

Appendix B

WHERE'S THE LIBRARIAN? PATRONS' VIEWS OF PUBLIC PERCEPTION IN THE INTERNET AGE

After finding out what we *perceive* to be patrons' perceptions of librarians, I thought it was time to ask the patrons directly. This is a summary of the results of the 2003 "Where's the Librarian?" survey and follow-up talk, which you can see (complete with lovely graphs and fun images) online at the "Where's the Librarian?" website (www.librarian-image.net/wheres_the_librarian.html). (I have to admit to certain preconceived expectations for these survey results based on the librarian survey results, and also on what I see in my own public libraries on a regular basis.)

Survey and Methodology

Over three months in mid-2003, the following libraries graciously allowed me to post a link to my survey on both their main and catalog webpages:

- Tucson-Pima Public Library, Tucson, Arizona
(www.library.pima.gov)
- Pierce County Community College, Washington
(www.pierce.ctc.edu/library)
- UW-Madison Woodman Astronomical Library,
Madison, Wisconsin (astronomy.library.wisc.edu)
- Washburn University's School of Law
DocLawWeb, Topeka, Kansas
(www.washlaw.edu/doclaw)
- Stratford Library Association, Stratford,
Connecticut (www.stratford.lib.ct.us)
- Solano County Libraries, California
(www.solanolibrary.com)
- European Southern Observatory Library, Chile
(www.eso.org/sci/libraries)
- Tarrant County Law Library, Fort Worth, Texas
(www.tarrantcounty.com/eLaw/site)

The survey questions were:

- How old are you?
- How long have you been using the library?
- How often do you use the library?
- Do you use the library's online catalog?
- Do you ask the librarian for help with the online catalog?
- Do you use the library's computers for Internet access (i.e., not library-specific)?
- Do you ask the librarian for help with your Internet use?
- Would you be comfortable talking to:
 - A male/female librarian?
 - A younger/older librarian?
 - A conservatively/casually dressed librarian?
- Do you think a librarian needs a college degree?
- Do you think that anyone who works in a library is a librarian?

I received 782 responses to the survey, although not every respondent answered every question. I need to mention that the results may be skewed; I had intended

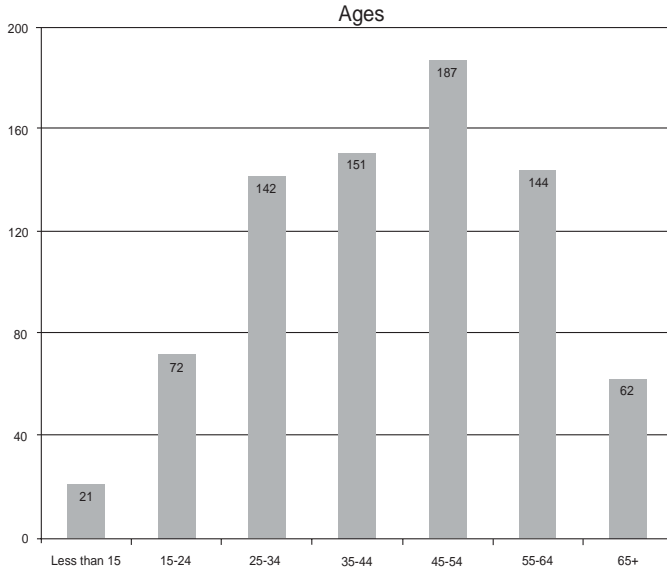
this to be a patron-only survey, but did not clarify that I would rather librarians not complete it, even though they are patrons, too. I also learned a great deal about how to build a survey for the general public—especially about word choice and selection order. The survey link was also sent around to other lists, college departments, and book groups, so many respondents were not actually sitting at a library computer. (Of course, given the location-independent nature of the web, there's no guarantee that any of the respondents were actually sitting at a library computer.)

Survey Results

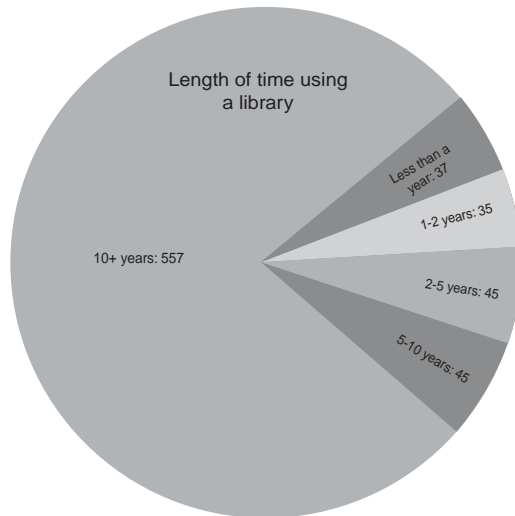
How old are you? I was hoping for a nice demographic representation of the general populace, and I got it. Teenagers, 20-somethings, all the way through. This is a nice curve, and I was especially glad to get some young folks in on the survey.

How long have you been using the library? This is where I suspect we start getting the “librarian skew,” as three-quarters of the respondents have been using the library for more than 10 years. But the other quarter is what I was expecting, a bit more of a balance across the options, from “I’ve been using the library forever” to “I just walked into one for the first time yesterday.”

How old are you?

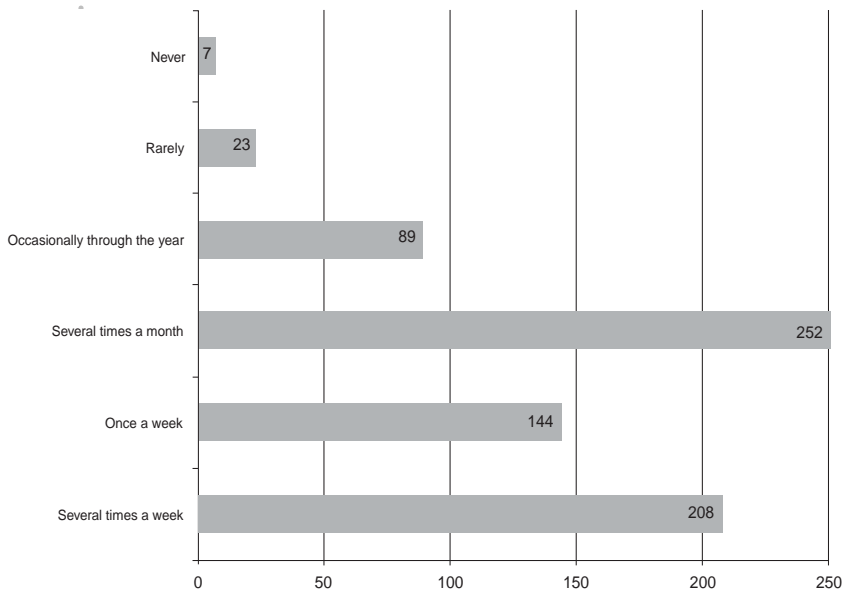


How long have you been using the library?



How often do you use the library? I'm amused by the fact that seven people said "never"—I am assuming those people weren't sitting at a library computer while filling out this survey! I like that the majority answer was "several times a month," although of course I'd be happier with several times a week.

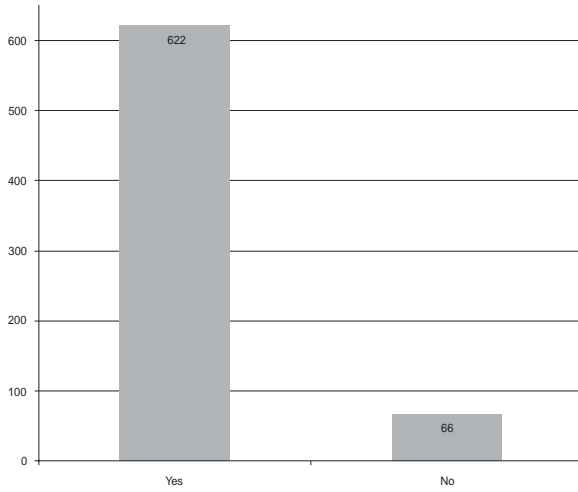
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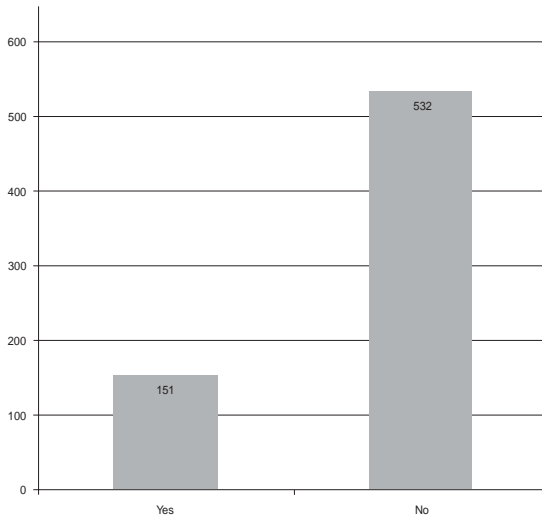
Do you use the library's online catalog? I was very happy to find that folks are using it.

Do you ask the librarian for help with the online catalog? I was sad to find out that respondents weren't using all the resources at hand to help them get the most out of it.

Do you use the library's online catalog?

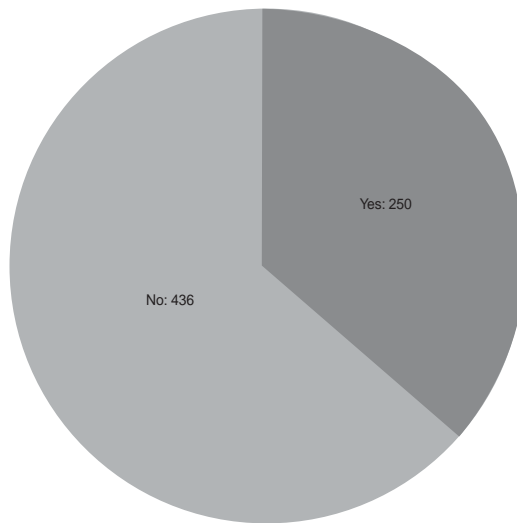


Do you ask the librarian for help with the online catalog?



Do you use the library's computers for Internet access (i.e., not library-specific)? Based on my own experience, I expected these numbers to be reversed. Every time I go into my local library every single terminal is full of people surfing the web, checking their email, and just checking things out online.

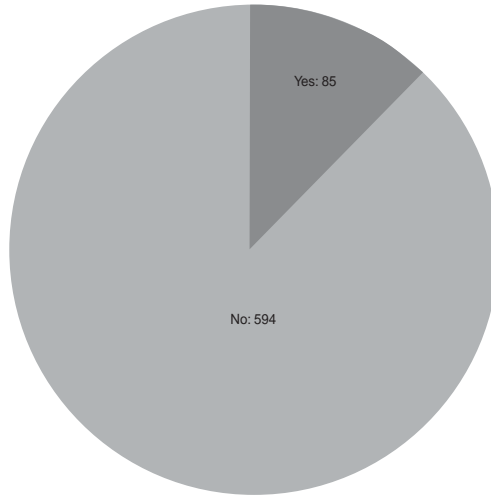
Do you use the library's computer for Internet access?



Do you ask the librarian for help with your Internet use? Unfortunately, the majority of respondents answered “no.” I hope this trend changes.

Would you be comfortable talking to... It's good to see that, at least in real life, it doesn't seem to matter how the librarian appears, as long as they're approachable.

Do you ask the librarian for help with your Internet use?

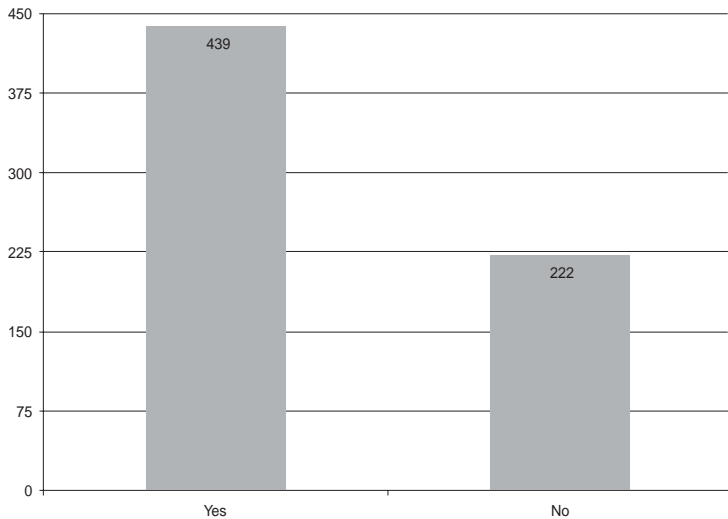


Would you be comfortable talking to ...

	Yes	No
A male librarian	92.7%	7.2%
A female librarian	97.2%	2.8%
An older librarian	93.1%	6.8%
A younger librarian	92.7%	7.3%
A conservatively dressed librarian	89.3%	1.1%
A casually dressed librarian	93.9%	6.1%

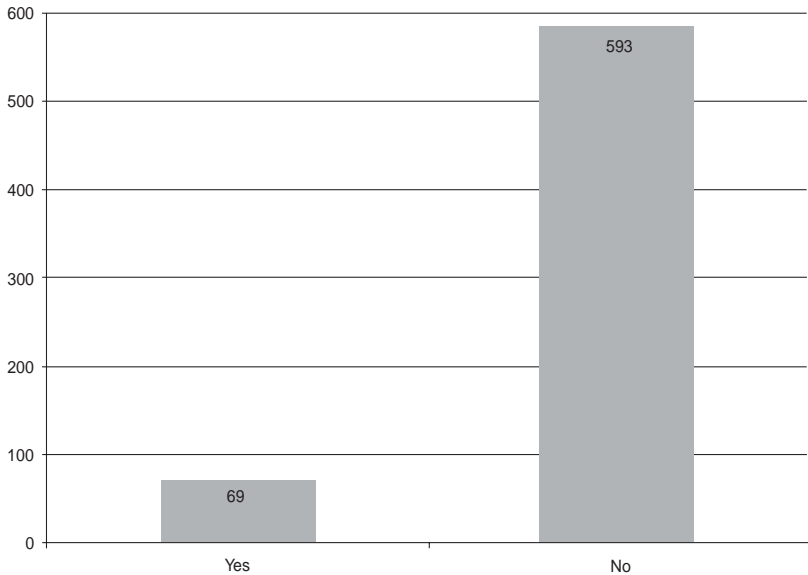
Do you think a librarian needs a college degree? Based on comments like “You need a degree to do that?”, what I read in newspapers, and even the results of the first survey, I did expect the answers to this question to be reversed. This may partially be due to librarians answering the survey, but I believe this is largely because people are beginning to appreciate the training that goes into becoming a librarian.

Do you think a librarian needs a college degree?



Do you think that anyone who works in a library is a librarian? This is the big question. There may be some “librarian skew” here, too, but not enough to sling the numbers like this. Because of the recent deluge of online articles, webcasts, and newspaper articles about librarians, the public may be starting to see that this is

Do you think that anyone who works in a library is a librarian?



a profession that requires attention, detail, care, and diligence, and it takes extra training to do what we do.

Overall, media representations notwithstanding, things seem to be heading in the right direction. All we can do is what we've been doing: educate, assist, and inform!