

The Evolving Roles of U.S. Academic Librarians: A Snapshot of Job Responsibilities in 2023

Russell Michalak, Laura Rose Taylor, Michelle Reed, Amanda Koziura, and Devon Ellixson*

This study examines the evolving roles of academic librarians across Canada and the United States. Adapting a survey tool published in a prior Canadian study, the authors surveyed over 350 librarians in the United States, analyzing shifts in research support, teaching and learning, digital scholarship, user experience, and scholarly communication. Results indicate significant engagement in information discovery and digital scholarship, with a growing need for training in digital tools and data management. The resulting report highlights the crucial role of academic librarians in adapting to technological and educational changes, underscoring the necessity for ongoing professional development.

Introduction

The roles of academic librarians have evolved considerably over the years, in part due to technological advancements and shifts in societal dynamics. While “traditional” responsibilities—such as collection development, reference, and cataloging—have remained core to librarianship, the integration of “new roles”—such as digital scholarship, research support, and user experience—has considerably expanded the potential responsibilities that librarians have in their roles. Technology has been further integrated into all roles, and renewed emphasis has been placed on the importance of relationship building between patrons and library workers to better adapt to institutional and patron needs. The events of 2020 accelerated the field’s adoption of digital and asynchronous modes of content and service delivery. Even now, we are still feeling the effects of this, as expectations around delivery mode and method of many services have shifted to a more remote or hybrid nature to meet patron needs. As higher education wrestles with maintaining academic rigor amid these disruptions, librarians stand as crucial partners in supporting

*Russell Michalak is Director of Library and Archives at Goldey-Beacom College, email: michalr@gbc.edu; Laura Rose Taylor is Senior Director for Strategic Planning and Communication at Northern Arizona University, email: Laura.Taylor@nau.edu; Michelle Reed is Director of Programs at Library Futures at Library Futures, email: michelle@libraryfutures.net; Amanda Koziura is Head of Scholarly Communication & Data Services and Associate Professor at the University of Nevada-Las Vegas, email: amanda.koziura@unlv.edu; Devon Ellixson is Library Student Intern at Goldey-Beacom College, email: devonellixson@gmail.com. ©2026 Russell Michalak, Laura Rose Taylor, Michelle Reed, Amanda Koziura, and Devon Ellixson, Attribution-NonCommercial (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>) CC BY-NC.

research, fostering collaboration, and making content available to their patrons at the point of need.

The Association for College and Research Libraries (ACRL) has long been interested in new and evolving roles in librarianship. In 2015, for example, ACRL released *New Roles for the Road Ahead*, a collection of essays celebrating its 75th anniversary. The New Roles and Changing Landscapes Committee was established by ACRL's Board of Directors the following year and was charged with carrying out the organization's work on changing landscapes, which includes strategies connected to open educational resources, retention of a diverse workforce, and emerging and add-on roles. This research, which explores the practical implications and real-world responsibility shifts experienced by academic librarians post-2020, was solicited by ACRL's New Roles and Changing Landscapes Committee and completed by a subcommittee thereof.

Building on Ducas et al.'s (2020) prepandemic study, this investigation identifies evolving roles and gauges librarians' confidence levels, training needs, job satisfaction, as well as the perceived impact of their roles on the academic sphere. It uses the same categories for classifying job responsibilities as the 2020 Canadian study for "traditional" and "new" roles, which were based on *the New Roles for New Times: Transforming Liaison Roles in Research Libraries* report by the Association of Research Libraries (ARL). Though these categories and their subcategories may not match how individual libraries or librarians classify their services, we adopted them for use in this research because they are well-established in existing library literature and therefore allow for more accurate comparison with prior studies. However, the difficulties of universal classification for roles—even those that have been common in librarianship for several decades—are a limitation of the study, as discussed at the end of this report. Similarly, which duties the field considers "new" and "traditional" will continue to evolve over time, and future studies may choose to classify job responsibilities in different ways.

The following research questions guided our study:

1. Exploration of Emerging Roles: What are the emerging roles of academic librarians, and how do they compare with traditional functions? What training needs arise from these emerging roles?
2. Job Satisfaction Assessment: How satisfied are academic librarians with their roles, particularly in light of the evolving demands and responsibilities associated with emerging functions?
3. Evaluation of Impact: What perceptions do academic librarians hold regarding the impact of their roles on the academic enterprise? How do they perceive their contributions in advancing institutional goals and supporting scholarly endeavors?

Literature Review

The role of academic librarians has undergone a profound transformation as technology and shifting educational priorities reshape higher education. Librarians have moved far beyond their traditional responsibilities to embrace dynamic, multifaceted roles that address the evolving needs of their institutions. This journey is marked by innovation and adaptability as librarians navigate new challenges and redefine their professional identities. Goetsch (2008) highlighted the initial waves of technological integration, where librarians began reshaping their roles to meet the demands of modern users. This early adaptation laid the groundwork

for the rapid changes observed by Jaguszewski and Williams (2015), who emphasized the shift toward user-centric services that prioritize digital scholarship, research support, and innovative collection development. Martin and Sheehan (2018) further examined how the transition from collection-centric to user-centric library models necessitated a reimagining of library spaces and the acquisition of new skills. Ducas et al. (2020) documented the hybrid capacities in which Canadian librarians increasingly operate, blending traditional tasks with responsibilities in digital initiatives and user experience. These studies collectively underscore the emergence of new, technology-driven roles in librarianship.

Research support has been another critical area of expansion. Once primarily trainers, librarians have become integral collaborators in interdisciplinary research. Roberts and Levy (2005) documented this shift, showing how librarians increasingly contribute to curriculum development. Daland and Hidle (2016) emphasized the importance of building social and professional networks with postgraduate students to enhance research processes. At the University of North Carolina Charlotte, Wu et al. (2020) highlighted librarians' roles in technology instruction and management, meeting the demands of interdisciplinary research. These changes reveal a broader trend of librarians embedding themselves in collaborative research processes to support academic success. Additionally, Rod (2023) found that the increasing demand for data-related services within academic libraries reflects this shift, as librarians now need skills in data management, computational coding, and metadata, building on earlier research that calls for the continual adaptation of librarian roles to include technical competencies.

Scholarly communication has also transformed, with librarians stepping into leadership roles to manage the complexities of the digital age. Ogburn (2012) provided a framework for adapting to these changes, emphasizing leadership and collaboration. McGlone (2014) and Gardner (2014) detailed the expanded roles of librarians in digital project management, web design, and data curation. Frankosky et al. (2014) noted the critical role of librarians in navigating copyright challenges, while Orzech and Abramovich (2018) and Revez (2018) called for a reevaluation of workflows to better support open science and digital scholarship. These developments highlight how librarians have adapted to lead in the face of new academic demands. Falciani-White (2024) also discussed the environmental conditions required for creativity and innovation within academic libraries, noting that although libraries have made strides, they often fall short in supporting creative work, which is critical for keeping pace with advancements in scholarly communication.

Digital scholarship has emerged as a frontier for innovation in librarianship. McGlone (2014) described the expanding responsibilities of digital project librarians, while Gardner (2014) emphasized the adaptation of scholarly communication librarians to digital publishing and data management. Cummings (2020) explored the challenges faced by digital humanities librarians, such as imposter syndrome, while praising successful interdisciplinary collaboration at the University of Utah's Digital Matters Lab. Malone (2020) and Buck and Pino (2020) showcased how librarians are leveraging virtual and augmented reality technologies to enhance educational experiences. Sichani (2024) redefined digital humanities labs as inclusive spaces that promote interdisciplinary collaboration through hybrid activities, illustrating how librarians have embraced leadership in managing innovative digital initiatives. These studies highlight the continued transformation of librarians into leaders in digital scholarship. Kautonen and Gasparini (2024) further expanded this by offering the B-Wheel process

model, which provides a design-thinking approach for librarians to develop AI competencies and tackle the complexities of new technologies in digital scholarship.

The integration of digital tools has also transformed user experience roles in libraries. McGlone (2014) as well as Gardner (2014) noted the evolution of traditional roles like reference and collection development into areas focused on user-centered design principles. Young et al. (2020) found that libraries with advanced UX practices, supported by leadership and collaboration, were better equipped to meet user needs. Sa'ari et al. (2023) highlighted the role of librarians as data scientists, who enhance e-learning environments by optimizing usability and facilitating seamless access to digital resources. These examples illustrate the growing importance of librarians in designing user-centered digital experiences. Hamad et al. (2024) contributed to this by discussing how libraries are increasingly central to advancing climate change literacy, underscoring their role in fostering both social responsibility and user-centered service delivery through strategic outreach and resource development.

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated these transformations, forcing libraries to rapidly pivot to virtual services. Runyon and Steffy (2021) documented the swift transition to online reference, research consultations, and information literacy instruction, noting how pre-existing digital infrastructure smoothed the process for some institutions. Ibacache et al. (2021) highlighted how tools like Kahoot! and Poll Everywhere became essential for engaging students remotely, while Koob et al. (2022) emphasized the need for enhanced digital literacy training for librarians and students alike. Libraries also worked to bridge the digital divide, providing laptops and Wi-Fi hotspots to ensure equitable access (Ibacache et al., 2021). McClure (2023) reflected on the varied outcomes of these efforts, underscoring the importance of flexibility, equity, and technology integration in shaping future service models.

Beyond these core transformations, librarians have increasingly embraced “add-on” roles that diversify their contributions to academia. Brunner et al. (2013) described the pressures librarians face to adopt new skill sets, particularly at smaller institutions. Perini (2016) explored the concept of librarians occupying a “third space” between faculty and students, highlighting both the opportunities and challenges of these hybrid positions. These evolving roles demand resilience, proactive engagement, and continuous learning, as librarians navigate the complexities of modern academia. Rothfus et al. (2024) echoed these findings in their study on open scholarship, revealing that librarians must continuously adapt and expand their competencies to support researchers navigating the challenges of open science and access.

Across these domains, the emergence of new roles in librarianship reflects a profession that is dynamic, adaptive, and increasingly integral to higher education. By embracing change and continuously expanding their expertise, librarians ensure their relevance as leaders and collaborators in the evolving academic landscape.

Methodology

The ACRL New Roles and Changing Landscapes Committee decided to explore the evolving roles of academic librarians to understand and document shifts in U.S. librarianship influenced by recent technological and societal changes. Ducas et al. (2020) surveyed Canadian librarians, focusing on research support, teaching and learning support, digital scholarship, user experience, and scholarly communication. With permission from the Canadian researchers, a subcommittee of ACRL's New Roles and Changing Landscapes Committee undertook the task of repurposing the survey for a U.S. audience.

Like the Ducas survey, this study examined the evolving roles of academic librarians, focusing on five key areas: research support, teaching and learning, digital scholarship, user experience, and scholarly communication. These areas were primarily drawn from the ARL publication *New Roles for New Times: Transforming Liaison Roles in Research Libraries*. To ensure a comprehensive exploration of current trends, additional functions were identified through a review of relevant literature and job postings.

The survey included a 50-question instrument designed to gather detailed insights. Respondents were asked to indicate the specific functions they perform within each of the five areas, assess their confidence in executing these tasks, and share how they acquired the necessary skills. To identify training gaps, participants were also asked to indicate areas where they felt additional professional development was needed. Furthermore, the survey explored the balance between traditional and emerging roles by asking respondents to classify their duties and estimate how much time they devoted to each category.

To provide a broader understanding of librarians' professional experiences, participants were invited to assess their job satisfaction and reflect on the perceived impact of their roles on the academic mission. These questions aimed to capture not only the functional aspects of their work but also their alignment with institutional goals and personal fulfillment in their roles.

Most questions were close ended, offering predefined options for respondents to select as applicable, with an "other" option available for additional input. At the end of the survey, respondents were encouraged to provide general comments.

In May 2023, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Goldey-Beacom College approved the research project. The survey was conducted over a span of nearly two months, from June 2 to July 28, 2023. As ACRL is the largest professional association for academic librarians, distribution targeted members within the ACRL, including subgroups such as the ACRL Leadership Discussion Group, ACRL University Libraries, and ACRL Annual Survey and Statistics Editorial Board, alongside ALA Core members on ALA Connect. Additional dissemination channels included the ACRL Insider blog and the ARL-ASSESS listserv. Social media platforms, primarily Twitter and LinkedIn, were used to promote the survey further, courtesy of ACRL and the project's research team. This strategy resulted in over 400 responses during the active recruitment period.

To maintain consistency with the Canadian survey, an MLS or equivalent degree was required for eligibility. Eligibility was further restricted to academic librarians aged 18 or over and employed in the United States. To manage data quality, a progress indicator of greater than 8% was established as the threshold for inclusion to ensure that respondents engaged with the survey beyond the initial questions. Responses that showed completion as "True" but had all fields blank, and those that did not meet the progress threshold, were excluded from the analysis. This filtering process culminated in a dataset of 350 usable responses. We conducted a descriptive analysis of the resulting dataset. Each question had a different number of respondents, and some questions allowed for multiple responses. Thus, each individual question has a different n value.

Profile of Respondents

Key characteristics of respondents who met the above criteria include:

- Approximately 43% (n = 151) had up to 10 years of experience in postsecondary educational institutions.

- The largest segment (30%, $n = 106$) reported being in their current position for between four and 10 years.
- Educational qualifications showed that, in addition to holding an MLIS, 31% ($n = 107$) possessed an additional master's degree, and 7% ($n = 25$) held a PhD.

This is similar to the Canadian study, which highlighted 52% of respondents with up to 10 years of experience working in a postsecondary institution, 36% of respondents working in their current position for between four and 10 years, 36% with an additional master's degree, and 6% with a PhD.

Results

This research uses the five areas noted in the Canadian study to examine significant shifts in librarians' roles in research support, teaching and learning, digital scholarship, user experience, and scholarly communication. Percentages reported in our textual results summary are rounded figures.

Results from Ducas et al.'s 2017 survey of Canadian academic librarians are used throughout as a comparative benchmark. Variations between the Canadian ($n = 205$) and U.S. (2023; $n = 350$) findings should be interpreted cautiously, as they may reflect differences in survey timing, sample size, population scope (research-intensive institutions in Canada versus a broader U.S. academic librarian population), and structural differences in the size of the academic library workforce in each country.

Research Support

The research support area of the U.S. survey had three sections: general; data management; and bibliometric services.

The general section includes information discovery, data management, systematic reviews, bibliometrics services, and grant application support. Of the 348 respondents in the general section (see Figure 1), 273 stated they provide one or more of the services offered as options, and 75 stated they did not provide any of the research support services asked about in the survey. "Information discovery, such as consultations and literature reviews" had the highest percentage of respondents in this section at 75% ($n=260$). This percentage is identical to the 75% reported in the Canadian study ($n = 153$). Respondents reported delivering the other services at a range of 12% to 16% ($n = 41-55$), a decrease from the 23% to 28% range in the Canadian study ($n = 46-58$).

We asked additional questions about data management and bibliometrics services as these categories include a vast array of services. Again, we replicated the Canadian study when asking about specific facets of these service categories to better understand which aspects U.S. academic libraries may be focusing on. In both data management and bibliometrics in the U.S., the largest percentage of respondents (34% [$n = 93$] and 64% [$n = 166$], respectively) selected "none of the above" indicating that while they may be offering services that would generally be classified as data management or bibliometrics, they are not currently offering any of the specific types of services we asked about.

Of the 271 respondents in the data management section (see Figure 2), the top services most likely to be provided were "assistance with the use of technology, infrastructure, and tools" at 38% ($n = 103$); "finding external data sets" at 35% ($n = 96$); and "support for data deposit in your institutional repository" at 19% ($n=51$). While the top service is the same as reported in the Canadian survey ("assistance with the use of technology, infrastructure, and

FIGURE 1
Research Support: General Respondents.

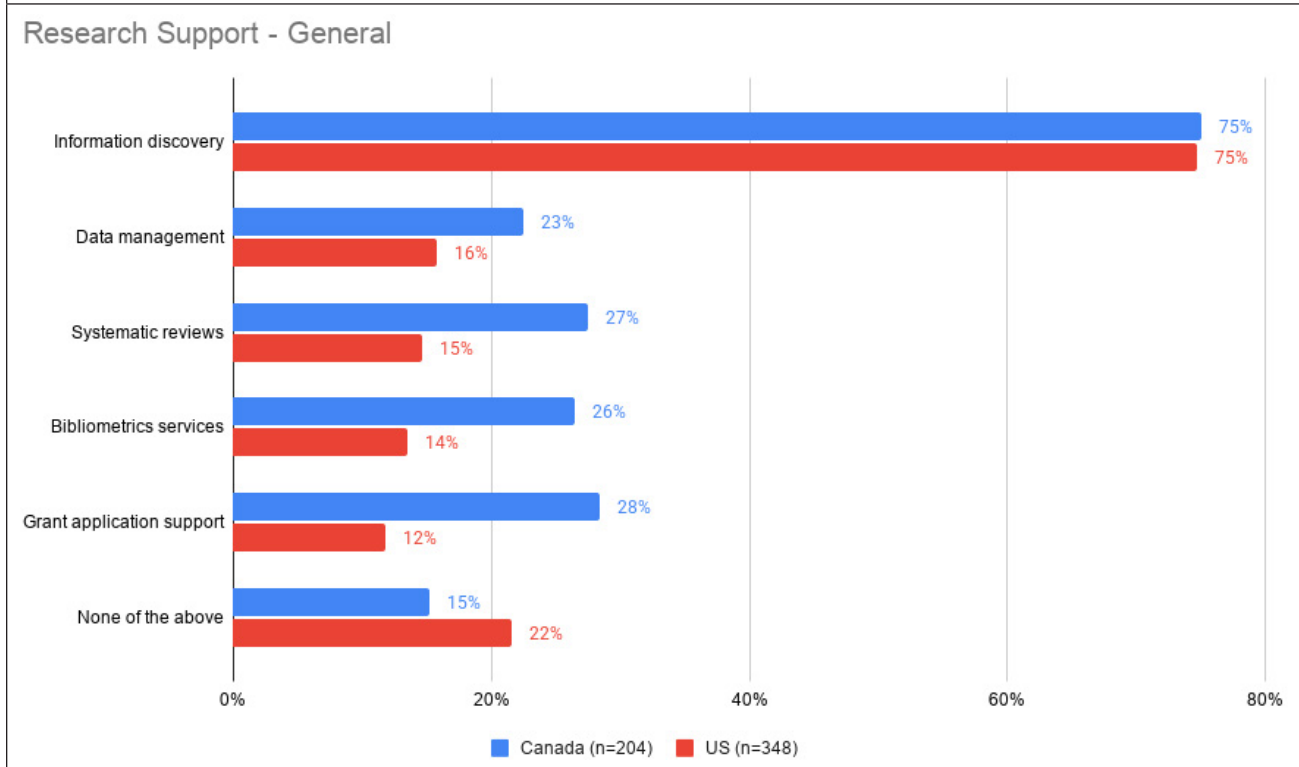
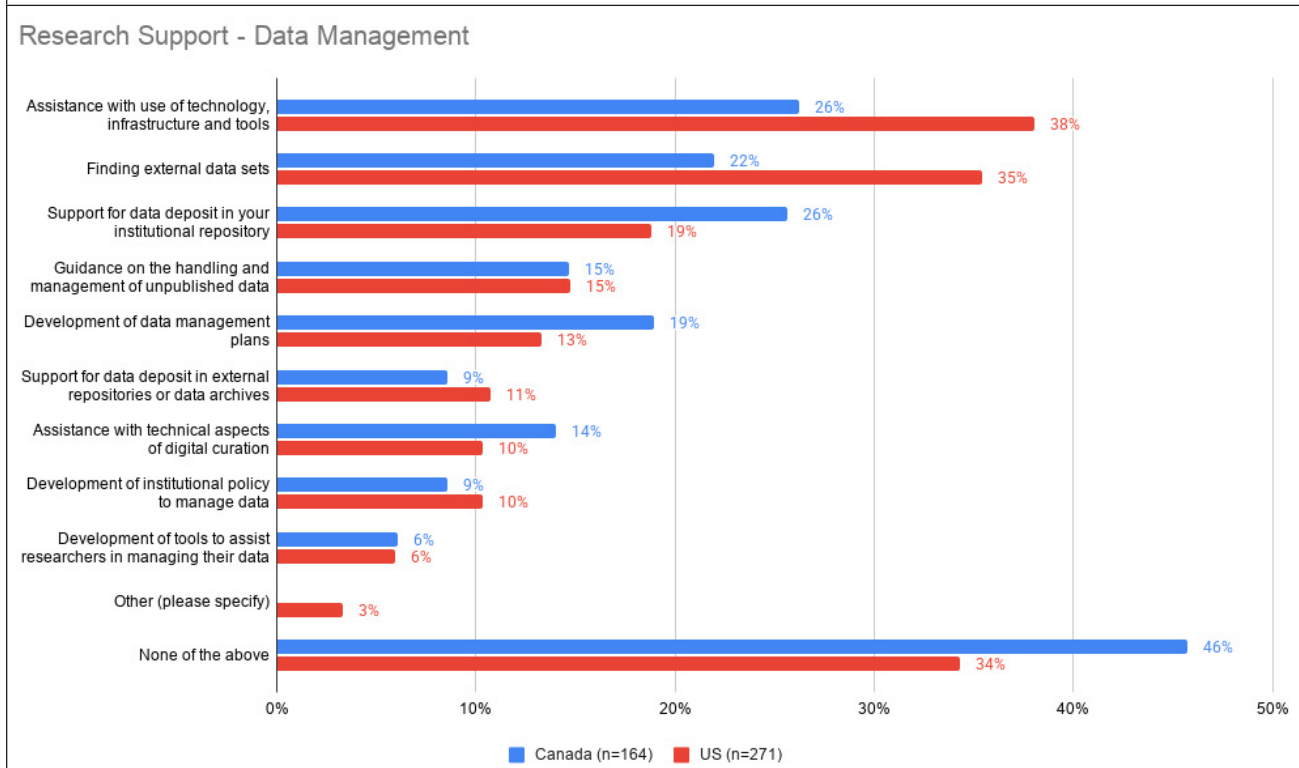


FIGURE 2
Data Management Respondents.



tools" at 26% [n = 43]), the Canadian survey lists "support for data deposit in your institutional repository" in second place at 26% (n = 42) and "finding external data sets" in third place at 22% (n = 36). However, the Canadian survey only had 164 respondents in this section making it an inexact comparison.

The bibliometric services section of the U.S. survey had 258 respondents (see Figure 3). The top services most likely to be provided were "citation reports" at 24% (n = 61) and "altmetrics support" at 14% (n = 37), followed by "bibliometrics training" and "e-research support for recruitment, promotion or tenure application," which both came in at 13% (n = 34). The first three are the same top results found in the bibliometrics services section of the Canadian survey (n = 157), albeit in a different order. In the Canadian survey "bibliometrics training" came in at 30% (n = 47), "citation reports" at 27% (n = 43), and "altmetrics support" at 25% (n = 39), while e-research support for recruitment, promotion, or tenure application was far lower down the list at 8% (n = 13).

Teaching and Learning

In the teaching and learning area of the U.S. survey, 281 of 344 (82%) respondents indicated that they provided at least one of the 12 services provided as options, while 63 (18%) indicated they did not provide any (see Figure 4).

The services most offered in the U.S. survey were "classroom teaching to students" at 70% (n = 242) and "one-on-one teaching" at 63% (n = 216). More than half of respondents reported providing "short videos and screencasts" (55%, n=216), "online learning" (52%, n=180), and "tutorials" (52%, n=178). While the first two services may be considered as core

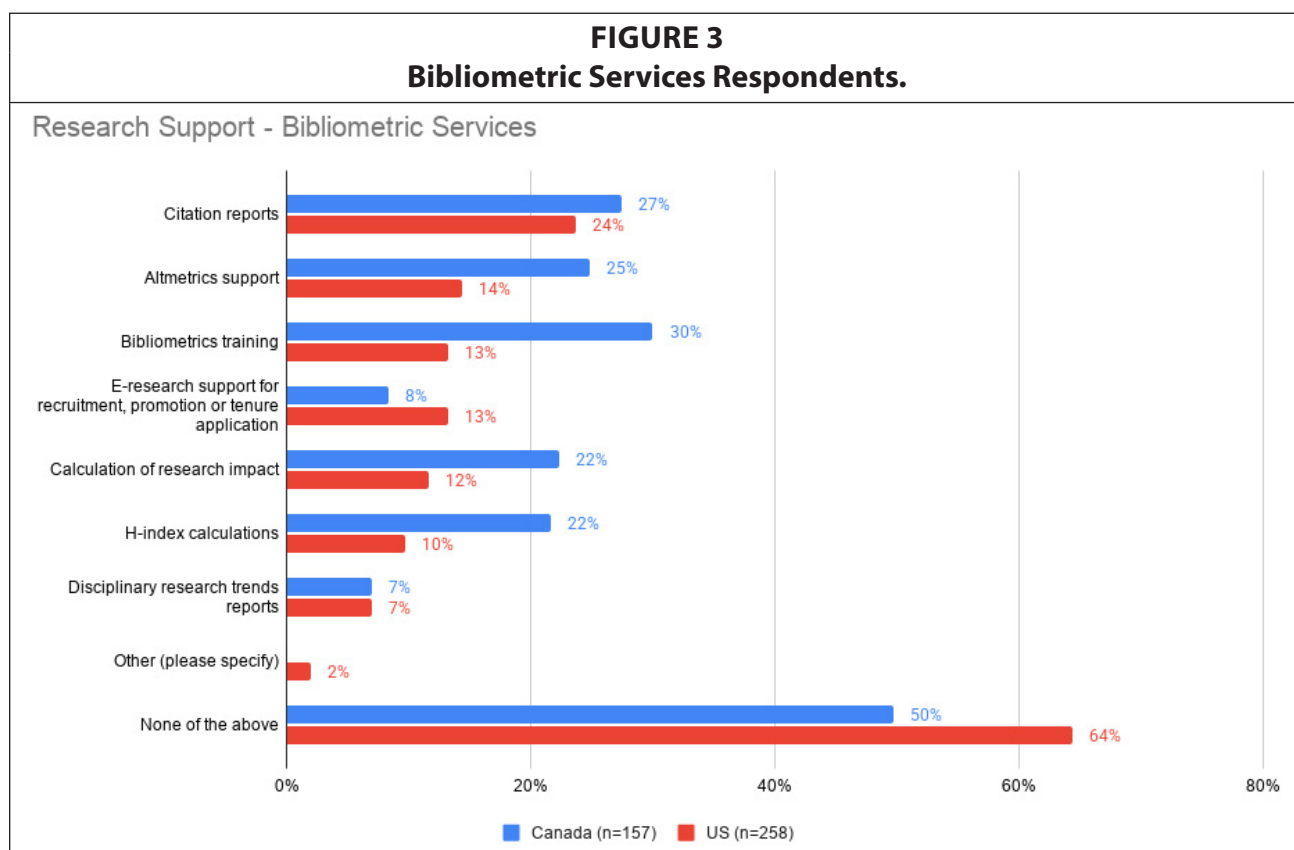
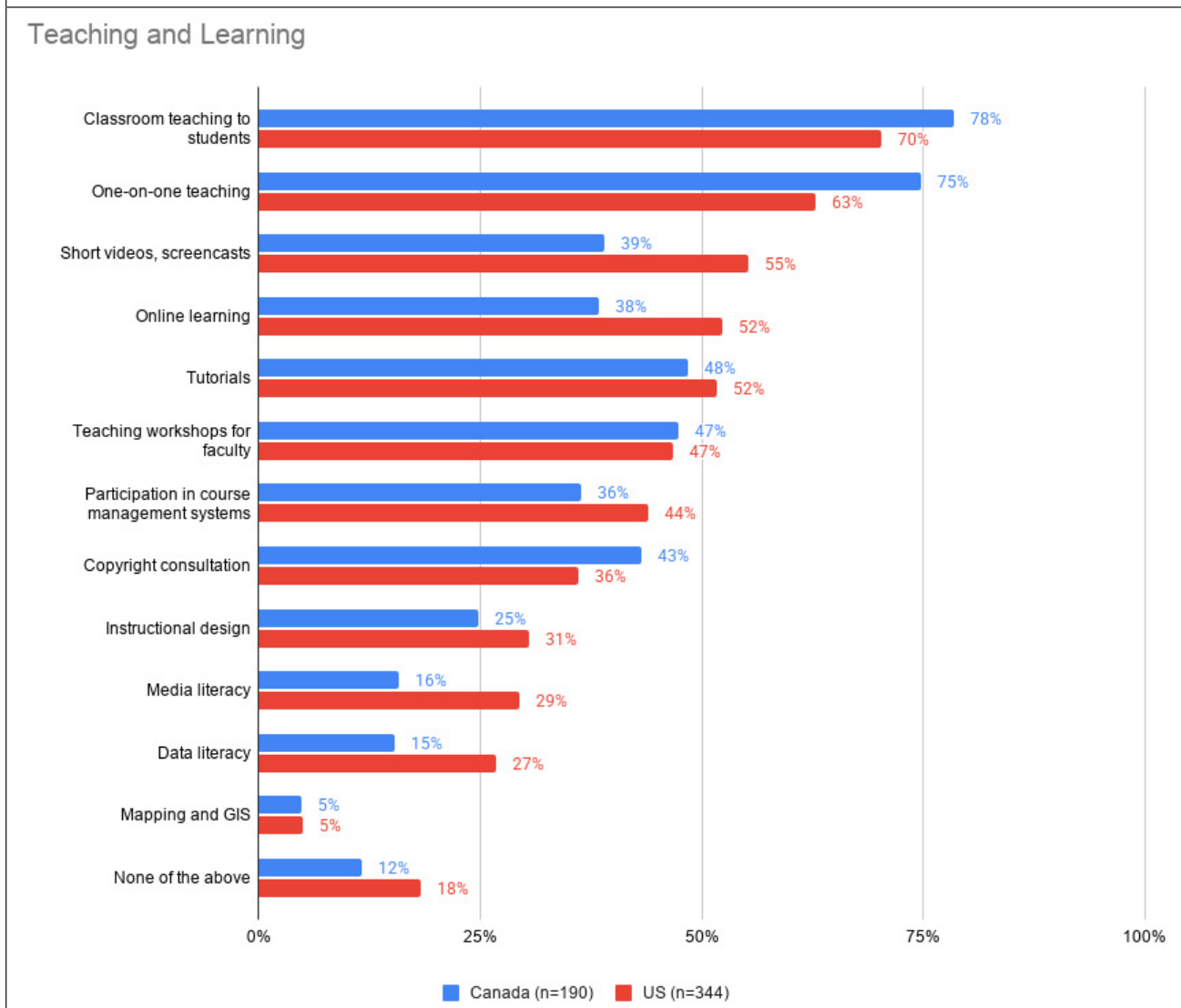


FIGURE 4
Teaching and Learning Respondents.

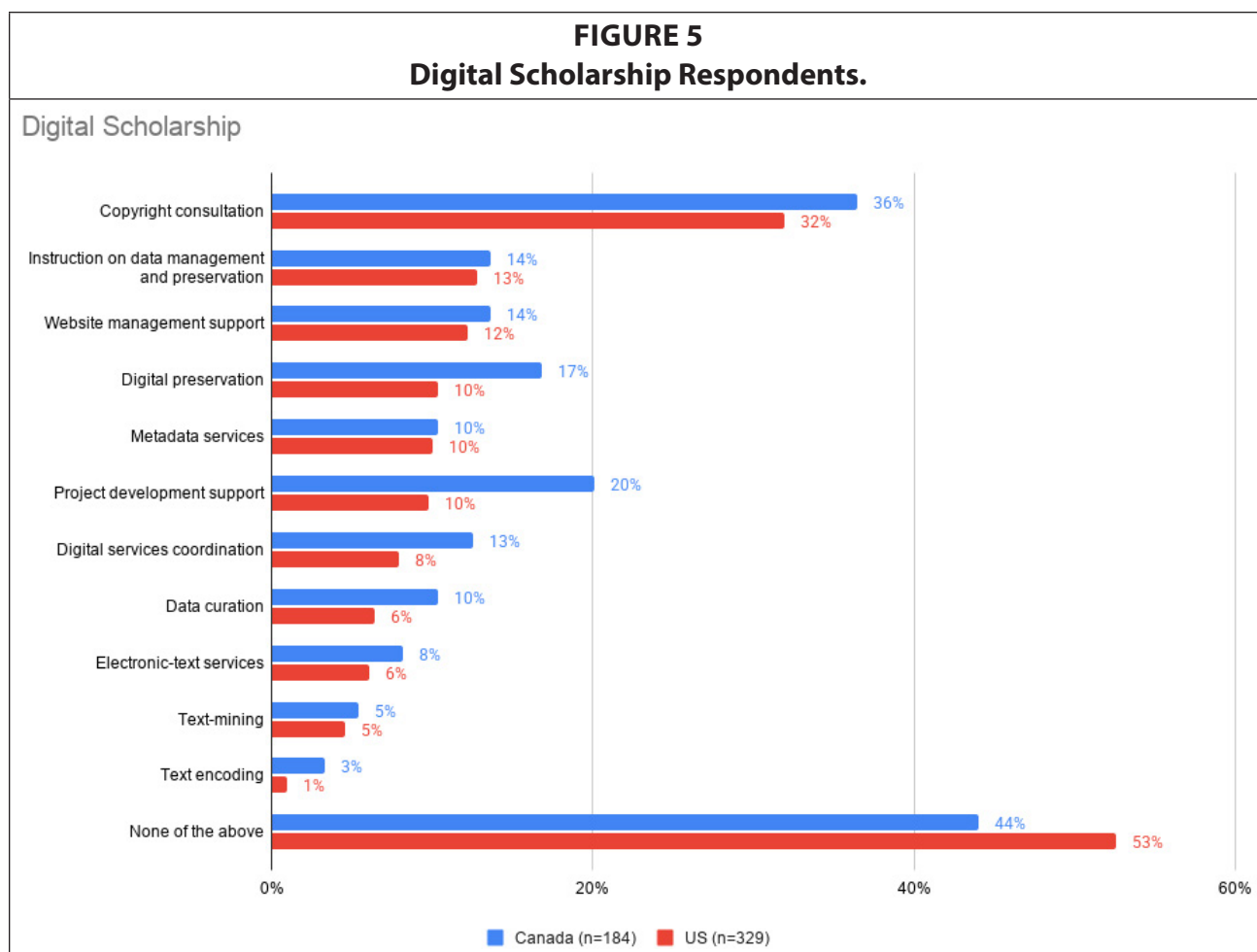


mainstays, the next three services can be leveraged at a distance—and during a pandemic lockdown.

The Canadian survey (n = 190 for this service area) had the same core services at the top of their most offered list: “classroom teaching to students” and “one-on-one teaching” in the top two spots, at 78% (n = 149) and 75% (n = 142), respectively. The next three spots were held by “tutorials” (48%, n = 92), “teaching workshops for faculty” (47%, n = 90), and “copyright consultation” (43%, n = 82).

Digital Scholarship

The digital scholarship area of the U.S. survey had 329 respondents (see Figure 5). More than half (n = 173) indicated that they did not provide any of the 11 services provided as options, while the remainder (n = 156) indicated they provided at least one. The Canadian survey had significantly fewer respondents in this section (n = 184); however, the highest response rate was also for “none of the above” at 44% (n = 81). While digital scholarship



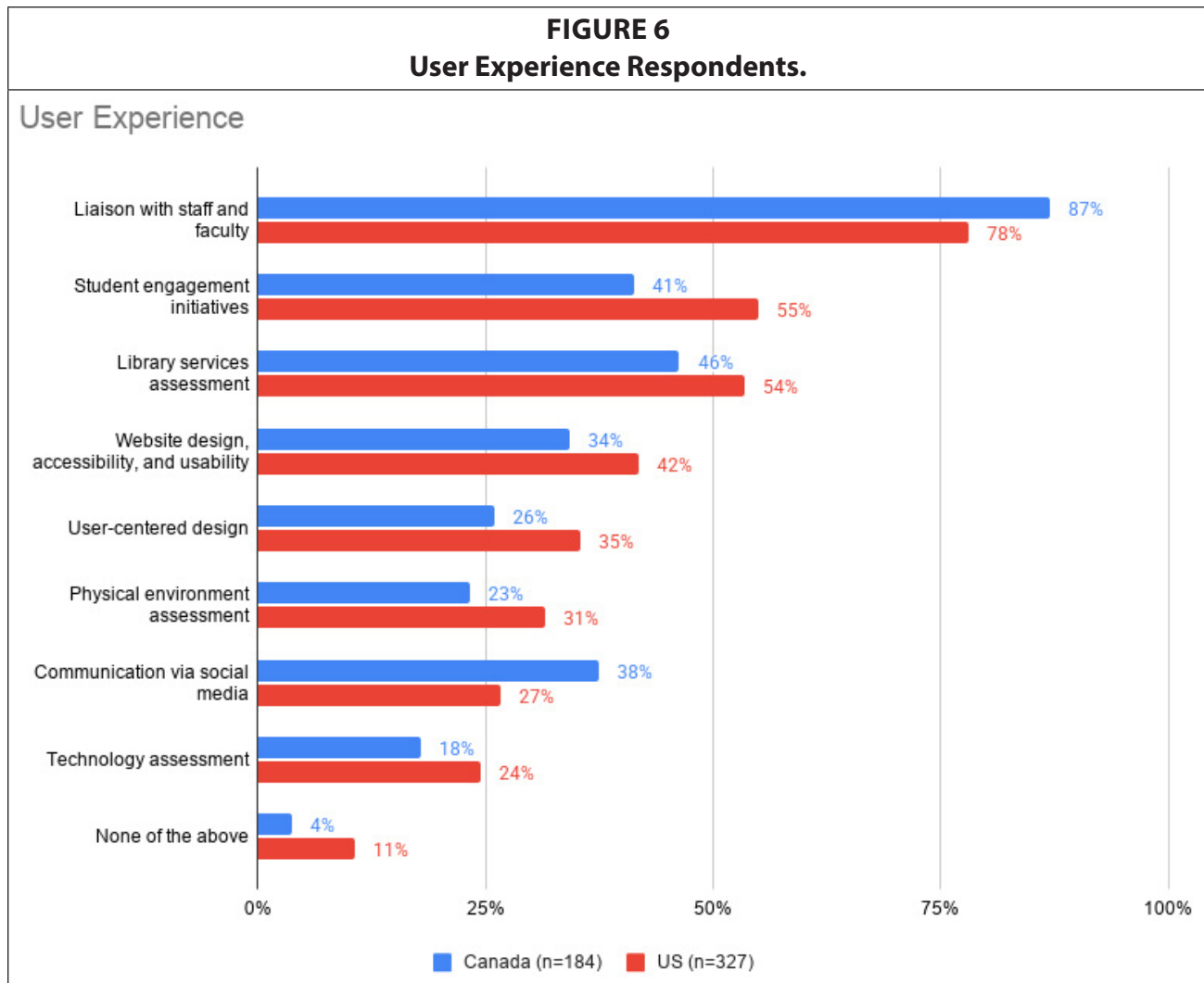
services are becoming increasingly present in academic libraries, particularly at research-intensive institutions, it is a category that is notoriously difficult to define, and thus the 11 services selected may not be reflective of what respondents consider digital scholarship services.

Our results show that “copyright consultation” at 32% (n = 105) was the most-offered service in the U.S. survey, which was more than double the next highest service of “instruction on data management and preservation” at 13% (n = 42). The Canadian survey had the same top service: “copyright consultation” at 36% (n = 67), which was followed by “project development support” at 20% (n = 37).

User Experience

The user experience section of the U.S. survey had 327 respondents. Only 11% (n = 35) of U.S. respondents indicated that they did not provide any of the eight service options presented (see Figure 6). The majority (n = 293) reported providing at least one. Similarly, the Canadian survey showed that most of their respondents provide at least one service in this area, with only 4% (n = 7) saying they did not.

The service most offered was “liaison with staff and faculty” at 78% (n = 255), followed by “student engagement initiatives” at 55% (n = 180) and “library services assessment” at 54% (n = 175). The same three services topped the user experience list in the Canadian survey



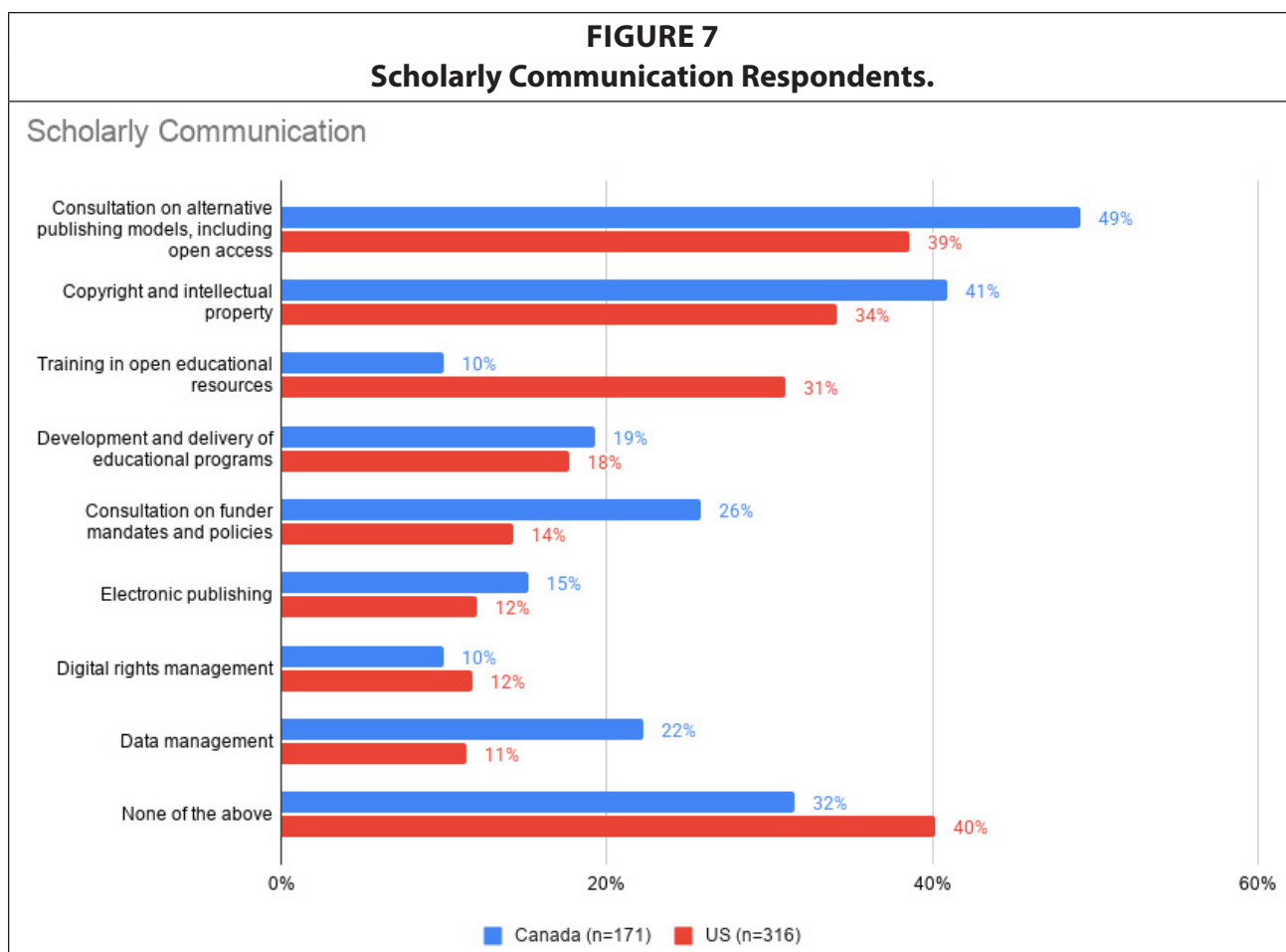
(n = 184) but in a different order: “liaison with staff and faculty” at 87% (n = 160) was also first, followed by “library services assessment” at 46% (n = 85) and then “student engagement initiatives” at 41% (n = 76).

Scholarly Communication

In the scholarly communication area, 60% (n = 189) of respondents reported providing at least one of the eight services provided as options, and the remaining 40% (n = 127) indicated that they did not provide any (see Figure 7). In the Canadian survey, 68% (n = 117) of respondents reported providing at least one of the eight services shown in the table below, with the remaining 32% (n = 54) stating they did not provide any of them.

The most selected answer in the scholarly communication area was “none of the above” at 40% (n = 127). Just behind it was the service provided with the highest percentage, “consultation on alternative publishing models, including open access” at 39% (n = 122), followed by “copyright and intellectual property” at 34% (n = 108), and then “training in open educational resources” at 31% (n = 98).

“Consultation on alternative publishing models, including open access,” also had the top spot in the Canadian survey at 49% (n = 84), again followed by “copyright and intel-



lectual property” at 41% (n = 70). However, “training in open educational resources” was only reported by 10% of respondents (n = 17) in the Canadian survey, compared to 31% of respondents (n = 98) in the U.S. survey.

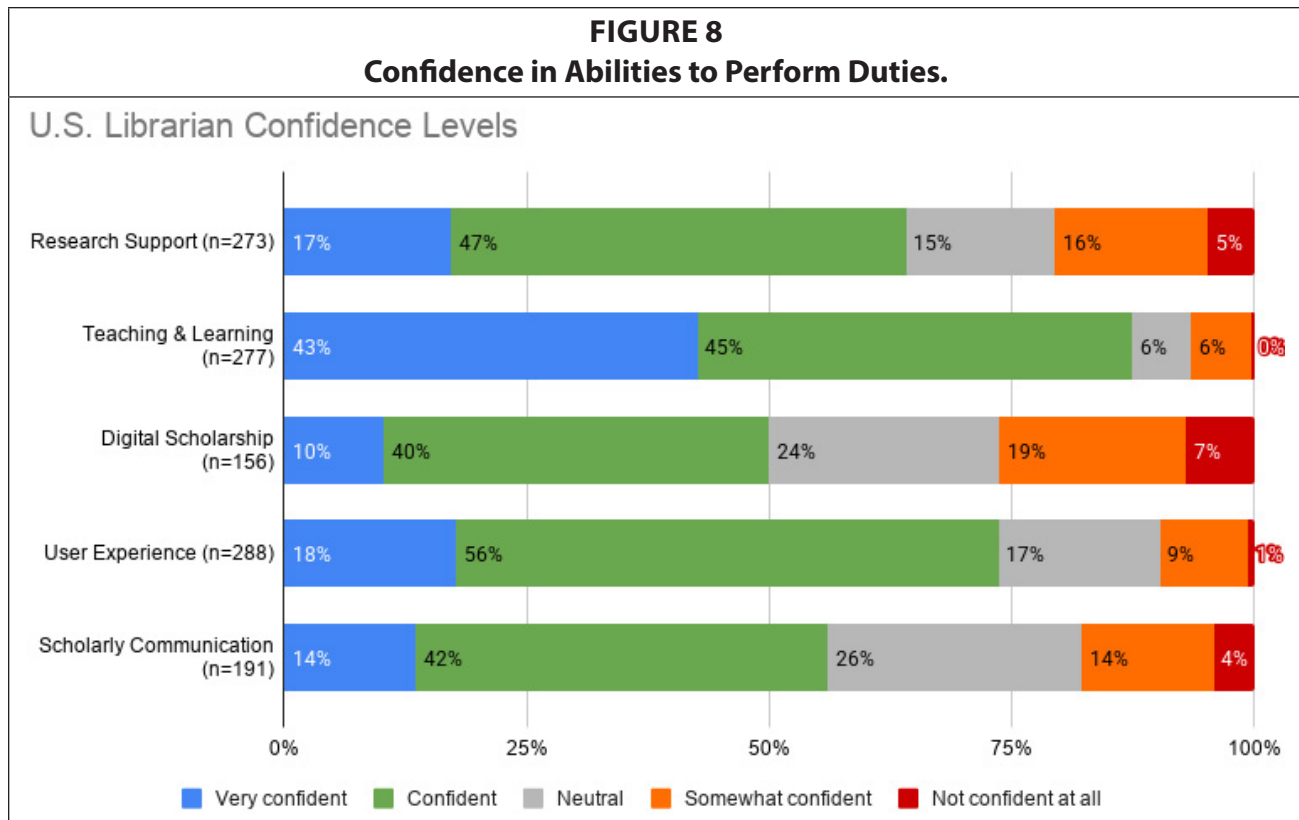
Librarians' Confidence Levels

U.S. respondents were asked to rate their confidence across each of the five areas (see Figure 8). Each area of expertise had a different number of respondents as follows:

- Research support: 273
- Teaching and learning: 277
- Digital scholarship: 156
- User experience: 288
- Scholarly communication: 191

Survey participants indicated being most confident in the area of teaching and learning, with 87% (n = 242) of them reporting being confident or very confident, followed by user experience with 74% (n = 212). Sixty-four percent of respondents (n = 175) were confident or very confident in the area of research support, followed by scholarly communication at 56% (n = 107), and digital scholarship at 50% (n = 78).

In the Canadian survey, respondents were also most confident in the area of teaching and learning, with 75% (n = 126) selecting confident or very confident, followed by research



support at 62% (n = 102) and user experience at 60% (n = 104). Again, at the bottom of the list were respondents reporting they were confident or very confident in terms of scholarly communication at 51% (n = 62) and digital scholarship at 50% (n = 53).

Survey participants reported being least confident in the area of digital scholarship, with 26% (n = 41) of them reporting being somewhat confident or not confident at all, followed by research support with 21% (n = 56).

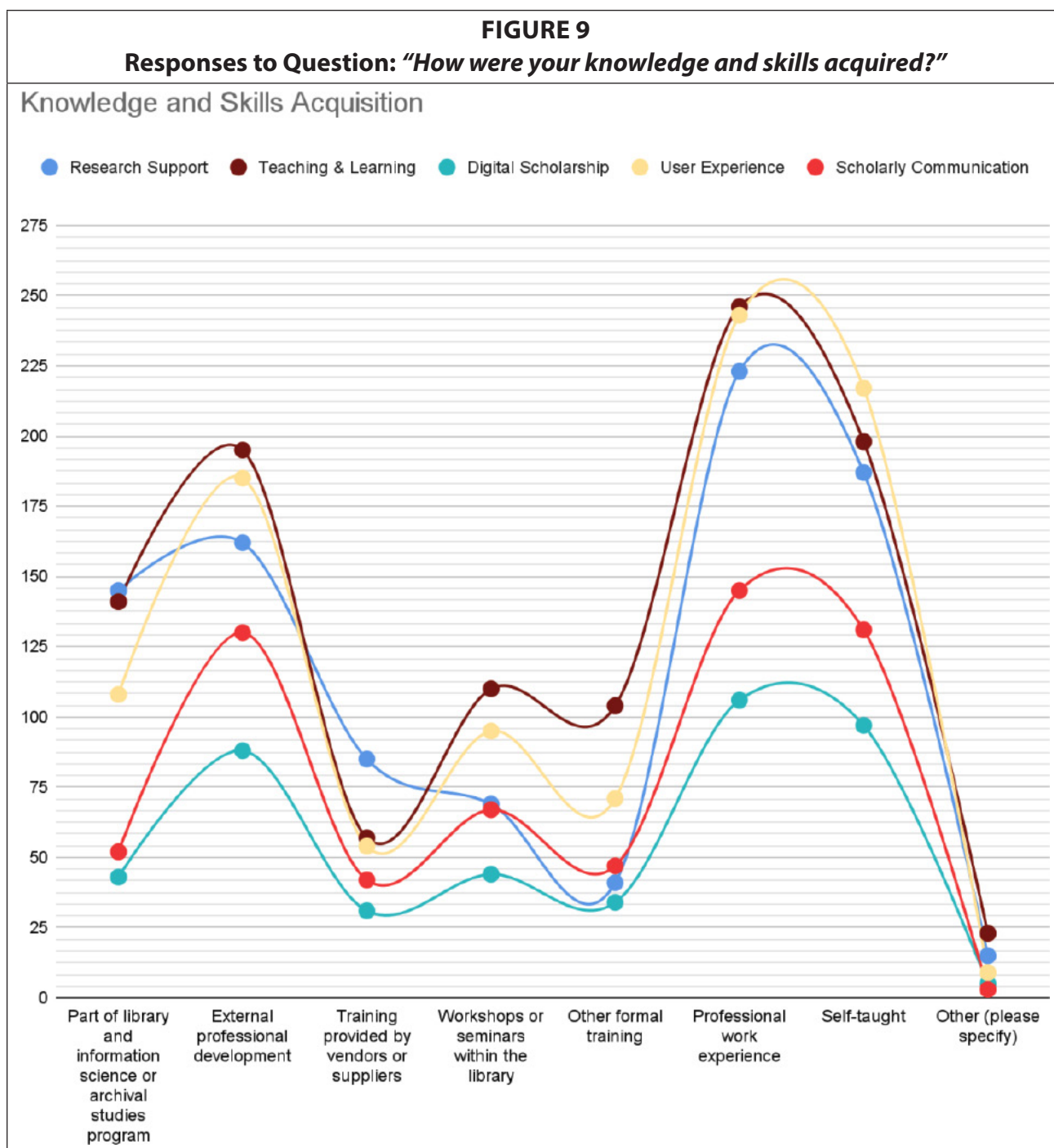
Training and Training Needs

In the U.S. survey “Professional work experience” was, on average, the most common way that respondents acquired their skills, followed by “self-taught” and “external professional development” (see Figure 9). The next highest were via “library and information science or archival studies programs” and “workshops or seminars within the library.”

In the Canadian survey, respondents had the same three at the top, followed by “workshops or seminars within the library.” The lower utilization of “workshops or seminars within the library” in the U.S. survey likely reflects the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on libraries and librarians.

In the U.S. survey, “training provided by vendors or suppliers” showed more utilization across the five areas than in the Canadian survey, in which “research support” was much more likely than for the other four areas to be reported for “training provided by vendors or suppliers.”

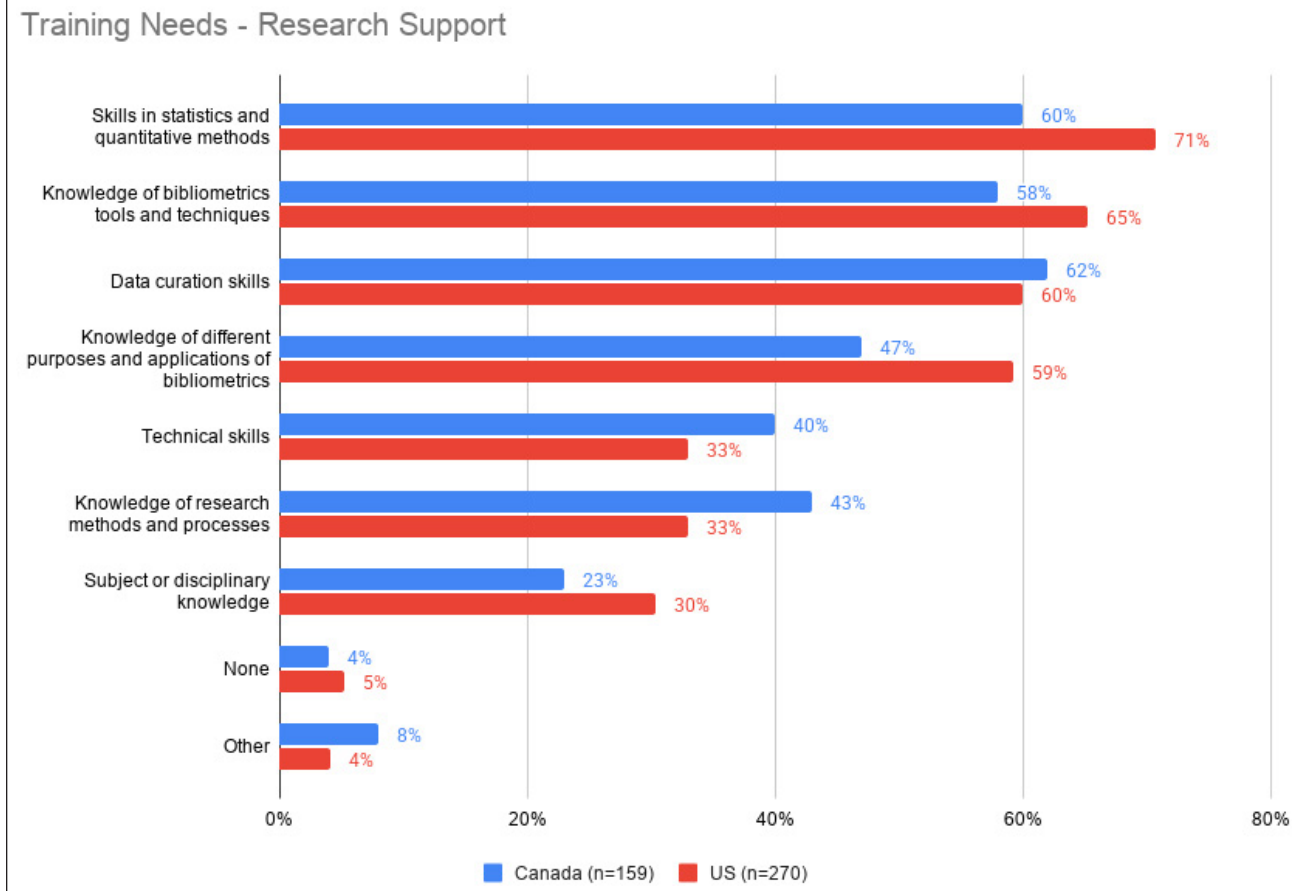
Respondents also shared areas in which they felt a need for additional training. The highest percentages were recorded in the research support area (n = 270), where the most



desired training type was for “skills in statistics and quantitative methods” at 71%, followed by “knowledge of bibliometrics tools and techniques” at 65%, and “data curation skills” at 60% (see Figure 10).

In the teaching and learning area ($n = 267$), the highest desired training type was for “mapping and GIS” at 54%, followed by “data resources” at 46%, and “instructional design” at 44% (see Figure 11). In the Canadian survey, none of the teaching and learning options registered more than 50% of respondents.

FIGURE 10
Training Needs: Research Support.



For the digital scholarship area (n = 151), “digital tools and methods” and “text-mining training” were both desired by 58% of respondents, followed by “data management” at 54% (see Figure 12).

For the user experience area (n = 276), “assessment methodology and techniques” training was desired by 47%, followed by “web usage analysis” at 44% (see Figure 13). “User-centered design” and “knowledge of process improvement tools” were desired by 41% and 40% of respondents, respectively.

In the scholarly communication area (n = 180), “digital rights management” topped the list at 56%, followed by “data management” at 50%, and “funder mandates and policies” at 49% (see Figure 14).

Traditional Versus New Roles

One question asked respondents whether they were performing a new role related to research support, teaching and learning support, digital scholarship, user experience, or scholarly communication, and another asked whether they were performing a traditional role (e.g., reference, instruction, cataloging, collection development, administration).

Of the 350 respondents who completed the survey, 304 (87%) responded with a “yes” or “no” response to both questions. Respondents who skipped one or both, or who answered

FIGURE 11
Training Needs: Teaching and Learning.

Training Needs - Teaching and Learning

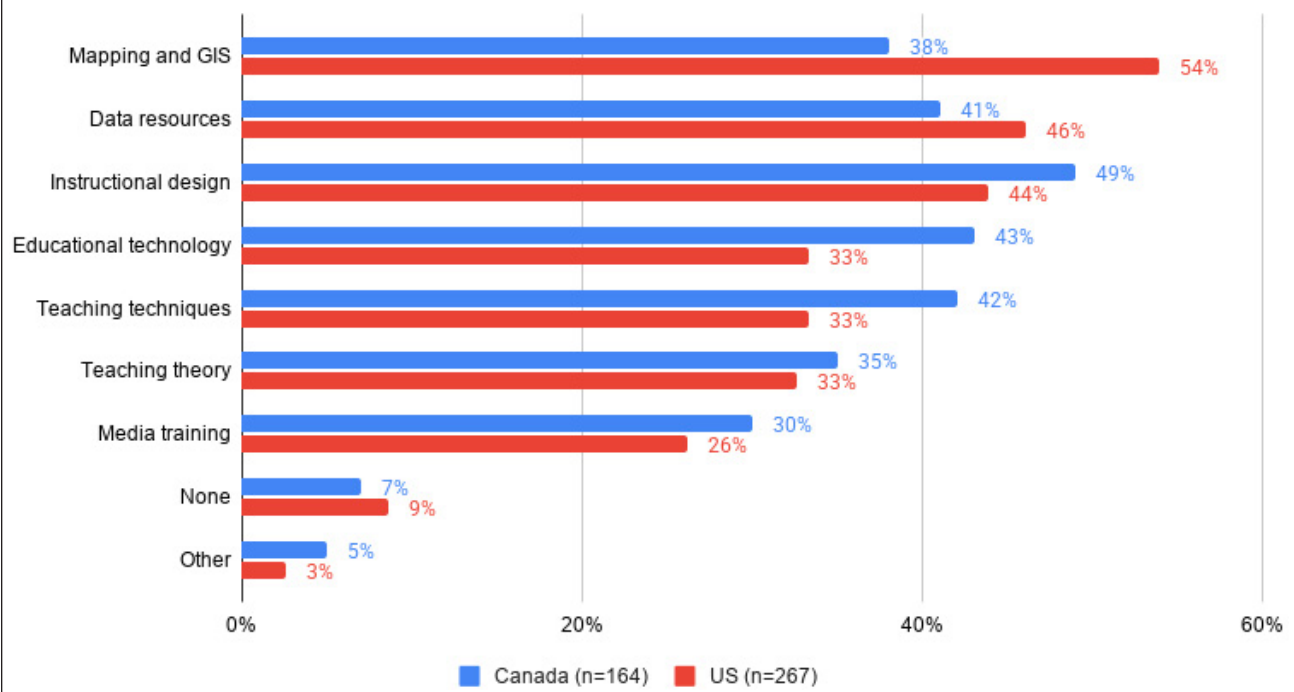


FIGURE 12
Training Needs: Digital Scholarship.

Training Needs - Digital Scholarship

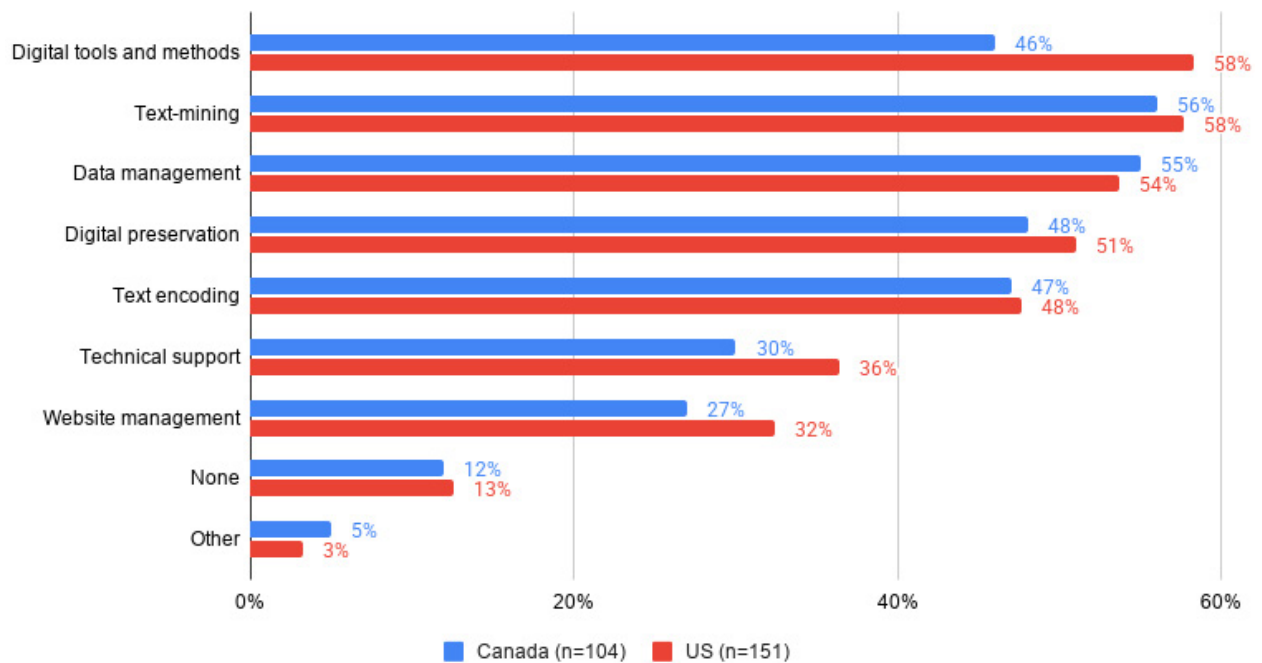


FIGURE 13
Training Needs: User Experience.

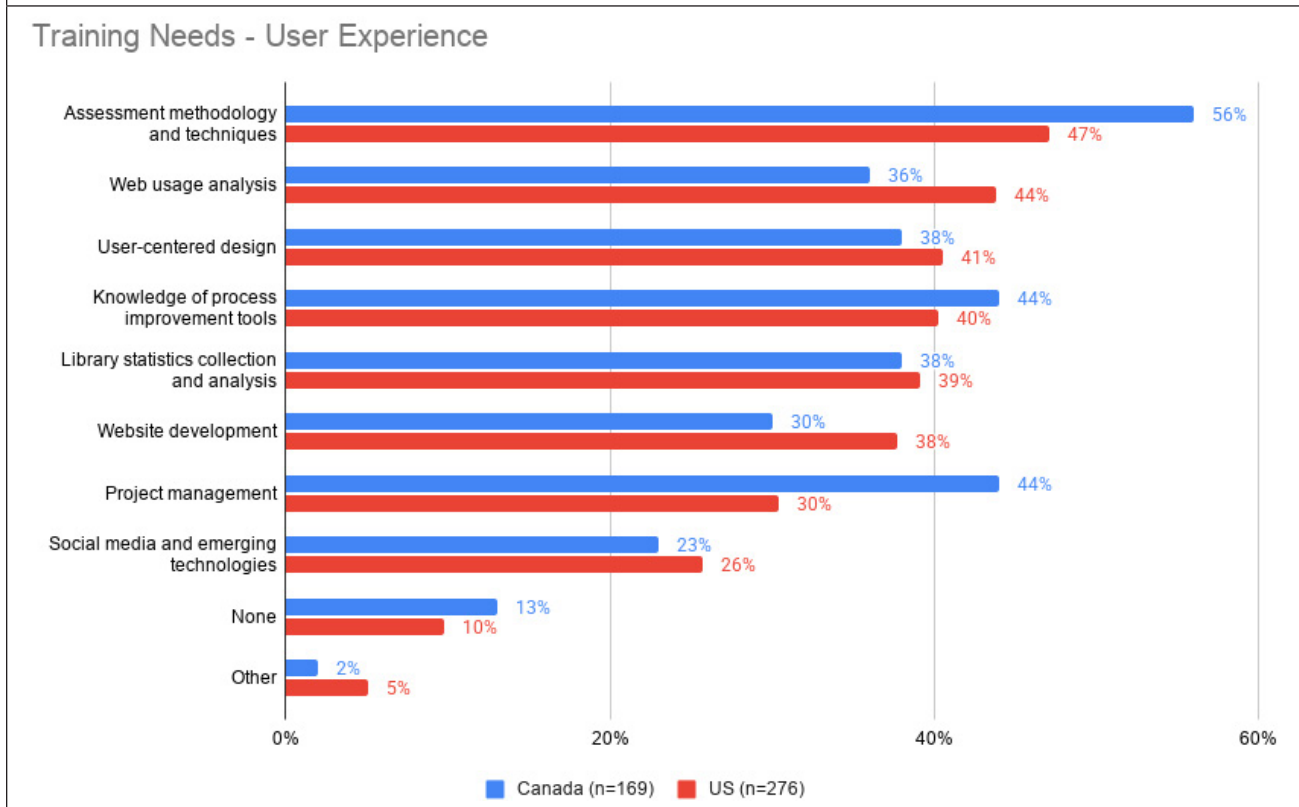
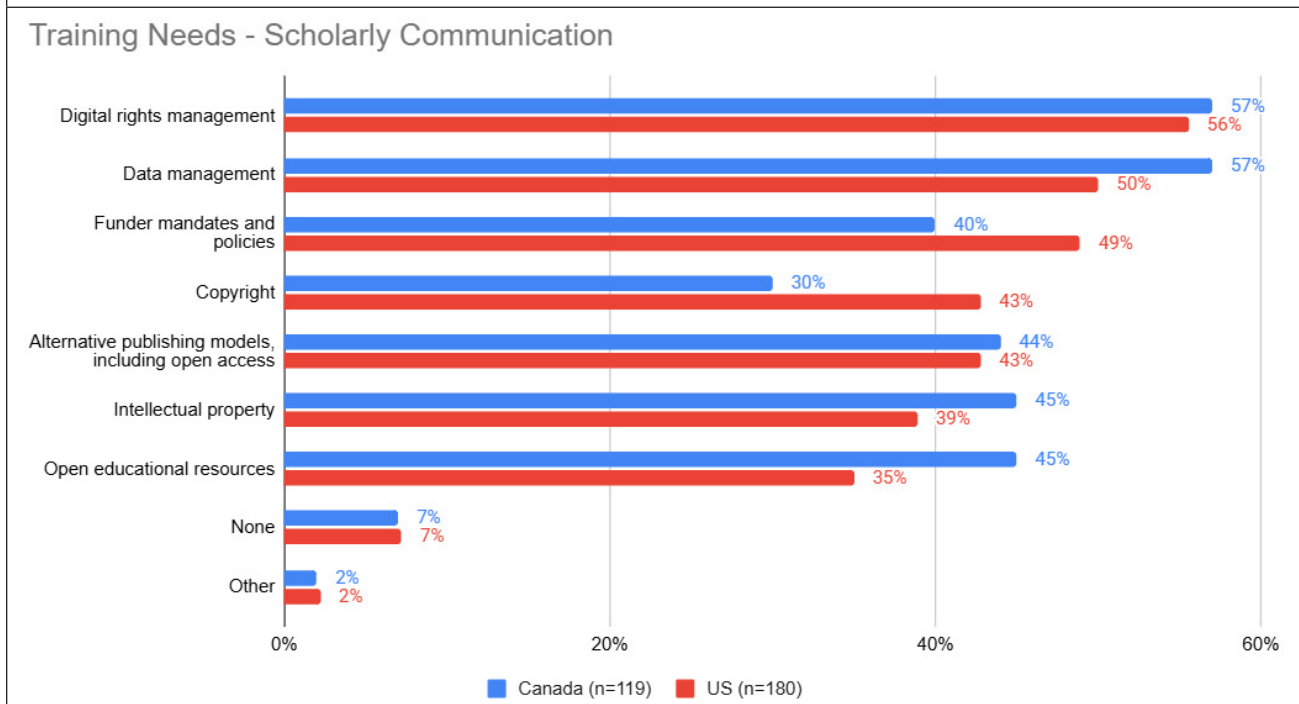


FIGURE 14
Training Needs: Scholarly Communication.



“no” for both questions were excluded when calculating the proportions of librarians who perform either of the traditional or new roles.

Of the 304 respondents, 52% (n = 158) said they are performing only a traditional role, and 15% (n = 44) said they are performing only a new role. A total of 33% (n = 102) reported performing a hybrid role. In the Canadian survey, the percentage of librarians performing only new roles was similar at 13%, while the percentage performing traditional and hybrid roles was 44% each. However, the count of librarians performing traditional roles in the Canadian survey was slightly higher than the count of those who reported performing hybrid roles.

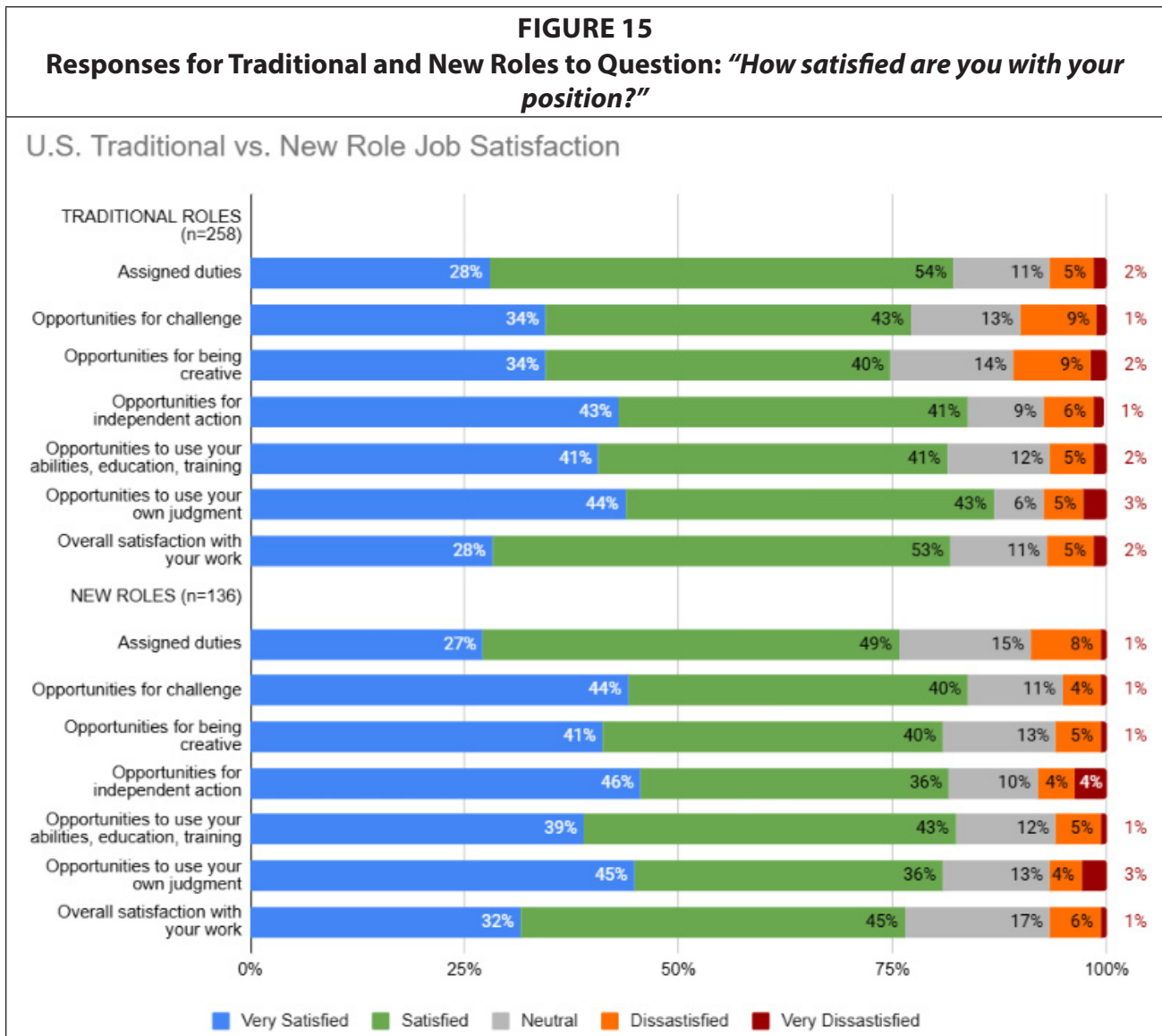
Of the U.S. survey's 350 respondents, 317 responded to a question that asked if they spend most of their time delivering traditional services, new services, or equal time on both. Nearly half of the respondents (49%, n = 156) said they spent the majority of their time delivering traditional services (e.g., reference, instruction, cataloging, collection development, administration), followed by equal time on both (31%, n = 98), and delivering new services (e.g., research support, teaching and learning support, digital scholarship, user experience, scholarly communication) (20%, n = 63).

These results are similar to those in the Canadian survey, in which the highest percentage was also for delivering traditional services (45%, n = 79), followed by equal time on both (36%, n = 62) and delivering new services (19%, n = 33).

Job Satisfaction

Most respondents to the U.S. survey expressed general satisfaction with their traditional roles, defined as reference, instruction, cataloging, collection development, and administration (n = 258) (see Figure 15). A significant number of librarians (n = 140, 54%) report being satisfied with their assigned duties, with 72 (28%) indicating they are very satisfied. Satisfaction is also strong in areas such as using their own judgment (111 satisfied, 43%; 113 very satisfied, 44%) and opportunities for independent action (105 satisfied, 41%; 111 very satisfied, 43%). However, satisfaction declines in categories like opportunities for creativity and challenge. In these areas, 37 (14%) respondents are neutral and 23 (9%) are dissatisfied regarding creativity, while 33 (13%) are neutral and 23 (9%) are dissatisfied with the level of challenge in their roles. Overall, job satisfaction remains positive, with 138 (54%) satisfied and 73 (28%) very satisfied, though there are areas for potential growth, particularly in providing more opportunities for creativity and challenges.

For respondents performing new roles (defined as research support, teaching and learning support, digital scholarship, user experience, and scholarly communication) (n = 136), most are satisfied or very satisfied with their assigned duties (66 satisfied, 49%; 37 very satisfied, 27%) and opportunities for creativity (54 satisfied, 40%; 56 very satisfied, 41%). High satisfaction is also evident in the use of abilities and education, where 62 (46%) are very satisfied, and 49 (36%) are satisfied. Opportunities for independent action and using judgment also show strong satisfaction, with 56 (41%) and 61 (45%) respondents very satisfied, respectively. However, a notable number of respondents express neutrality or dissatisfaction in some areas, particularly in assigned duties, with 21 (15%) neutral and 12 (9%) dissatisfied. While the general trend reflects positive job satisfaction, more opportunities for independent action, being trusted to use their own judgment, and a review of assigned duties could enhance the experiences of librarians in these emerging roles.

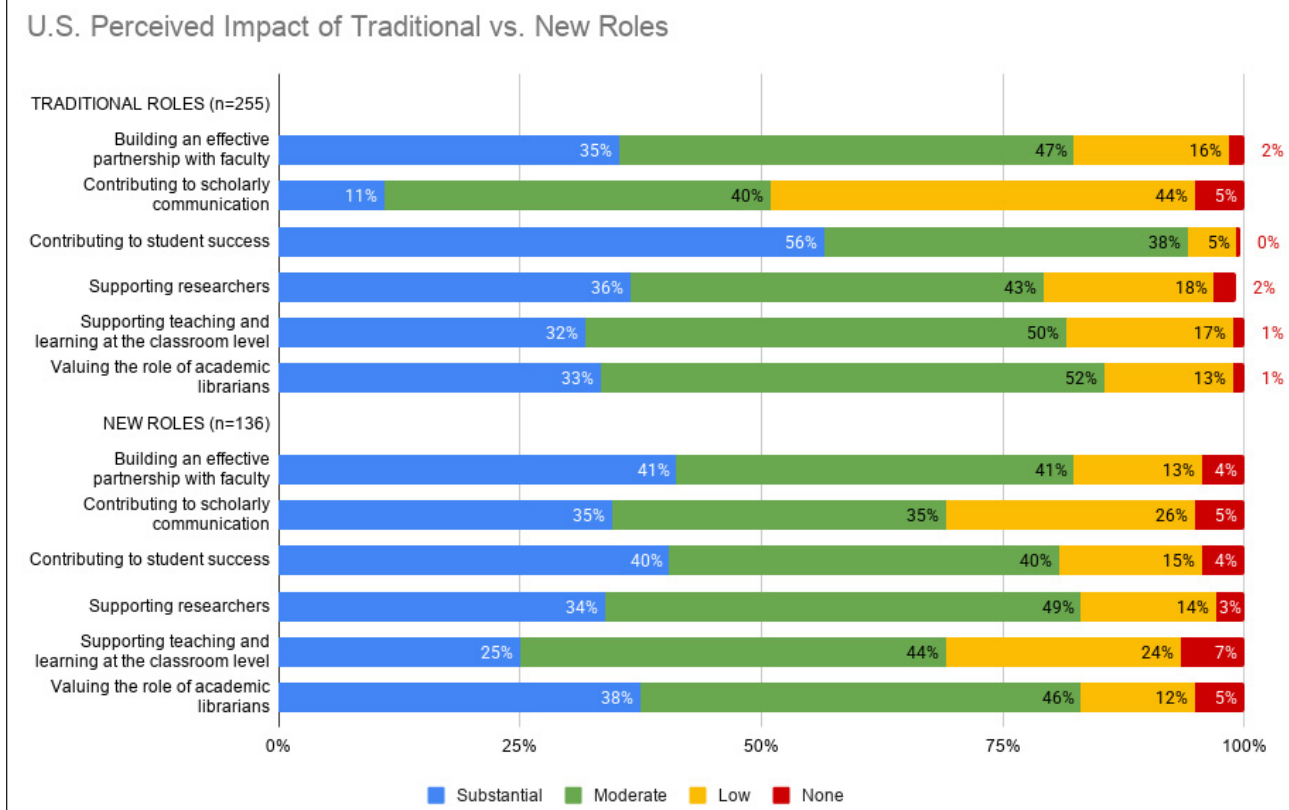


Impact on the Academic Enterprise

The survey asked U.S. respondents performing both traditional and new roles as defined above, “what impact do you believe your role is having on the academic enterprise?”

The results indicate that respondents performing traditional roles (n = 255 responses) perceive a substantial impact in several areas, particularly in building effective partnerships with faculty (35%, n = 90), contributing to student success (56%, n = 144), and supporting researchers (36%, n = 93) (see Figure 16). Moderate impact is most frequently noted in supporting researchers (50%, n = 127) and valuing the role of academic librarians (52%, n = 133). However, some respondents report a low impact in areas like contributing to scholarly communication, with 112 (44%) respondents indicating a minimal impact in this area. These findings highlight that, while many academic librarians in traditional roles feel they have a meaningful impact on student success, research support, and faculty partnerships, contributions to scholarly communication may be perceived as less influential.

FIGURE 16
Responses for Traditional and New Roles to Question: "What impact do you believe your role is having on the academic enterprise?"



The results show that many respondents performing new roles ($n = 136$ responses) perceive a substantial impact in contributing to student success and building effective partnerships with faculty, with 55 (40%) and 56 (41%) respondents, respectively, selecting substantial for these categories. Similarly, supporting researchers is also seen as impactful, with 46 (34%) respondents indicating a substantial effect. Most responses across all categories, however, tend to reflect a moderate impact, particularly in supporting teaching and learning at the classroom level (49%, $n = 67$) and valuing the role of academic librarians (46%, $n = 62$). In contrast, contributing to scholarly communication shows a more mixed impact, with 35 (26%) respondents indicating a low effect, suggesting that this area may need further development. These findings suggest that while librarians in new roles see themselves as key contributors to student success and faculty partnerships, there is room for growth in their perceived impact on scholarly communication and teaching support at the classroom level.

Discussion

Emerging Roles of Academic Librarians

This study suggests that academic librarianship is evolving in response to technological innovation and institutional shifts, but that transformation is layered onto longstanding professional foundations. Time-allocation data reinforce this: nearly half of respondents reported spending most of their time delivering traditional services, while a substantial share reported hybrid

work that blends traditional and emerging responsibilities. Confidence levels provide essential context for understanding this transition. Respondents reported the highest confidence in teaching and learning (87%) and user experience (74%), suggesting that many librarians feel well prepared to support instruction and relationship-centered, user-facing work even as roles expand. In contrast, lower confidence in scholarly communication (56%) and digital scholarship (50%) points to areas where emerging responsibilities may be outpacing training and institutional support. These patterns highlight clear opportunities for targeted professional development and resourcing to help librarians sustain hybrid roles and meet evolving campus needs.

As seen in the survey results, 33% of respondents identified themselves as performing hybrid roles that blend traditional and new responsibilities, a finding that mirrors Ducas et al. (2020) and Jaguszewski and Williams (2015), who emphasized the growing complexity of liaison and research support functions. The transition from collection-centric to user-centric models, as described by Martin and Sheehan (2018), is reflected in the prominence of roles such as digital scholarship (50% confidence) and user experience (75% confidence). These hybrid capacities not only redefine professional identities but also challenge librarians to navigate multifaceted responsibilities while staying responsive to their institutions' evolving needs. Close attention should be paid to the needs of librarians navigating these roles and additional resources and training provided as needed to improve their ability to meet patron needs. Further, the blend of traditional and new roles seen in each position should be evaluated to ensure they are complementary enough to be included together in a single position. If they are not, then separating duties into multiple roles may increase confidence by allowing individuals to spend an appropriate amount of time mastering each responsibility without being spread too thin.

The survey results also underscore the heightened focus on research support, with 74% of respondents providing services like consultations and literature reviews. This aligns with studies by Roberts and Levy (2005) and Daland and Hidle (2016), which documented the librarian's role as a key collaborator in interdisciplinary research. However, a notable gap emerges in advanced areas such as bibliometrics and data curation, where 65% and 60% of respondents, respectively, identified training needs. These findings highlight the growing importance of research impact and data-related services in academic libraries, as evidenced by Rod (2023), who argued that technical expertise in areas like data visualization and analysis is becoming foundational for modern research support. Institutions, particularly research-intensive ones with significant patron needs related to data, can benefit from putting additional training, positions, and resources into data and research impact related areas to both increase librarian confidence in providing expertise in these areas and better meeting patron needs.

Job Satisfaction in Changing Roles

The relationship between job satisfaction and confidence in role performance emerges as a critical theme. Respondents reported the highest satisfaction and confidence in traditional areas like teaching and learning (87%) and user experience (74%), while emerging areas like digital scholarship (50%) and scholarly communication (56%) showed significantly lower confidence levels. This aligns with the findings of McGlone (2014) and Gardner (2014), who noted that inadequate preparation for technology-driven responsibilities often leads to lower confidence and, subsequently, job dissatisfaction.

While most respondents were generally satisfied with their roles, there is room for improvement in traditional role areas requiring creativity (25% neutral or dissatisfied) and opportunities for challenge (23% neutral or dissatisfied). These results echo Falciani-White (2024), who identified the lack of institutional support for innovation as a barrier to job fulfillment. Libraries need to foster environments where creativity and experimentation are encouraged. All areas of libraries, from circulation to cataloging to teaching and digital scholarship, can benefit from innovative thinking and exploration of ways to improve both public-facing services and behind-the-scenes workflows. Providing librarians with greater autonomy and resources to innovate, and then rewarding them for resulting innovations, can not only enhance job satisfaction but also position libraries as hubs of academic and creative engagement.

Moreover, the survey revealed that librarians performing hybrid roles often face greater challenges balancing competing responsibilities, and that those with newer roles have comparatively lower satisfaction with their assigned duties (24% neutral or dissatisfied). This supports a thoughtful reexamination of assigned duties, as Heady et al. (2020) warned that role overload, when not accompanied by workload adjustments, contributes to burnout and turnover. To address this, institutions must adopt equitable workload distribution models and redefine role expectations to ensure sustainability and professional well-being.

Contributions to the Academic Enterprise

Academic librarians play a pivotal role in advancing institutional goals, yet their perceived impact varies significantly across domains. Respondents across both new and traditional roles highlighted substantial contributions to student success (56%) and supporting researchers (36%), reinforcing Daland and Hidle's (2016) assertion that librarians are indispensable collaborators in teaching and research. However, the comparatively lower perceived impact reported in scholarly communication suggests either a disconnect between this emerging role and broader institutional priorities or that librarians are not aware of the full impact of their activities in this area.

This misalignment may stem from insufficient institutional support and training in areas like copyright management, open access, and funder compliance. For example, while 39% of respondents reported providing consultations on alternative publishing models, many indicated a lack of confidence in navigating complex scholarly communication landscapes. As Ogburn (2012) and Revez (2020) argued, librarians must be equipped with both leadership skills and technical expertise to fully integrate into the scholarly communication ecosystem. By prioritizing training in this area, institutions can empower librarians to contribute more effectively to the dissemination of knowledge and the promotion of open science. Further, institutions should take a more active role in recognizing the expertise of librarians in this area and encourage faculty colleagues to consult with them.

In digital scholarship, the study reveals a troubling gap between institutional needs and librarian preparedness. With 52% of respondents indicating no involvement in digital scholarship services, this area remains underdeveloped despite its growing importance. Studies by Malone (2023) and Sichani (2024) emphasized the transformative potential of digital scholarship labs and interdisciplinary collaboration. To bridge this gap, libraries must invest in dedicated digital scholarship positions, tools, and training, enabling librarians to lead initiatives in areas like text mining, metadata, and data preservation.

Professional Development and Training Needs

Professional development emerges as a cornerstone for the effective integration of emerging roles. Respondents overwhelmingly indicated a need for targeted training in research support (71% seeking skills in statistics and quantitative methods), digital scholarship (58% requesting training in digital tools and methods), and user experience (47% identifying gaps in assessment methodologies). These findings are consistent with Kautonen and Gasparini (2024), who argued that structured training programs are essential for equipping librarians with the competencies needed to navigate AI, data science, and other advanced technologies and research methodologies.

However, the reliance on self-taught methods and informal learning pathways, as reported by respondents, underscores a critical gap in institutional support. While professional experience remains a valuable source of skill acquisition, it cannot replace formalized training programs designed to address the complexities of modern librarianship. Koob et al. (2022) and Ibacache et al. (2021) similarly found that pandemic-era disruptions highlighted the inadequacy of ad hoc training, particularly in digital literacy and remote service delivery. Moving forward, institutions must adopt a proactive approach to professional development, offering and funding participation in workshops, certifications, and collaborative learning opportunities that align with both librarian and institutional goals. Comanda et al. (2021) highlight the particular importance of professional development being funded by institutions, for leaving librarians to cover the costs themselves is unfair, inequitable, and inherently excludes people based on their economic status.

Balancing Traditional and Emerging Roles

The survey suggests an ongoing shift, with traditional responsibilities still dominant but emerging roles expanding, with 49% of respondents dedicating most of their time to traditional responsibilities and 33% balancing both. This reflects Perini's (2016) concept of the "third space," where librarians navigate dual identities as traditional knowledge curators and innovative collaborators. However, the risk of overburdening librarians with additional responsibilities without adjusting workloads is a recurring theme in the literature. As Heady et al. (2020) warned, role expansion without corresponding support leads to decreased morale and retention.

To address these challenges, libraries must adopt a strategic approach to role integration. This includes redefining job descriptions, ensuring equitable workload distribution, and providing the necessary resources and support for emerging responsibilities. By doing so, institutions can create sustainable roles that balance innovation with tradition, fostering both professional satisfaction and organizational success.

Enhancing the Impact of Librarianship

Despite the challenges, academic librarians are uniquely positioned to drive institutional transformation through their roles in research, teaching, and digital innovation. However, to maximize their impact, libraries must address several key areas:

1. **Institutional Alignment:** Align librarian roles with broader institutional priorities, particularly in areas like digital scholarship, scholarly communication, and data services. This requires not only training but also the integration of librarians into decision-making processes that shape academic and research strategies.

2. **Creative Environments:** Foster environments that support creativity and innovation, addressing the dissatisfaction many librarians feel in these areas. This could include dedicated time for experimental projects, collaborative initiatives, and recognition of creative contributions.
3. **Sustainable Workloads:** Ensure that the integration of emerging roles is accompanied by workload adjustments and support structures. Sustainable role design is critical for maintaining morale, productivity, and long-term retention.
4. **Comprehensive Training Programs:** Develop targeted professional development initiatives that address gaps in digital scholarship, research support, and user experience. Leveraging vendor partnerships, cross-disciplinary collaborations, and formal certifications can help librarians stay ahead in a rapidly evolving landscape. Institutions must be willing to fund these opportunities otherwise librarians may not be able to take advantage of them.
5. **Advocacy and Visibility:** Promote the visibility of librarians' contributions, particularly in underrecognized areas like scholarly communication and digital scholarship. Highlighting success stories and measurable outcomes can strengthen librarians' roles as institutional leaders.

As this study illustrates, the evolving roles of academic librarians reflect a profession in flux, balancing tradition with innovation. By addressing the identified gaps and challenges, institutions can empower librarians to thrive in their hybrid capacities, ensuring they remain integral to the academic enterprise. Future research, particularly longitudinal and comparative studies, will be essential in tracking these transformations and guiding the strategic development of the profession.

Study Limitations

This study provides valuable insights into the evolving roles of academic librarians, but it also highlights several limitations that must be considered when interpreting the findings. Understanding these constraints is crucial for contextualizing the results and identifying areas for future exploration.

The self-selecting nature of the survey respondents may have introduced bias, as those who participated likely had particular views or experiences that may not reflect the wider population of academic librarians. This raises questions about the generalizability of the findings and the extent to which they represent diverse perspectives across the profession.

Geographical and institutional variation further constrains the study's scope. By focusing primarily on academic librarians in the United States, the study does not account for differences in librarianship across international contexts or nonacademic institutions. Libraries in other countries or institutions with distinct educational and technological landscapes may face unique challenges and opportunities, which this study does not address.

The temporal context of the data collection also presents limitations. Conducted shortly after the significant global disruptions caused by the pandemic, the findings represent a snapshot of a transitional period. As institutions continue to adapt and recover, long-term trends may differ significantly from the immediate observations captured in this study. Moreover, the rapid pace of technological advancements, particularly in generative artificial intelligence (AI) and digital tools, risks rendering some findings outdated, underscoring the need for ongoing research to remain relevant.

Survey design issues also impacted the study. Although the survey categorized services familiar to academic librarians, some respondents may have interpreted the service areas differently, potentially leading to inconsistent responses. Additionally, the exclusion of certain emerging services may have influenced the results, limiting the scope of insights. Providing clearer definitions and examples in future surveys could improve the consistency and clarity of responses.

Finally, the qualitative portion of the survey suffered from low engagement, with the highest response rate to open-ended questions reaching only 20%. The limited responses and thematic inconsistencies made it challenging to draw meaningful conclusions, precluding the use of a grounded theory approach. As a result, we were unable to draw conclusions from the open-ended responses.

Future Research Directions

To address these limitations and expand on the findings, future research should explore several promising areas. First, an in-depth analysis of emerging “add-on” roles could provide valuable insights into how these responsibilities integrate with librarians’ primary duties. Understanding the impact of these roles on job satisfaction, professional identity, and workload distribution could inform better role design and organizational support.

The increasing prevalence of generative AI in educational and research settings presents another critical area for exploration. Research should examine how AI tools are being utilized in libraries, the skills librarians need to work effectively with these technologies, and the ethical implications of AI in information management and literacy. This would ensure librarians are equipped to navigate the opportunities and challenges posed by AI integration.

Longitudinal studies offer another valuable approach to understanding how the roles of academic librarians evolve over time. Tracking these changes would provide insights into how libraries adapt to technological advancements, societal shifts, and emerging educational priorities. Such studies could identify trends and inform strategic planning for the future.

Expanding research to include international and nonacademic contexts would provide a more comprehensive understanding of global trends in librarianship. Comparative studies could reveal how differing educational systems and cultural contexts influence librarians’ roles and responsibilities, offering a broader perspective on the profession.

Further research into the training and development needs of librarians is essential for preparing professionals for emerging roles and technologies. By identifying specific skill gaps and professional development priorities, library schools and professional associations could tailor their offerings to better support the evolving needs of the profession.

Finally, as digital literacy becomes increasingly important, examining the role of librarians in promoting these skills could yield valuable insights. Understanding how librarians teach and facilitate digital literacy would highlight their contributions as leaders in education and their importance in supporting students and faculty in an increasingly digital world.

By addressing these areas, future research can build on the foundation laid by this study, ensuring that academic librarians are well-prepared to navigate the complexities of their evolving roles and responsibilities. These efforts will help libraries remain vital, adaptive institutions in a rapidly changing educational and technological landscape.

Conclusion

The study confirms that academic librarians are taking on new roles in research support, digital scholarship, and user experience, while still maintaining traditional responsibilities. These emerging roles require new skill sets, particularly in technology and digital tools, highlighting a pressing need for targeted training and professional development to ensure librarians can effectively meet the evolving demands of their institutions.

Academic librarians view their roles as critical to the academic mission, contributing significantly to the research and teaching. Job satisfaction is also generally positive, though confidence and satisfaction are lower in areas related to emerging roles. To sustain and improve job satisfaction, librarians must receive additional training in digital scholarship and other research support areas. Librarians also perceive that being able to implement the skills from such training could increase their impact on the research and teaching missions of our institutions. Institutions should focus on providing resources for professional development to ensure their librarians are equipped to responsibilities in these newer areas. However, these additional responsibilities can only be added to librarian workloads if their other responsibilities are adjusted accordingly to prevent overwork, otherwise there can be negative impacts on morale and retention.

Finally, the employment landscape for academic librarians emphasizes the importance of flexibility, adaptability, and continuous learning. As roles continue to evolve, librarians who develop expertise in emerging areas will find themselves better positioned for career advancement. Institutions should provide ongoing training in both traditional and emerging areas to ensure librarians can meet the demands of the modern academic environment.

The survey questionnaire and aggregate data from this study are deposited in the Open Science Framework.

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