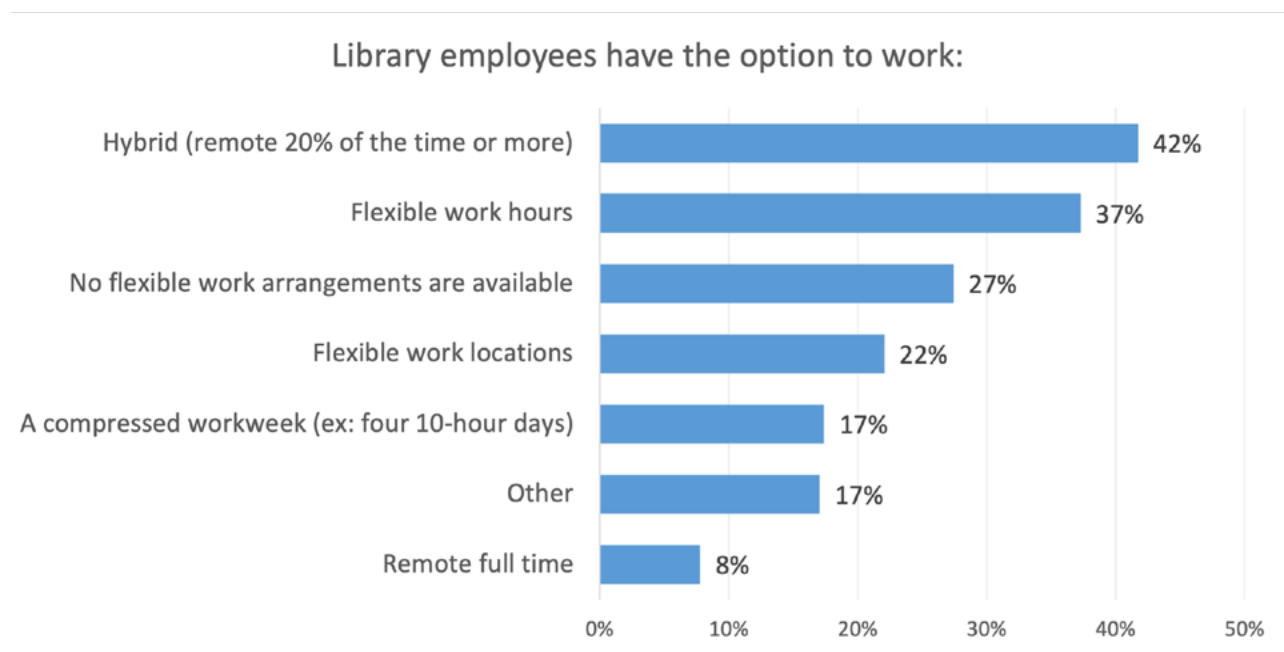


Figure 6. Library employees have the option to work

About the Survey

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. Libraries required to submit Academic Library Component data to IPEDS can download a file containing all the data required for the IPEDS Academic Library Component and share it with their campus IPEDS keyholder.

The survey is developed and administered annually by the ACRL Academic Library Trends and Statistics Survey Editorial Board (<https://www.ala.org/acrl/aboutacrl/directoryofleadership/editorialboards/acr-stats>) in collaboration with ACRL staff. The editorial board recognizes ACRL's Gena Parsons-Diamond for her collaboration and contributions. From the biggest picture to the smallest detail, she has demonstrated ACRL's commitment to the ongoing success of the Benchmark tool, which launched in 2021, as well as the annual survey. ²²

Notes

1. For the purposes of this article, all data is derived from the summary data results available through ACRL Benchmark, unless otherwise noted. Institutions that complete the survey receive complimentary access to this data.

2. Laura Rose Taylor, "2021 ACRL Academic Library Trends and Statistics Survey: Highlights and Key Academic Library Instruction and Group Presentation Findings," *College & Research Library News* 84, no. 3 (2022), <https://crln.acrl.org/index.php/crlnews/article/view/25850/337w84>.