



Peer-Reviewed Article

Academic Librarians' Participation in Non-Library Conferences

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates librarian attendance at non-library conferences (NLCs), such as subject-specific conferences, by surveying librarians about attendance, the characteristics of those who attend, why they attend, how they participate, and more. Among the questionnaire respondents, the most likely attendees are STEM liaisons from doctoral universities. While the responses to attending NLCs were broadly positive, the richest data obtained from the study was from a freeform response to a question about perceived benefits/flaws about attending NLCs. Many respondents cited the value of keeping up with trends in the non-library field, improved patron interaction, and getting out of the library silo. The few respondents who reported downsides to attending NLCs mentioned costs, time commitment, and relevance of content. We affirm the value of NLCs and share suggestions for increasing the prevalence of and support for attendance by formally and informally sharing experiences with other librarians.

KEYWORDS

non-library conferences, professional development, continuing education

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Introduction

Conference attendance is a critical component of librarian professional development. It has been recommended in particular to support career growth for early career professionals (Vega & Connell, 2007). Attending a conference provides an opportunity to present to peers, gain new insights surrounding professional practice, and network with colleagues to develop formal and informal connections. When considering conference attendance, odds are that most librarians primarily look to opportunities presented by and for librarians (Bradshaw, 2014). While librarian conferences represent a unique means to foster intra-profession community and share best practices, subject librarians or liaison librarians may also decide to include subject-focused conferences in their conference circuit. This study investigates characteristics of those who attend non-library conferences (NLCs) and perceived benefits or detriments of attending using a survey developed and conducted in 2020.

One of the primary challenges in the role of a subject-focused librarian is becoming familiar with and keeping up with current trends of the discipline(s) one supports. This is especially true if the librarian is a non-expert or someone without a secondary post-baccalaureate degree. But even those who do have formally instilled subject expertise may find themselves needing to liaise with more than one department, or work with parts of their department that are not specifically focused on the area they have studied. Furthermore, librarianship has undergone a transformation in the tasks and duties traditionally appointed to a librarian. Some of these transformations are characterized as a deeper level of research support and departmental involvement (Johnson, 2020). Such a change requires effort to maintain a current perspective. A viable method for maintaining this current awareness is through participating in NLCs.

Literature Review

A literature search reveals just a handful of articles over the last 20 years focusing on NLCs. It is unsurprising that many authors who compose such articles support librarian attendance at NLCs. About half of these articles analyze authors' experience attending an NLC, often discussing benefits such as improved instruction and reference, keeping up with trends in the field, interacting on a deeper level with faculty, enhancing professional networks, and collection development (Lyons, 2007; Tomaszewski & MacDonald, 2009; Tysick, 2002). As librarianship enters a space of increased interaction and relationship-building with faculty members, engaging with field-specific trends becomes more important (Hankins et al., 2009; Tomaszewski & MacDonald, 2009). New methods for learning and opportunities to engage in an immersive space with those doing the scholarship "can be eye-opening and result in improving your knowledge, skills, and services in and for the disciplines you support" (Nevius et al., 2022, p. 43). Lyons (2007) presents findings in a comparison of publishers present at an NLC versus a library conference. Conklin (2013) presents an analysis of a conference program as an alternate means for keeping up but indicates the effort may supplement attendance or be a viable option

to pursue when there is a lack of funding. One advantage missing from Conklin's work is the "professional rejuvenation" or excitement generated when in the immersive experience of a conference (Vega & Connell, 2007). Whether it is the field you serve or work within, bringing home a refreshed energy and a new sense of motivation is a pervasive theme throughout the literature (Bennett, 2011; Harrison, 2010; Tomaszewski & MacDonald, 2009; Tysick, 2002).

Several surveys assessed librarian involvement in NLCs and non-library professional development. A survey after a year of non-library conference membership, sponsored through a small grant program at the University of Houston, cites the ability to contribute to those organizations and raise the perception of librarians and librarianship as added benefits (Bennett, 2011). A Texas A&M program to fund NLC attendance, aimed at enriching librarian and faculty interaction, is a recruitment and retention tool. A questionnaire found that three-quarters of participating librarians would attend the same conference again, and the remaining found the experience important but would attend a different conference if the opportunity arose again (Hankins et al., 2009). Davidson & Middleton (2006) discuss retention and organization membership, limiting the audience to STEM librarians. Their results show that this group values membership in professional organizations; though the sample was not limited to NLCs, they were included.

Almost all the works highlighted finances as a barrier to conference attendance. Bennett (2011) reports the majority of study participants' willingness to maintain professional membership even at their personal expense. Other barriers include difficulty measuring return on investment (Bradshaw, 2014); gaining support of higher-ups (Nevius et al., 2022); lack of peer-to-peer interaction (Lyons, 2007); selecting one conference when a portfolio includes many disciplines and subdisciplines (Davidson & Middleton, 2006); and combating feelings of isolation (Hankins et al., 2009). Many of these barriers are paired with recommendations for how to appropriately prepare should these issues come up. Nevius et al. (2022) emphasizes diversity and inclusion when attending a conference, and questions whether one should support a conference that is not putting forth effort to be inclusive. Lyons (2007) is upfront with the idea that NLCs should not replace library conferences, but supplement them, recognizing the benefits of cross-institutional peer networking.

Continued involvement can increase engagement and comfort level at a specific NLC. In the literature, some articles highlight attendance, but others have librarians offering sessions, participating in exhibits, and engaging with the conference in a new and meaningful ways, mirroring the 'natural progression' of the academic librarian moving from attendance to poster presentations and leading sessions (Vega & Connell, 2007, p. 503). Price et al. (2020) exemplifies this next-level involvement in NLCs, describing a multi-year journey with a naturally interdisciplinary health sciences conference wherein librarians are involved in live-tweeting, presenting materials, and offering librarian expertise for attendees' benefit. The latter can be problematic, particularly considering the variation in services offered at academic

libraries—for example, the variety of services offered around evidence synthesis methods (Nevius et al., 2022). Regardless, improving the visibility of libraries and library services benefits librarianship.

This survey and analysis add to the current literature by offering a moderate sample size of librarian experiences across institutional boundaries. It is clear from the literature review that NLCs are viewed as value-added experiences. We investigated whether this statement held when surveying hundreds of academic librarians.

Methods

For the purposes of this study, we defined an NLC as any conference or meeting for which the primary intended audience is not librarians or information professionals. Typically, NLCs are disciplinary conferences. Examples include: American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS); American Public Health Association (APHA); American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy (AACP); American Society for Engineering Education (ASEE); American Chemical Society (ACS); American Mathematical Society (AMS); American Musicological Society; American Geophysical Union (AGU); Annual Conference on the First-Year Experience; Association for Jewish Studies (AJS); Educause; FORCE11; German Studies Association; Lilly Conference; Modern Language Association.

In this survey of the landscape of librarian attendance at NLCs we designed questions to uncover whether:

- some disciplines are more likely to see academic librarians attend their subject conferences than others
- academic librarians were members of subject-focused professional organizations
- NLC attendance is more likely when academic librarians are active participants, presenting or involved in committee work, for example
- career status—tenure-track or otherwise—made academic librarians more or less likely to attend NLCs
- certain classifications of academic institutions made NLC attendance more possible, through travel and professional development funding

The questionnaire was created in Qualtrics. We consulted an assessment librarian (MC) at our institution for feedback on question formation and phrasing before submitting our questionnaire and documentation to the IRB. The University of Texas at Austin issued an Exempt Determination Letter for our study (IRB #2020-03-0079) on April 19, 2020.

Two of the authors (Bogucka and Chapman Tripp) were science librarians, who started with questions about the conference-going habits of their science librarian colleagues but broadened the inquiry to include any academic librarians. We distributed the survey

announcement via the following professional listservs and venues: ALA Liaisons Assembly; BUSLIB-L; CHMINF; EBSS-L; ELDnet; GEOnet; HSIG; IAMSLIC; ILI-L; LIRT; LITA-L; MEDLIB-L; PAM; SCHOLCOMM; SLA Academic Forum; SLA DBIO (biomed & life sciences); SLA FAER (food, ag, environ resources); SLA PHT (pharm tech); STS-L; one author's Twitter account (200+ followers); These venues provided an estimated subscriber reach of at least 23,360. Here we report on 415 survey responses, representing less than 2% of the estimated subscriber total, collected between April 21 and July 31, 2020.

Not all respondents answered every question on the entire survey, nor did they necessarily need to.

- 304 completed 50%
- 284 completed 70%
- 268 completed 96%
- 225 completed = 100%

There were 45 incorrectly formatted responses. Responses about multiple conferences were inserted into a question block intended for a response about a single conference. Where noted, they have been left out of reported numbers. There were 273 correctly formatted responses. These respondents answered at least part of one question block about an individual conference. 12 respondents did not supply a conference name but answered some portion of conference-specific questions. (Total respondents, 415)

After exporting from Qualtrics, we analyzed the quantitative data in crosstabs comparing Carnegie Classification, librarian status, librarian roles, conferences attended, participation, value, how conferences were selected, and how conferences were paid for, then analyzed via Tableau visualizations. We analyzed qualitative responses via a multi-software pathway detailed below.

Qualitative Data Handling

We employed a novel use of Rayyan, a free systematic review application, to code responses to the open-ended question, "What do you perceive to be the value OR detriment of non-library conference attendance for you, your library, and/or your institution?" There were 251 responses to this question. We pulled a random sample of 50 responses, examined them for larger themes, and Bogucka developed a list of 10 values codes and 7 detriment codes, which we then applied to the entire response set.

After exporting the Qualtrics responses to Excel, we copied each comment and its unique response number to a Word document, where we then cleaned up the comments so that each response had only one tab and one paragraph return. We saved the cleaned document as a .txt file, designating two EndNote fields-- REFTYPE *Journal Article and FIELDS Author[tab>Title.

We then transformed it into a Rayyan-importable .txt file by importing it into EndNote using the Tab-Delimited import filter and exporting it from EndNote using the EndNote export filter. We activated identity-shielding on the resulting Rayyan “review” and entered in our keywords, then began labeling comments using our standardized terminology.

We exported individually coded Rayyan files as .csv files, which Chapman Tripp imported into Tableau and then calculated our inter-rater reliability.

Table 1

Inter-rater reliability for qualitative coding

| Combination | Total | Agree | Disagree | Agreement |
|--------------------|--------------|--------------|-----------------|------------------|
| C + B | 714 | 297 | 417 | 0.42 |
| B + A | 715 | 340 | 375 | 0.48 |
| A + C | 631 | 315 | 316 | 0.50 |

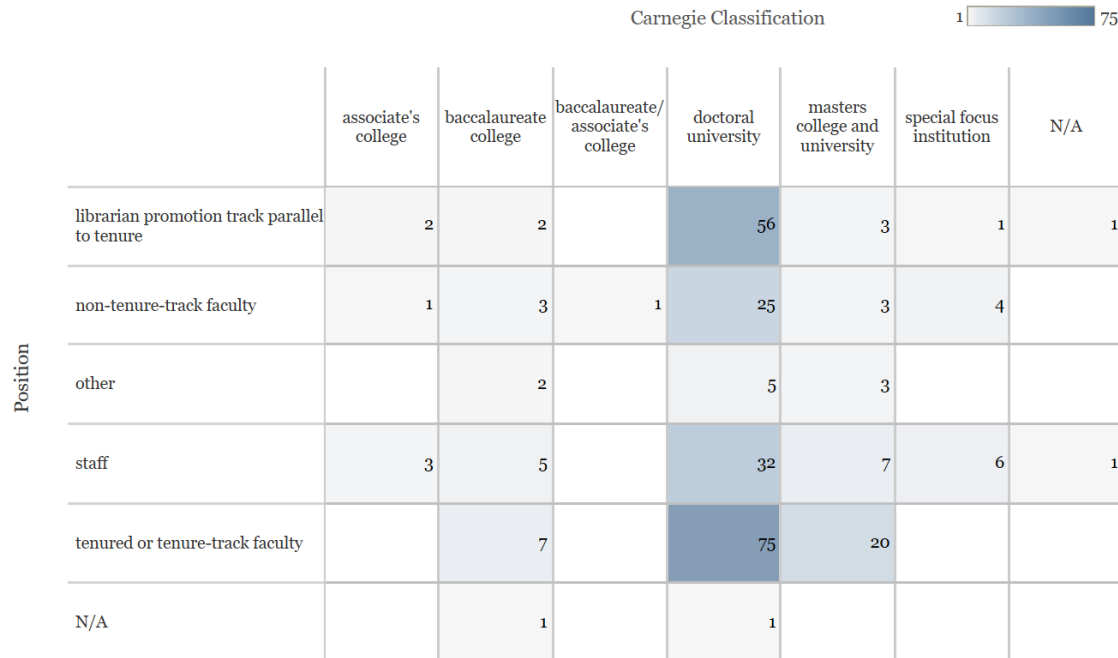
Results

Quantitative Data Handling

The questionnaire captured information about librarians’ faculty/tenure status, librarians’ organizational roles and subject areas, and the Carnegie Classification of librarians’ institutions. Responses address these essential questions:

- What can we learn about the characteristics of respondents who attend NLCs?
- What can we learn about institutional support for NLC attendance?
- What can we learn about the characteristics of the NLCs that respondents attend?

Among the respondents, the most frequent NLC attendees, and those most likely to present at NLCs, are STEM liaisons who work at doctoral universities and hold either tenured/tenure track or parallel promotion track appointments (Figure 1).

Figure 1*Respondents by Carnegie classification vs. Position*

Note. Participants who did not respond to either question are filtered out of this view.

This STEM-heavy participation was reflected in the top three conferences that respondents reported attending: the American Society for Engineering Education (ASEE), the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), and the American Chemical Society (ACS). It should be noted that we made no attempt to count the available NLCs across disciplines. Lacking that data, this study does not address whether STEM librarians are over-represented in our sample.

STEM librarians comprised the largest proportion (25.7%) of respondents who answered the question about their roles/subject areas. The next highest categories were library administration/management (9.3%) and instruction librarian (8.4%). Forty percent of respondents are either tenured or tenure-track faculty, or on a librarian promotion track parallel to tenure. Most respondents (30.5%) work in either a doctoral university or a master's college or university.

Respondents' top three behaviors, in order, are that they did not present, they presented alone or with librarians from their own institutions, or they presented with non-library faculty or staff from their own institutions—an order that is consistent across both librarian roles and librarian statuses. Presentation participation is highest among librarians from doctoral universities and STEM liaison librarians.

Table 2*Responses about presenting at NLCs*

| Did you or will you present at this conference? Check all that apply. | Respondent count |
|--|-------------------------|
| I did not/will not present | 142 |
| I presented/will present by myself or with librarians from my institution | 127 |
| I presented/will present with non-library faculty or staff from my institution | 71 |
| I presented/will present with librarians from other institutions | 56 |
| I presented/will present with non-library faculty or staff from other institutions | 39 |
| Did not answer | 39 |

Note. These numbers total more than 415 because respondents could select all options that applied.

281 of the 415 survey takers answered our question about how they chose NLCs to attend. 53% of librarians chose which NLCs to attend completely on their own initiative. Another 3.6% chose to attend NLCs on their own but acknowledged that library faculty or staff recommended the conferences. 74%, most commonly respondents who identified as either STEM liaisons or library management/administration, chose NLCs recommended by non-library faculty or staff. 14.9% cited the recommendation of library faculty or staff alone, and 16.7% cited the recommendation of non-library faculty or staff. 3.2% reported that both library and non-library faculty or staff recommended conferences that they subsequently attended.

Table 3*How survey participants selected an NLC to attend*

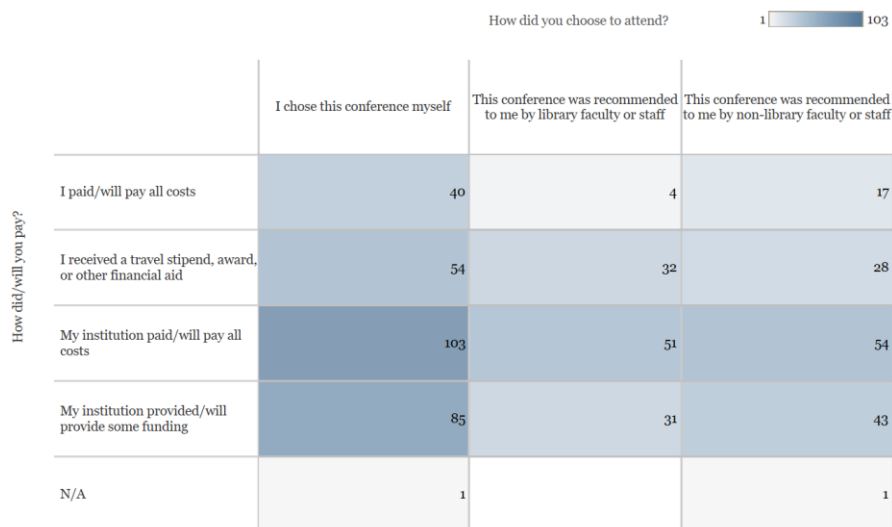
| How did you decide to attend this conference? Check all that apply. | Respondent count |
|--|-------------------------|
| I chose this conference myself. | 203 |
| This conference was recommended to me by non-library faculty or staff | 107 |
| This conference was recommended to me by library faculty or staff | 81 |
| Did not answer | 134 |

Note. These numbers total more than 415 because respondents could select all options that applied.

We were curious about the intersection of funding, without which conference attendance often is not possible, and librarians' autonomy in selecting their professional development. Most respondents received institutional funding, either in part or in full, to cover the costs of attending NLCs (Figure 2). This was consistent across librarian roles and statuses. Those most likely to have paid the entire cost of NLC attendance were STEM liaisons, tenured/tenure-track librarians, or librarians from doctorate granting universities.

Figure 2

How respondents choose the conference vs. how they paid



Note. Respondents who did not answer either question are not included in this view.

These self-selected respondents overwhelmingly reported extremely positive or somewhat positive perceptions of the value of attending conferences in disciplines other than librarianship, consistently across librarian roles and statuses, and regardless of how the NLC was selected or paid for, and whether the librarian presented at the NLC. The qualitative responses revealed more nuance about why the respondents found NLCs worth attending and will be addressed in depth in a later section.

47% (N = 198) of respondents have presented at one or more NLCs. While this may not necessarily reflect the proportion of all presenting librarians at all NLCs, it suggests that many librarians are not just audience members in sessions but actively participating and sharing their domain knowledge. 112 of these presenters described themselves as first-time attendees.

Furthermore, librarian presenters report collaborating with both librarians and non-librarians. The fact that 157 respondents presented on their own or with other librarians from the same institution or another institution and 91 respondents presented with non-librarians from their institution or other institutions shows evidence of rich collaboration and added visibility of librarians.

Qualitative Section

The questionnaire contained one free-text question: “What do you perceive to be the value OR detriment of non-library conference attendance for you, your library, and/or your institution?” For the top three NLCs (AAAS, ACS, ASEE), respondents *valued* trends and improved patron interactions most highly. Most respondents did not report downsides to NLC attendance, but those who did cited cost, time, and relevance.

We labeled the qualitative responses from a standardized table of codes. Table 4 contains a list of all the coding terms established during the pilot coding activity. The second column shows standardized abbreviations of the coding terms used as labels in Rayyan. Rayyan, a systematic review screening tool, shields the entries of different screeners—or in this case, coders—so that we could assign codes without seeing each other’s labeling. The list in Table 4 minimized inconsistencies in coding that may arise from discrepancies in terminology abbreviation, punctuation, casing, spacing, etc. Figure 3 shows the frequency with which coders applied the standardized codes.

Table 4

Coding category definition and standardized codes

| Description | Code |
|--|----------------------|
| Val: getting out of the library bubble/silo | V:librarysilo |
| Val: field current trends/awareness | V:trends |
| Val: collection development | V:CD |
| Val: improved patron interaction | V:patron |
| Val: tenure/promotion | V:tenure |
| Val: increases clout of library | V:clout |
| Val: general intellectual stimulation | V:stimulate |
| Val: interaction with other librarians attending | V:otherlibrarians |
| Det: cost | D:cost |
| Det: relevance of subject matter | D:relevance |
| Det: disconnect from library colleagues | D:disconnect |
| Det: lack of (non-cost) support from the library | D:nonfinancial |
| Det: limited opportunities to present | D:opportunitypresent |

Det: absence from work

D:time

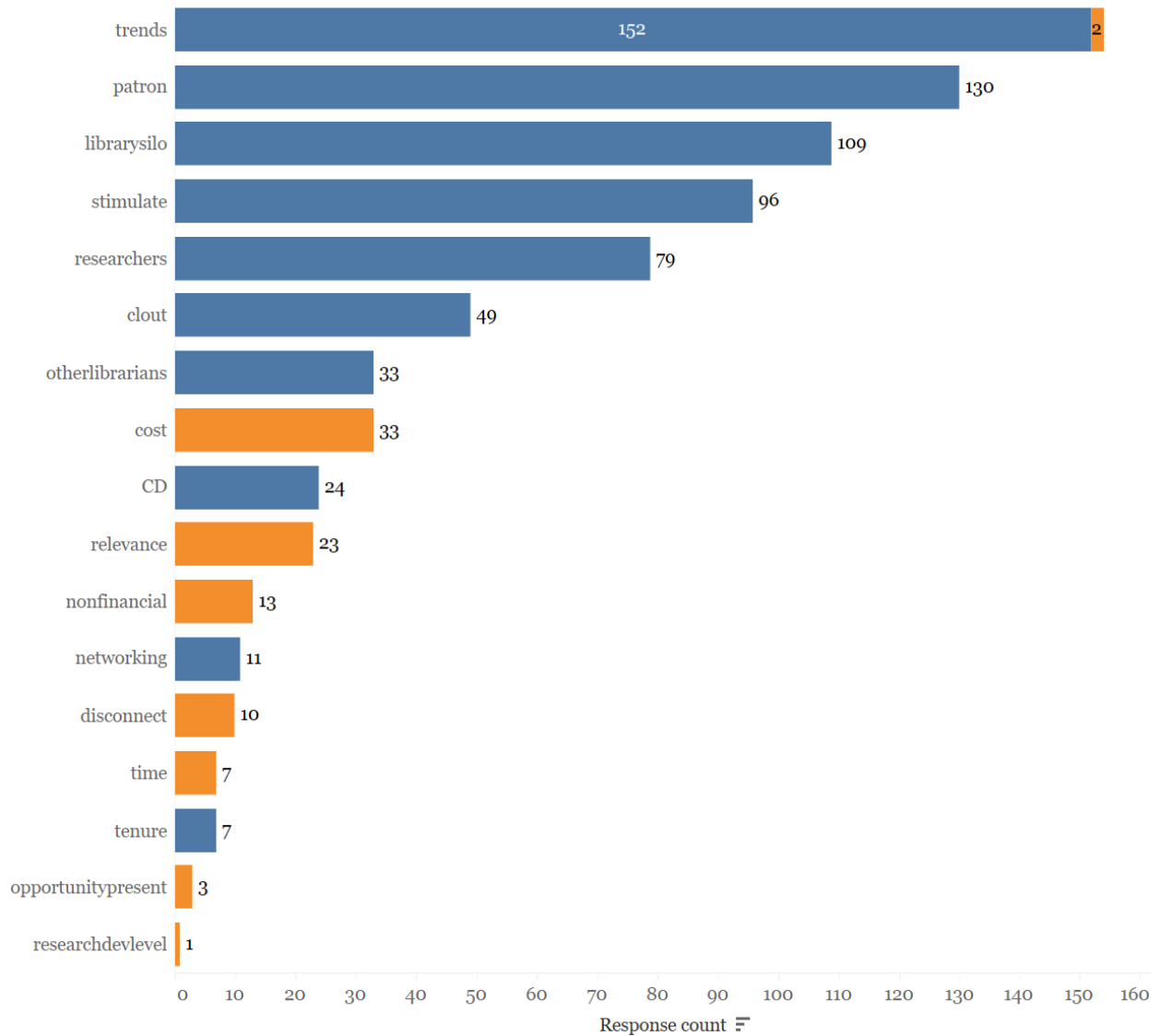
Det: research presented too early in development to be useful

D:researchdelevel

Figure 3

Rayyan label frequencies, subject, and sentiment coding for qualitative responses

value | detriment



Note. This includes codes assigned by two or more reviewers.

Survey Limitations

Potential Errors

Although the majority of responses met the authors' expectations, some questionnaire-takers misinterpreted the directions (see Appendix A: Survey). The questionnaire provided three repeated-question blocks, meant to collect information on three separate NLCs. These common questions tended to reflect how many conferences respondents entered into the survey. Q4-8, Q9-13, and Q14-18 are identical, and were intended to capture information on up to three distinct NLCs. If respondents had only attended one NLC, they did not need to answer Q9-Q18. Respondents who had attended only two NLCs did not need to answer Q14-Q18. Some respondents put more than one conference name in Q4 or Q9 or Q14, or entered the same data in Q4, Q9, and Q14. The most common error-type was respondents putting information about several NLCs into one question block. This occurred in 45 instances.

In order to incorporate the data from these respondent errors, one author reconciled the data by splitting out multiple conference-name entries into separate lines and matching each with the corresponding entries about those conferences. Because of the variable nature of the text—a mix of punctuation, acronyms, abbreviations, and full names—splitting these responses was a manual process. The process rested on the assumption that the *conference name* (e.g., Q4) on the first line of a multi-entry response should correspond to the information on the first lines of Q5-Q8, and that author's judgement. After this, the data were pivoted in Tableau Prep and combined with the qualitative response coding Rayyan data. Because participants could select multiple responses for some questions, it was unclear which conferences these responses referred to, and we filtered out these 45 responses when evaluating responses at the individual conference level. 12 respondents did not indicate they had attended an NLC and did not enter an NLC name but answered at least one question in a question block, requiring extra data cleaning to distinguish these answers from respondents who did not report they attended an NLC. For future surveys on this topic, we would seek more feedback on the questionnaire and overall data collection methods to avoid this issue.

Other potential errors arise from responses where the survey names were given as ambiguous acronyms. For example, some respondents listed "MLA" as an NLC they attended. Our survey listed "MLA" as a library conference, with a link to the website of the Medical Library Association, for clarity. However, we cannot discount the possibility that some respondents entered MLA, meaning Modern Language Association, whilst others erroneously entered MLA meaning Medical Library Association. If conducting this survey again, we would explicitly call out these common acronyms to avoid confusion.

Unasked Questions

In trying to shield our respondents from survey fatigue, we regretfully jettisoned many questions we would have liked to ask. Questions that may be part of a follow-up survey include:

- Does the non-library organization you belong to or whose NLC you attended have a Library & Information Science section? (View a list of LIS section information for selected NLCs at <https://doi.org/10.18738/T8/NEYRHY>)
- Have you served on a committee in a non-library organization?
- Have you served in an office in a non-library organization?
- For specific NLCs, how many times have you attended them?
- Provide full names of conferences, not just acronyms.
- Geographical data about the NLC attendees (rationale being that respondents' locations may affect their likelihood to travel—AAAS, for example, regularly holds its annual meetings in Boston and Washington, D.C., meeting elsewhere in the U.S. only every third year.)
- How many years have you been a librarian?
- Do your liaison departments ever underwrite your attendance?
- How does your institutional support—funding, release time, etc.—for NLC attendance compare with support for librarian-focused conferences?

This study would also have benefitted from the responses of librarians who do *not* attend NLCs, and information on why they choose not to. In future surveys we would encourage responses from any librarian regardless of NLC attendance status. Information on disciplinary faculty's thoughts about librarian attendance at NLCs, though intriguing, was beyond the scope of this study.

After considering our data, which was collected in the earliest days of the COVID-19 pandemic, we believe it would be useful for future studies to ask:

- Will more virtual meetings equal more librarians attending NLCs?
- How do non-STEM librarians' results compare to STEM-librarians' results?
- Are some disciplines more likely to have librarians attending their conferences?
- How do institutions fund institutionally recommended conferences?
- Do early-career librarians and established librarians have different likelihoods of attending NLCs?

The data is available at the Texas Data Repository (<https://doi.org/10.18738/T8/NEYRHY>), and dashboards have been created and shared publicly via Tableau (<http://tabsoft.co/3hKE1PG>). Location data was stripped from the datasets to protect participant anonymity. We encourage readers to use the data to address further questions.

Discussion

This study addresses a gap in the literature by presenting a broadly distributed survey on NLC attendance. Previously, articles on this topic have been personal experience-based or collected data from one institution (Bennett, 2011; Hankins et al., 2009; Nevius et al., 2022; Tysick, 2002). Respondents to our questionnaire report that the experience of attending an NLC is overwhelmingly positive. The fact that our biggest group of respondents were STEM liaisons may be a consequence of two authors being STEM liaisons, thus introducing an element of potential response bias. The high response rates of librarians from doctoral institutions and tenured/tenure track librarians may indicate a higher expectation to be involved professionally. Additionally, it is feasible that librarian-faculty interactions at non-doctorate granting institutions may be driven by undergraduate teaching support as opposed to research.

One factor that suggests our numbers may be skewed toward STEM is the information drawn from the literature about reported instances of NLC attendance. We observed instances of NLCs in the literature, and noted a higher proportion of social sciences conferences than what is reflected in our data. This notation suggests that the social sciences fields could be underrepresented in our data. As a result, we have taken high representation from the STEM liaison-identifying respondents with a grain of salt across multiple categories.

Many of the results characterizing attendees proved unsurprising and will not be discussed here. One area we did find interesting is the perception of NLC attendance by librarian attendees, as shown in free-text responses to the question, “What do you perceive to be the value OR detriment of non-library conference attendance for you, your library, and/or your institution?” Coding the responses to this question reveals three main benefits:

- Keeping up with academic field trends
- Improved patron interaction
- Getting out of the library silo

These three coded sentiments each represent more than 100 of the 251 qualitative responses, quantitative evidence supporting earlier works reporting that NLC attendance is of value to librarians professionally (Hankins et al., 2009; Lyons, 2007; Nevius et al., 2022; Tysick, 2002). Additionally, the detriment codes overall were lower than anticipated. However, each of these values/detriments *are* related to the programming of the conference, in direct contrast to

the work by Vega and Connell (2007), who found that librarians attend conferences overwhelmingly to gain a sense of professional rejuvenation and network.

One theme from the literature was the prevalence of NLC attendance based on the positions that include collection development duties. Lyons' (2007) work, comparing the publishers at a library conference (American Library Association) and an NLC (American Political Science Association), showed that only 23% of the publishers at the NLC were present at ALA, driving a compelling case for selectors. In Hankins et al. (2009) only librarians with 50% or more of their duties in collection development were initially permitted to participate and attend a subject-based conference with funding. One wonders if the pattern of having subject selectors pick and choose items has fallen by the wayside as approval plans have gained traction. Perhaps it is the conferences that have stopped being such an attraction for publishers. Another possibility is that the lack of collection development-based responses is tied to our potential response bias. Non-STEM NLCs may still be excellent places to keep up with publishing trends and select materials. In our data, only 11 respondents categorized themselves as collection management librarians and our qualitative code for value related to collection development was applied 24 times.

Of note is the rate of librarians who pay for conferences on their own; across all conferences, 48 respondents selected "I paid/will pay all costs." 32 respondents who paid their own way work at doctoral granting institutions, though several other institution types were also represented, suggesting that NLCs are of enough value that some will pay out of pocket. It is also important to recognize that the available funding may result in attendance at a conference, whereas the lack of funding may mean lack of attendance. In addition, paying out of pocket for conferences may be a possibility for some librarians financially and not others. The value of NLC attendance is reportedly high and fosters departmental relationships. We hope that library administrators recognize that value and support librarians in attending NLCs. We also recommend that librarians who have not done so request funding because this data shows that library funders are generally supportive of librarians' conference choices (Figure 2).

203 respondents indicated that they chose the conference and 107 answered that the conference was recommended to them by non-library faculty or staff. While respondents could choose more than one response for this question, these high numbers allude to the active role that librarian attendees are taking in finding NLCs for themselves and the importance of recommendations from non-library faculty and staff. 123 of respondents who said they chose the conference themselves were from doctoral universities, a notably higher rate than the other two response categories.

107 respondents report attending an NLC based on a recommendation from non-library faculty or staff. One author (Bogucka) can report being specifically invited by faculty in two separate disciplines to attend their preferred NLCs. While we did not survey participants to

inquire if they had asked non-library colleagues for recommendations, it hints at the importance of librarians receiving these recommendations. We encourage librarians to ask their non-librarian colleagues for conference suggestions. Upon asking, one may find cost-saving benefits such as departmental memberships which garner a reduced registration rate (Nevius, 2022).

Although a free-text response lamenting a lack of supervisor support led us to create a non-financial detriment code, the highest number (33) of qualitative responses coded as detriments were cost-related. Despite constraints on individual library travel and conference budgets, we believe data collected in this questionnaire can be used to build a case to attend an NLC. Those interested in attending NLCs may benefit by identifying conferences in their subject areas that have been attended by librarians previously. Our overwhelmingly positive responses point clearly to the value of NLC attendance. The qualitative response section allows for further insight into reasons why.

Another code created in the qualitative analysis was “getting out of the library silo.” This response appeared 109 times. Some of the responses coded in this category were quite strongly worded, such as in the following examples:

- “I think our profession is too insular at times and lacks fresh perspectives from different fields. Going to non-library conferences can expose people to new ideas as well as reveal insights about the challenges, etc. faced by practitioners.”
- “It is good for me to get my head out of library land, and in my case, see what is going on at the science-end of the world. This helps me better engage with my science liaison faculty, staff, and students. I don't believe there is any detriment to myself, my library, or my institution.”

Clearly a contingent of librarians value the diverse perspectives and opportunities to be introduced to new ideas that can inform their professional practice. Also highlighted were some aspects where library meetings underperform, such as including children and professional mothers in conferences.

The literature review and our study results illustrate the value of NLCs having spaces for librarians to belong to within the conferences and organizations, whether as an educational section (AAAS and ACS) or a dedicated librarian section (ASEE or AACP), providing space for librarians to network while being immersed in the conference. Notably, these example NLCs include the top three attended by librarians in our results. Giving librarians a venue to advise one another about relevant sessions further maximizes the value of NLC attendance.

Immersion and participation are crucial to any conference experience. Over the course of this project, the conference circuit changed drastically with many more conferences being offered online or in hybrid modes due to the pandemic. On the one hand, this provides for less expensive conference-going experiences that additionally have reduced environmental impact.

On the other hand, is the experience of attending a conference diminished in any appreciable way for NLC attendance? In the literature review, collection development was consistently identified as a benefit. It is not hard to identify this tangible benefit as no longer quite as relevant when attending a conference virtually. In 2020, at a point of continued lockdown, the response coding only revealed 242 responses who identified collection development as a benefit. Whether or not there are further distinctions between virtual and in-person conference-going experiences is a question for future research.

One recommendation is that NLC attendees should increase the venues in which they report back to other librarians. For instance, in previous years at the University of Texas at Austin there have been informal 'Brown Bags' where librarians shared professional development experiences. This type of informal gathering could alert other librarians to the practice of attending NLCs and some of their anecdotal benefits and shortcomings. We further suggest that supervisors and mentors recommend NLC attendance to new subject liaisons, to support quick learning and foster a sense of community within a discipline.

Conclusion

This survey provides quantitative evidence on the topic of librarian attendance at NLCs, reporting on respondents' previous attendance at NLCs and characteristics describing their positions and work environments, as well as posing a qualitative question on the value or detriment of the NLC attendance. Regardless of the response rate in certain areas of librarianship, and although the majority of respondents were STEM liaisons, we see implications that support NLC attendance for both individual academic librarians and their institutions. This study validates previous small-scale studies illustrating that NLCs are worthwhile expenditures of time and resources, engaging librarians and producing tangible benefits. We encourage supervisors and mentors to consider NLCs when approving funding and recommending conferences to their staff.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest but note that one author was previously a library organization's liaison to a scientific society that hosts an NLC.

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