

The Library and the Academic Enterprise: Trends in Illinois

Bradley F. Baker and Jay Starratt

Introduction

One of the top issues identified by the ACRL Focus on the Future Task Force is the role of the library in academe. The report states “though access to information is increasingly decentralized, and computer labs now compete with libraries as campus gathering points, librarians must demonstrate to the campus community that the library remains central to academic effort.”¹ The task force reported that some librarians fear that libraries could be “marginalized” in a digital age where scholarly communication seems on the cusp of great change. Most academic librarians have been involved in discussions that reflect this unease about the future. It is important to examine if the disquiet is justified.

Anecdotal evidence among librarians in Illinois hints that libraries are not in danger of marginalization. Frequent discussions among Illinois academic librarians indicate that libraries are becoming successful at redefining their roles through self-examination and by successfully explaining the strengths they possess to their campus colleagues. Many libraries seem to be

taking on greater roles in four major areas:

1. Digital Content Development and Management;
2. Digital Media Support Services;
3. Systems Operation and Management; and
4. Faculty Development/Training and Consulting Services.

This paper describes the results of a preliminary survey sent to the directors of all accredited, not-for-profit colleges and universities in Illinois that participate in the Illinois Digital Academic Library program (135 of the possible 182 libraries). The survey’s intent was to ascertain the validity of the generally shared impressions about greater participation in the academic enterprise by Illinois libraries in preparation for a more thorough examination of the changing roles. Respondents were asked to report on the changing (or unchanging) responsibilities they face, the partnerships they have formed, the organizational change they have experienced, and their anticipation of further developments. This paper will explore trends and common

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factors among libraries that have and have not found new roles and directions.

The Survey

Sixty-four librarians completed the survey. The table below provides the distribution of participating institutions by type of campus. The distribution of respondents is a fair representation of the overall distribution of colleges and universities across Illinois.

	# responding	% of responses
Public Colleges and Universities	35	55%
Private Colleges and Universities	29	45%
Community Colleges	26	41%
BA Level	8	13%
MA Level	19	30%
PhD Level	7	11%
Other	4	6%

The participants were asked a series of questions to determine their library’s level of involvement in each of the following campus activities:

Digital Content Development and Management

1. Digitization of journal articles and/or providing links to such content in library licensed electronic resources
2. Institutional repository development and support with faculty pre-print publications, etc.
3. Graphics and media production support and consulting services

Digital Media Support Services

4. Classroom support with use of learning technologies (media carts, data/video projectors, etc.)
5. Streaming audio/video production and support
6. Web-casting production and support services
7. Distance education support via two-way, interactive television
8. Video conferencing support

Faculty Development/Training and Consulting Services

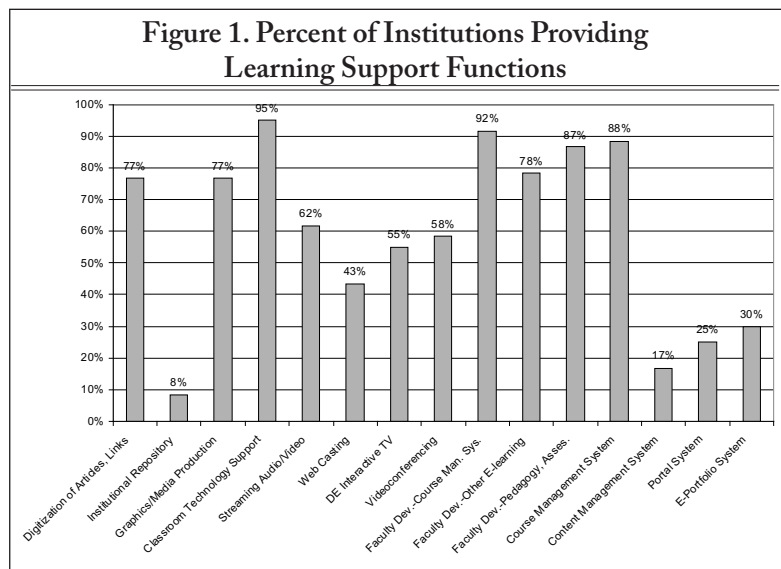
9. Faculty development related to learning technologies (course management systems, etc.)
10. Faculty development related to other e-learning applications
11. Faculty development related to pedagogy, instructional design and assessment

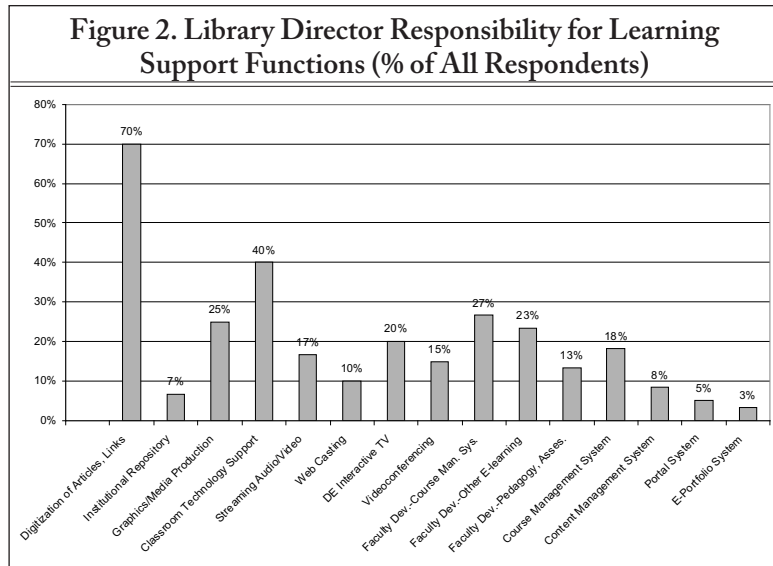
Faculty Development/Training and Consulting Services

12. Course management system operation (Blackboard, Web-CT, etc.)
13. Content management system operation for managing digital assets and learning objects
14. Portal development for support of teaching and learning (“My University” type of services)
15. E-Portfolio system operation for use by students and/or faculty

Results—General

In general the results of the survey indicate that academic libraries are involved in a broad and diverse range of activities that are not necessarily a usual part of a library’s portfolio of activities. Figure 1 gives a broad context for the overall presence of these functions in the responding institutions; it shows the percent of campuses that provide each of the fifteen learning support functions listed above.





The frequency of our sample group of colleges and universities offering specific learning support functions indicates fairly high provision of more traditional and mainstream learning support services (classroom technology support, faculty development, etc.) with much lower offerings of emerging services (institutional repositories, content management systems for managing learning objects, etc.).

Figure 2 shows the percentage across all respondents where the function reports to the library director on their campus. The true extent of library director responsibility for specific learning support functions is not evident in this figure as it is diminished by the inclusion of campuses not offering specific services. Figure 3 corrects for this factor by presenting the frequency of functions reporting to the library director only on campuses presently providing the function. Viewed from this perspective, Illinois academic libraries clearly are assuming greater administrative responsibility for learning support functions. Only two of the functions (e-portfolio support and faculty development in the areas of pedagogy and assessment) fall below 20 percent of library administrative responsibility. Fully 91 percent of the campuses reported that the library manages the digitization (of journal articles and/or providing links to such content in library licensed electronic resources) function. The next highest percentage concerned digital

repositories with 80 percent of the libraries claiming responsibility. Here it is important to refer to the frequency of this service being offered by campuses. While only a handful of our respondents say this service is being offered on their campuses, in four out of five cases the service does report to the library director when it is being offered. This points to a key leadership opportunity for libraries to expand their impact at the campus level by introducing and taking on responsibility for new learning support services. In many cases, the library administrators responding to the survey noted that their job titles had been changed to reflect their expanded roles in providing leadership for additional learning support functions on

their campuses. While Illinois academic libraries have made progress in expanding their reach on campuses, significant opportunities remain for broader and deeper involvement.

Having administrative responsibility for one or more learning support functions in addition to the library does not itself mean that library services are tightly integrated with the additional functions. Several respondents noted that while they did have additional areas in their portfolio, that these additional areas operated independently from the library. Others reported significant collaboration between the library and these expanded functional areas. At the very least, the role expansion evident in the responsibilities of many library

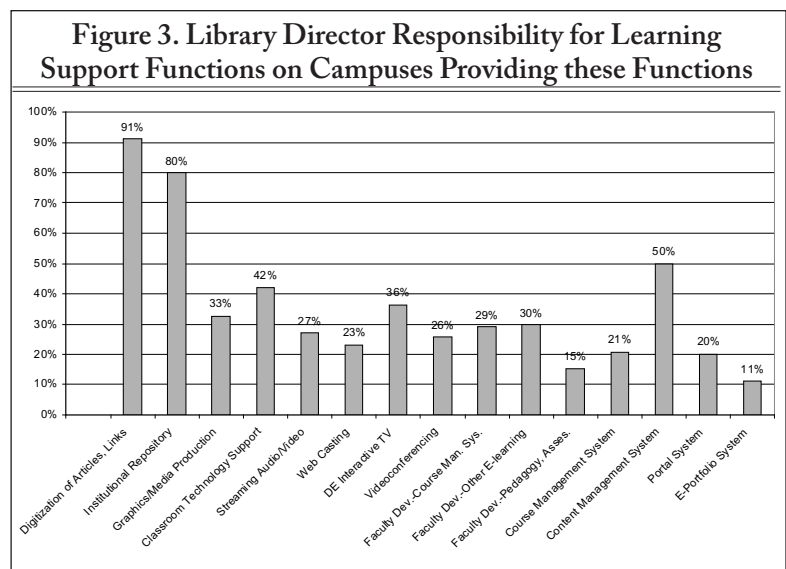
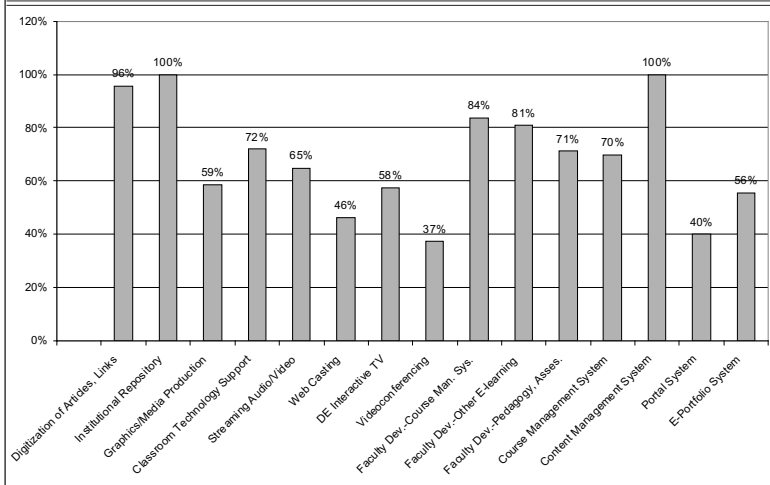


Figure 4. Total Library Involvement with Learning Support Functions on Campuses Providing Services



administrators does present significant opportunities for fostering such collaboration in expanding the reach of library services.

While having administrative responsibility for a function does not automatically imply greater collaboration, the absence of direct responsibility for a function also does not eliminate opportunities for library involvement and collaboration. To explore this factor, the survey asked respondents who did not have administrative responsibility to indicate whether their libraries provided: a limited amount of service/expertise; a substantial amount of service/expertise; or did they jointly/collaboratively manage it with other campus unit(s). Responses to this question indicate that libraries are actively involved in supporting a wide range of learning support functions. Figure 4 cumulates the number of positive responses to the three options in this question with the number of libraries that provide direct administrative leadership for the service.

In nine of the fifteen categories, over 60 percent of the libraries reported some level of involvement with specific learning support functions. Five of the categories rose to over 80 percent. None fell below 35 percent. Clearly, Illinois academic libraries are finding ways to share their expertise and form partnerships on campus. Several respondents indicated that they now have or will soon have joint responsibility for

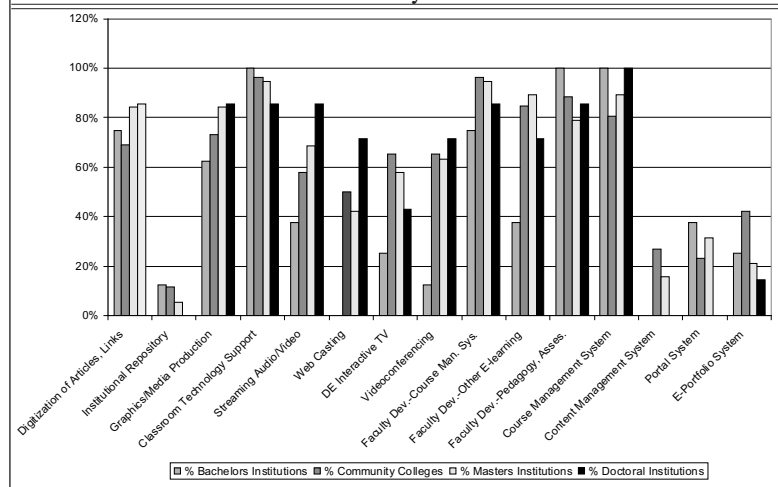
a specific function along with another area on their campus. Before we feel too positive about library initiatives in support broader learning support functions on our campuses, it is important to note that a significant number of libraries who indicated that they are providing some support for additional functions also indicated that the level of library involvement is limited. The data from the survey does not support analysis of this in any depth. A follow up study and focus groups will be needed to provide greater clarity on the depth of library involvement.

Results—Cohort

In order to get a better view of what is happening in the various libraries, it is informative to look at the responses by type of institution. Figure 5 (as with Figure 1) gives a broad context for the overall presence of these functions in the responding institutions by type. It shows the percentage of campuses that provide each of the fifteen functions.

The frequency of learning support functions being made available by campuses typically exhibits similar patterns by campus type. Service offering rates that are high (or low) overall tend to be in the high or low range for each Carnegie level grouping. There are some notable exceptions. Baccalaureate level institutions in particular tend to lag the other three cohorts in many of the technology-intensive services (streaming, web-

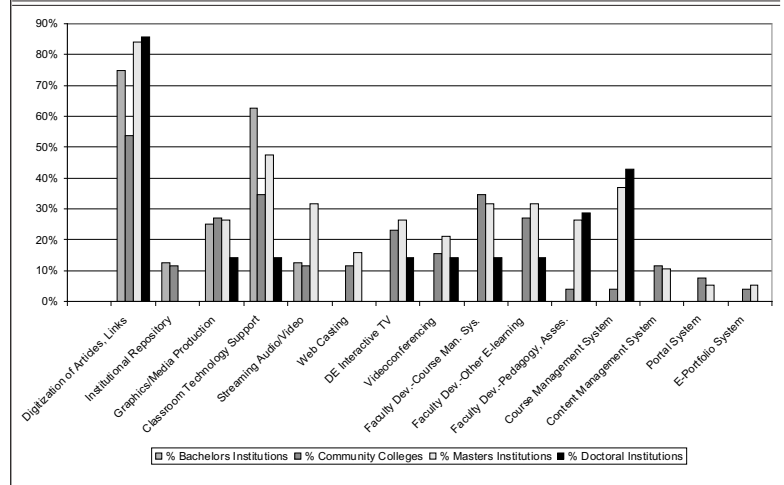
Figure 5. Campus Offerings of Learning Support Functions by Cohort



casting, DE, videoconferencing, content management systems) while they lead in areas most closely aligned with direct instruction (classroom technology support, faculty development with pedagogy, course management system support). Community colleges historically have focused more resources and attention on many of these learning support functions and this fact is reflected in high levels of offerings across the board.

Figure 6 explores differences by cohort in the frequency of specific functions reporting to the library director among all respondents. Figure 7 presents this same data just for institutions that are offering specific learning support functions. What is most striking about this data is the relatively low or nonexistent frequency of responsibility for most learning support functions being assigned to the library administrator in baccalaureate institutions. This finding certainly was impacted by the fact that most of the baccalaureate institutions responding to the survey were not offering many of these functions at present. The sample size of four-year institutions in the survey also was not as high as we would have liked, so it is possible that this situation is not typical of the cohort. It is not surprising that community colleges lead in the percentage of library administrators responsible for learning support functions. Again, this is logical given the traditional focus of community colleges and

Figure 6. Library Director Responsibility for Learning Support Functions Across All Respondents By Cohort



community college library directors in these learning support areas. It is interesting to note the high level of leadership being offered by directors at master's level institutions. One explanation that seems to be supported by comments made with survey responses is that institutions of this type lend themselves well to library directors assuming leadership in these areas. Master's level institutions may be large enough to be offering a wide range of learning support services and yet small enough to not have other support areas solely devoted to providing these services.

Figure 8, like Figure 4, cumulates the number of positive responses to questions about involvement with a function with the number of libraries that provide administrative leadership for the service. This again is the broadest measure available from the survey data showing the involvement of academic libraries with campus initiatives with learning support functions. It is useful to note that the baccalaureate and doctoral level institutions, while they do not direct as many operations as the other two types of institutions, are involved heavily in their campus utilization of these learning support functions. In many cases, these two types of institutions show the highest level of overall involvement. Again, while this figure does appear to present a very positive and impressive picture of academic library involvement in learning support functions, some caution in due. As

Figure 7. Library Director Responsibility for Learning Support Functions on Campuses Providing Services By Cohort

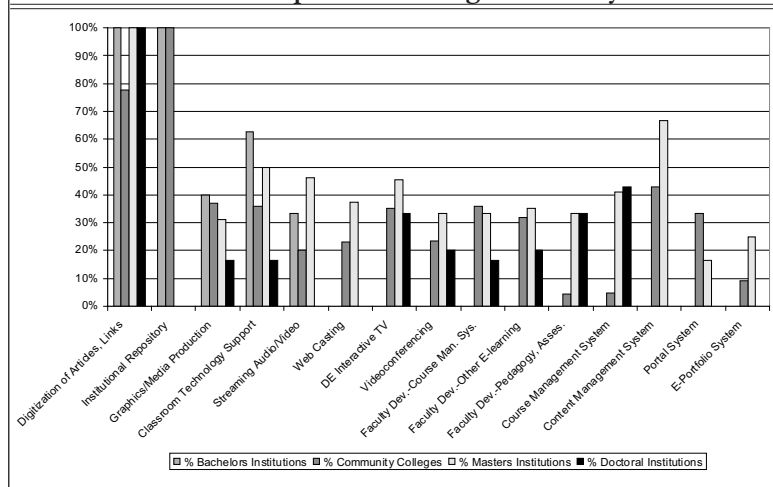
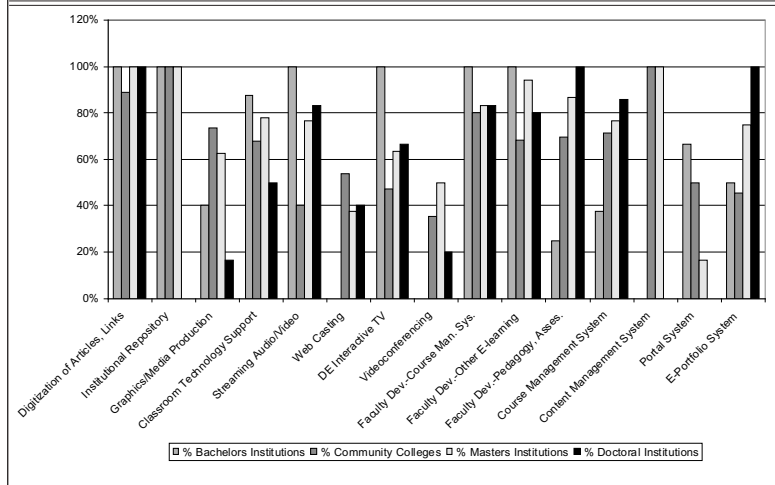


Figure 8. Total Library Involvement in Learning Support Functions On Campuses Providing This Service By Cohort



noted earlier, many libraries of all types indicated that the level of engagement of the library with these functions was limited. The data does support a conclusion that libraries and library services do touch these important learning support functions, but do not support a conclusion that libraries are taking full advantage of opportunities for role expansion in academe by actively and aggressively assuming additional responsibilities and partnerships.

One additional variable that can be explored using the survey data is differences between public colleges/universities and their private counterparts. Differences here were greater as a whole than expected. Figure 9 shows that in most learning support areas, libraries in public universities were more likely to be directing a function than their counterparts in private schools.

A View to the Future

The survey asked respondents to comment on any changes in involvement with learning support functions that they expected to see on their campuses and with their libraries in the next two years. While the results do not lend themselves to quantification, respondents do see the likelihood of increased responsibility in their own positions for these areas and much greater involvement of the library going forward. Many respondents who indicated that the current level of library involvement was

limited indicated that they expected more significant participation in the next two years. Others, who do not currently have administrative responsibility for these functions outside the normal realm of library services, indicated a likelihood of greater collaboration, or even joint administrative responsibility, with areas providing these services on their campuses.

Conclusions

Academic libraries of all types in Illinois have become involved in diverse and numerous campus functions that are not always within a library's normal functional responsibility. The libraries appear to be aggressively making their way into these new realms as managers, partners or contributors. Public, master's level institutions, in particular, report the most penetration into the management of a broad array of teaching and learning support services. While the level and impact of this engagement needs further analysis, one can conclude that academic libraries do have a significant opportunity to exploit a number of natural and already existing connections to learning support functions on their campuses.

Notes

1. W. Lee Hisle, "Top issues facing academic libraries: A report of the Focus on the Future Task Force," *C&RL News* 63, No. 10 (November 2002): 715.

Figure 9. Public And Private Institutions—Function Reports to Library

