

Link Up the Sticks: Access and Barriers to Professional Development for Small and Rural Academic Librarians

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Abstract

Participation in continuing education and professional development are crucial to the practice of librarianship as a thriving profession. However, increasingly tight budgets, stagnant salaries, small staff, and lack of access to current technologies may prevent active academic librarians who work on small and rural campuses from fully participating in professional development. As the duties of the modern librarian continue to evolve, efforts to ensure access to quality ongoing training for 21st-century information professionals from all areas of the North American landscape remain paramount. This study explores how academic librarians in small or rural library environments keep up with modern library practices, network with colleagues, and access formal and informal opportunities for continuing education and professional development. The study also identifies barriers to training opportunities for academic librarians on small or rural campuses and investigates the links between continuing education barriers and professional association membership.

Keywords: continuing education; professional development; rural academic libraries; small academic libraries; library education; training

Introduction

The characteristics of a *profession* have been well-documented in the literature across many disciplines. Generally, a profession is characterized by a focus on public service, a locus of control over who is admitted to the profession, access to professional privileges, a code of ethics, and most importantly, a body of systematic theory that members learn via lengthy education processes. In later literature, another characteristic has emerged: members of a profession have a commitment to continuing education.¹⁻³ The American Library Association (ALA) continues to ensure that librarianship reflects the characteristics of a modern profession via a broad Code of Ethics (COE) that articulates the common concerns and duties of LIS professionals. Within the ALA COE, the importance of continuing professional development (CPD) is addressed in Principle VIII: “[W]e strive for excellence in the profession by maintaining and enhancing our own knowledge and skills, by encouraging the professional development of co-workers, and by fostering the aspirations of potential members of the profession.”⁴

While the ALA COE offers expectations for CPD, the ability of Library and Information Science (LIS) professionals to fulfill this ethical responsibility may be inhibited by financial, technological, or institutional factors. In particular, these barriers may be a larger issue for librarians who work at small or geographically isolated academic institutions. This article investigates challenges and opportunities academic librarians at small and rural academic institutions encounter as they attempt to locate, access, and participate in CPD.

Literature Review

Since their inception, discussions about formal library education and CPD have

been wrought with debates tinged with regret about early missteps and optimism about future prospects for quality offerings. A literature review uncovers several histories of American library training and education, including books,⁵⁻⁸ an encyclopedia entry⁹ and numerous articles.¹⁰⁻¹⁴ In the winter of 1986, in celebration of the library education centennial, *Library Trends* published an entire issue dedicated to professional development.¹⁵ Literature covering continuing education and professional development appears along a similar continuum, starting in 1965 with Rothstein's short lecture on continuing professional development¹⁶ and continuing with Stone's worthy dissertation and subsequent books and articles.¹⁷⁻²⁰ Similar to the library education symposium, in 1971 *Library Trends* chose to highlight continuing education as its theme for an entire issue.

Academic librarians have focused on various issues and concerns surrounding CPD: published articles discuss the relationship between librarian faculty status and commensurate opportunities for continuing education,²¹ comparisons in type of library and professional development activities,²² and the role of CPD as it manifests in mentoring via professional associations.²³ Shrinking budgets coupled with higher travels costs and conference fees underscore the difficulties librarians face as they try to keep up their skills while towing the bottom line financially. Academic library professionals have offered up their useful data, best practices and workarounds in hopes that 1) higher education funding will flow again and/or 2) academic librarianship will benefit from the creation of higher quality, adaptable CPD models that overcome hard economic times or isolated locales.^{24,25}

The scarcity of CPD literature comes into sharp relief when the focus is on small

and rural academic libraries. The authors were able to locate general articles about barriers encountered in the context of reference service²⁶ and solo librarians' personal professional development,²⁷ but except for one article assessing the use of the Internet to train rural librarians,²⁸ research focusing on rural and small academic librarians' access to CPD opportunities is practically non-existent. Also discovered was a summary of responses in the Center for Rural Librarianship's *Issues and Trends Facing Rural and Small Libraries* report. The report noted "education (in library service and continuing education)," "continuing education, training and re-training," and "online training" were repeated concerns for librarians at rural and small organizations. In the same report, barriers to CPD opportunities were also mentioned: "budgets are declining," "gas prices make traveling for staff training expensive," and "small staff does not allow time for conferences."²⁹

Despite the gap in literature focusing on small and rural academic libraries, the larger body of CPD literature offers contextual frameworks that can be applied to these environments. Formal and informal channels to CPD for librarians in all specializations are covered significantly.^{30,20,31} Additionally, the role of social media and technology in CPD has been discussed.^{32,33} General discussions about barriers to CPD for librarians have also been covered, including quality of training,¹⁸ handling the effects of economic recessions,^{34,35} budget and funding/institutional support,³⁶ environmental factors,^{37,38} and the role of motivation in seeking out CPD opportunities.^{39,40} While these articles are informative and contribute to the CPD discussion overall, they do not address the unique challenges that LIS professionals in smaller or isolated academic environments may face.

This article takes up the torch of CPD issues as they pertain to academic librarians

working in rural environments or small libraries. The study applies two definitions of continuing education. The National Council on Quality Continuing Education's (NCQE) definition emphasizes personal responsibility: "... self-initiated learning in which individuals assume responsibility for their own development and for fulfilling their need to learn."⁴¹ Stone's broadened CPD definition recognizes informal and formal paths to lifelong professional development: "continuing library education ... consists of all learning activities and efforts, formal and informal, by which individuals seek to upgrade their knowledge, attitudes, competencies, and understanding in their special field of work (or role) in order to: (1) deliver quality performance in the work setting and (2) enrich their library careers."²⁰ The study also considers best practices for CPD as outlined by Varlejs' comprehensive guidelines, which offers ten tenets for promulgating quality library CPD on an international scale.⁴²

The included exploratory study focuses on how academic librarians in small or rural libraries locate and participate in formal and informal CPD opportunities. The study also identifies barriers to CPD for academic librarians working on small or rural campuses and tests for relationships between professional association membership and barriers to CPD. Additionally, the authors summarize how this group of LIS professionals has implemented ways to increase CPD offerings and circumvented barriers to quality ongoing LIS education in the workplace.

Methodology

Instruments and Procedure

A twenty-four question survey was created using GoogleDocs, a collaborative word processing tool. The questions were divided into three general areas: general

characteristics, professional development, and conclusion. After the tool was tested to determine validity and how long it took the average respondent to complete the survey, the content was uploaded into LimeSurvey, an open source survey and questionnaire tool. After the survey was entered into LimeSurvey, the questionnaire was tested again for validity and timing. Upon successful testing, the tool was given a permanent URL and launched for seven weeks. When the survey closed, responses were checked for errors and prepared for testing within LimeSurvey and SPSS.

Survey participation was requested through several electronic mailing lists (LISTSERVs). Chosen LISTSERVs include a selection of national, academic, state, and specialized library discussion lists. LISTSERVs include reference and instruction (RUSA-L, ILI-L), state library associations (LIB-IDAHO, SCLA-L, GLA-L), special libraries (ALL-SIS, TS-SIS, GODORT-L), national ALA divisions (NMRT-L) and population-oriented (RURALIB-L) organizations. Participation was also sought out via social networking sites such as LinkedIn, Google+, and Facebook (authors posted survey invitations on their personal profiles, state library associations, and special library group pages). During the survey period, two additional participation reminders were sent to the same LISTSERVs and social networking sites. When the survey was closed, there were 282 responses. All surveys were reviewed for completion, and the pool was furthered limited to credentialed academic librarians practicing in the United States. When these filters were applied, 218 surveys were found to be viable for the study, and those data were input into SPSS. In addition to the survey, four participants were interviewed about their specific experiences about CPD access. The interviews were held confidentially; therefore, interviewee identities are withheld and labeled I1 – I4. Interviewee responses

and participant comments from open-ended survey questions are included to give context to the study's results.

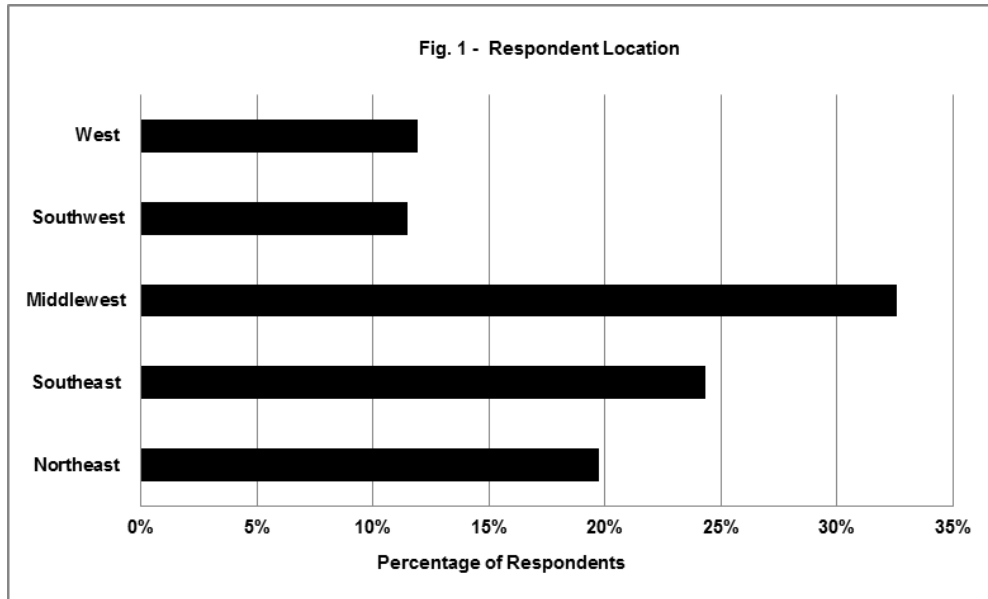
According to the *Academic Libraries: 2010 First Look* report, there are 26,706 academic librarians working full-time in the United States. Of that number, 6,374 work at institutions consistent with the VS2, S2, VS4, and S4 Carnegie Classifications.⁴³ Thus, the present study findings do not reflect holistic views of CPD access or barriers for small or rural academic librarians.

Results

Participants

To define “small academic libraries,” the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education’s Size & Setting Classification for very small two-year (VS2), small two-year (S2), Very small four-year (VS4), and Small four-year (S4) institutions (FTE <500 – 2,999) was consulted.⁴⁴ To define “rural area,” the United States Census Bureau’s definition (< 50,000 people) was used.⁴⁵

Participants in this study currently work in a rural or small academic library and possess an ALA-accredited Master’s degree (n=218). Of the surveyed respondents, 11% were male and 88.5% were female. Age was almost evenly distributed among respondents, with 28% between 25-35 years of age, 24% between 45-54 years of age, 23% between 55-64 years of age, and 21% between 36-44 years of age. Two percent (2%) were under 25 years of age and 2% were over 65. The majority of respondents live in the American Midwest (33%), followed by the Southeast (24%), Northeast (20%), West (12%), and Southwest (11%) (Figure 1).

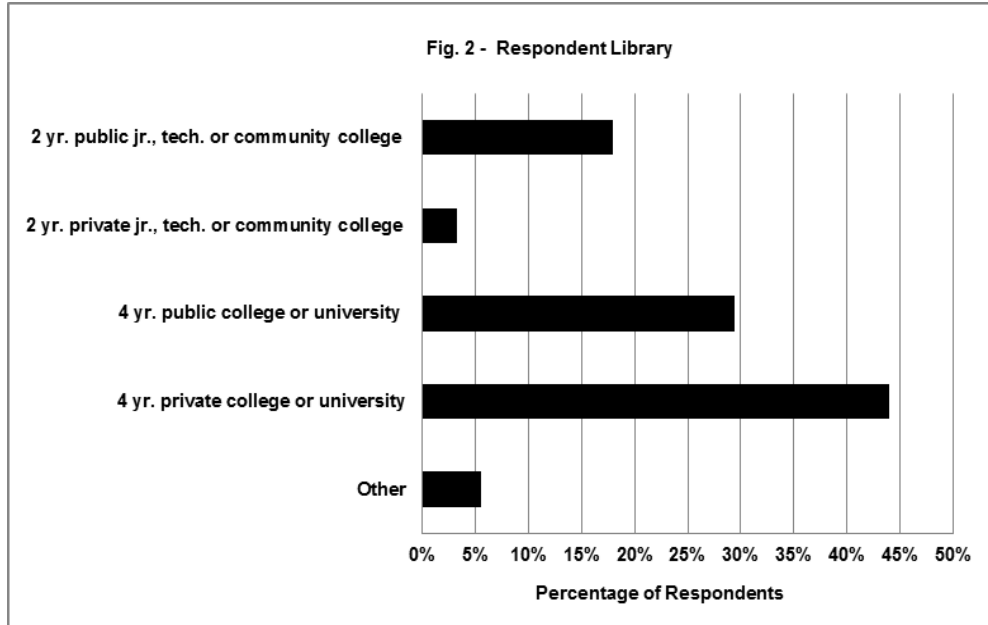


When asked to identify how long they have worked as an accredited librarian, the majority of respondents indicated fifteen years of experience or more (35%), followed closely by new librarians with zero to five years' experience (30%). Twenty-four percent of respondents have worked between five to nine years, and 11% have ten to fourteen years' of professional library experience.

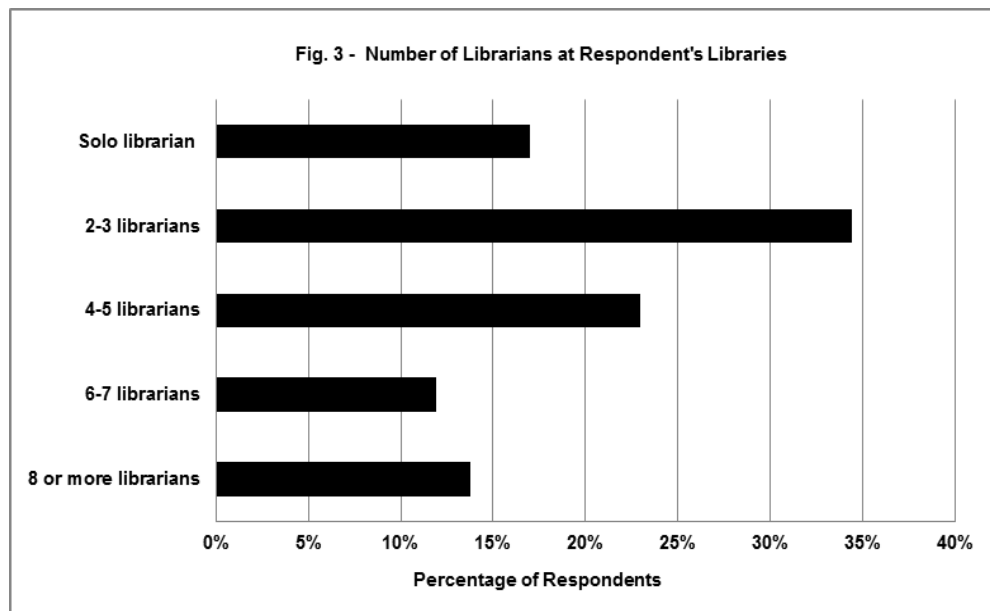
Less than two-thirds of all respondents (62%) do not possess nor are currently working on an additional advanced degree beyond an ALA-accredited Master's degree. A quarter of respondents have an additional Master's degree and only 5% have earned a Ph.D. At the time of the survey, 7% of respondents were working towards an additional advanced degree.

Respondents were asked to identify their academic library type. The majority of respondents (44%) worked at a four year private college or university, while 29% worked at a four year public college or university. Eighteen percent (18%) of respondents were employed at a two year public junior, technical or community college. Three percent (3%) worked at a two year private junior, technical or community college and 6% chose

“other” as their type of academic institution (Figure 2).



Respondents also identified some staffing details about their libraries. A majority of respondents worked at a library with two to three librarians (34%), and 23% worked at libraries with four to five librarians. Solo librarians made up 17% of respondents, and 14% of respondents reported that they worked at libraries with eight or more librarians. Twelve percent (12%) of respondents were at libraries that have six to seven librarians (Figure 3).



Considering the real-world challenges of work in small libraries, several respondents indicated more than one primary work function. The majority of respondents had reference/instruction duties (38%), followed by administration/management duties at 27%. Thirty-five percent (35%) worked in a myriad of other areas (i.e. circulation, interlibrary loan, technical services).

Institutional support

Institutional support often determines a librarian's ability to participate in CPD. It is so critical to CPD that Varlejs stressed its necessity in four of her ten best practices for CPD.

- “Organizational commitment and leadership from staff development and continuing education administrators with expertise in adult continuing education...”
- “[c]onsistent documentation of individuals’ participation in learning and recognition of continuing learning in hiring and promotion decisions...”
- “[a] minimum of 0.5 to 1.0% of institutional budget earmarked for staff development...” and

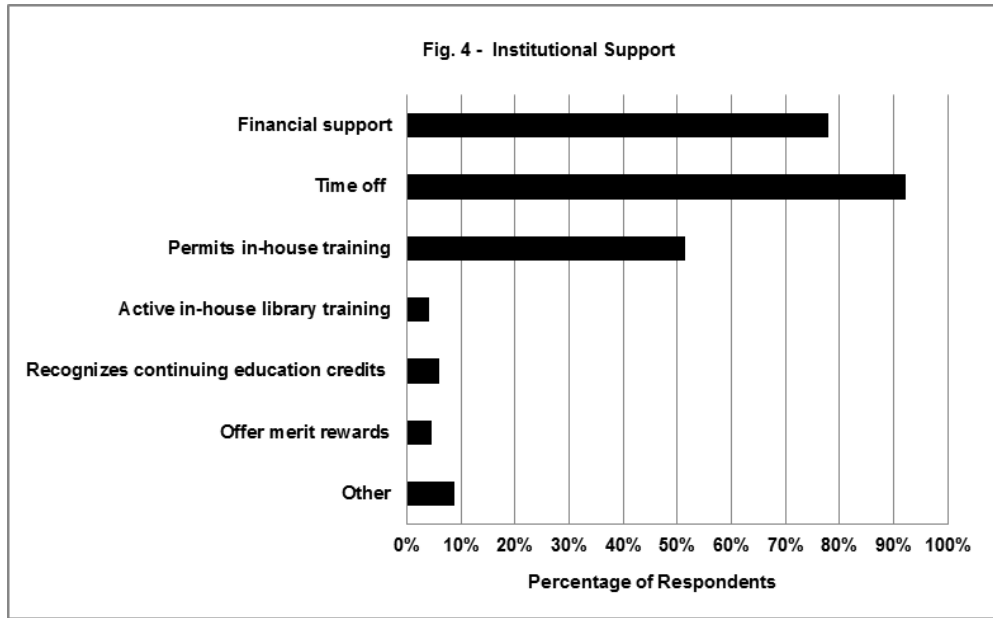
- “[a]bout 10% of work hours provided for attendance at workshops, conferences, in-service training, and other educational activities, and for informal learning projects.”⁴⁶

Participants in this study were asked whether their institutions provided support of professional development. Eighty-eight percent (88%) of respondents acknowledged that their institutions provide support for professional development opportunities. Only 11% said their institutions do not provide support for CPD.

When asked about how their institutions provide support for CPD, 92% of respondents indicated that their institutions provide time off to attend conferences or continuing education courses. Given the ability to choose more than one option, respondents also cited financial support (78%) as the second most popular form of institutional support. Just over half of the participants (51%) indicated that their institution allowed librarians to teach or lead in-house training. Fewer respondents indicated that their institutions recognized continuing education credits (6%), offered merit rewards (5%) or had an active in-house library training/development department or staff person (4%) (Figure 4). Open-ended comments highlight that while the library/institution may support professional development, it can be sporadic or inconsistent:

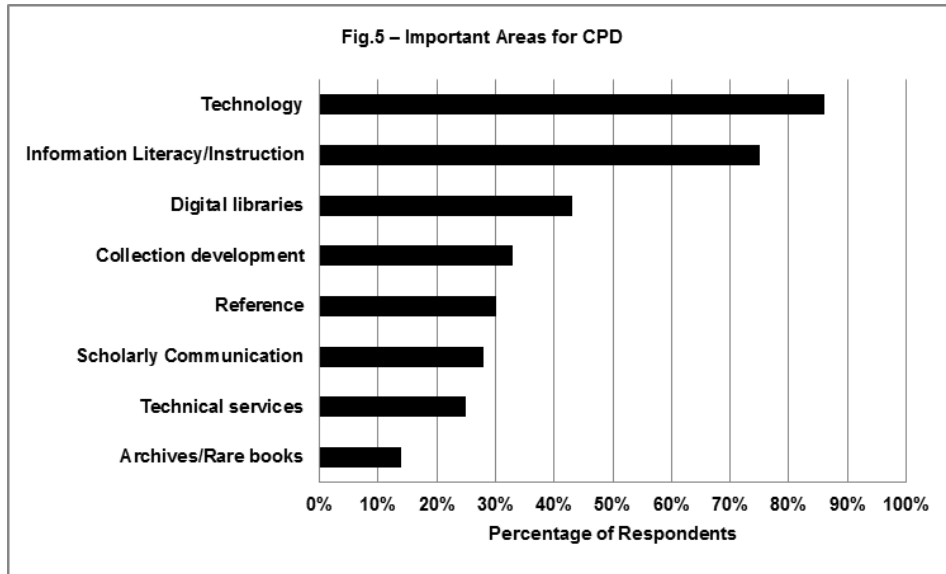
Some of the [ways my institution supports professional development] are occasionally supported. None are supported consistently. - Respondent

[My institution] [a]llows on occasion (every few years) conference attendance and online professional development. – Respondent



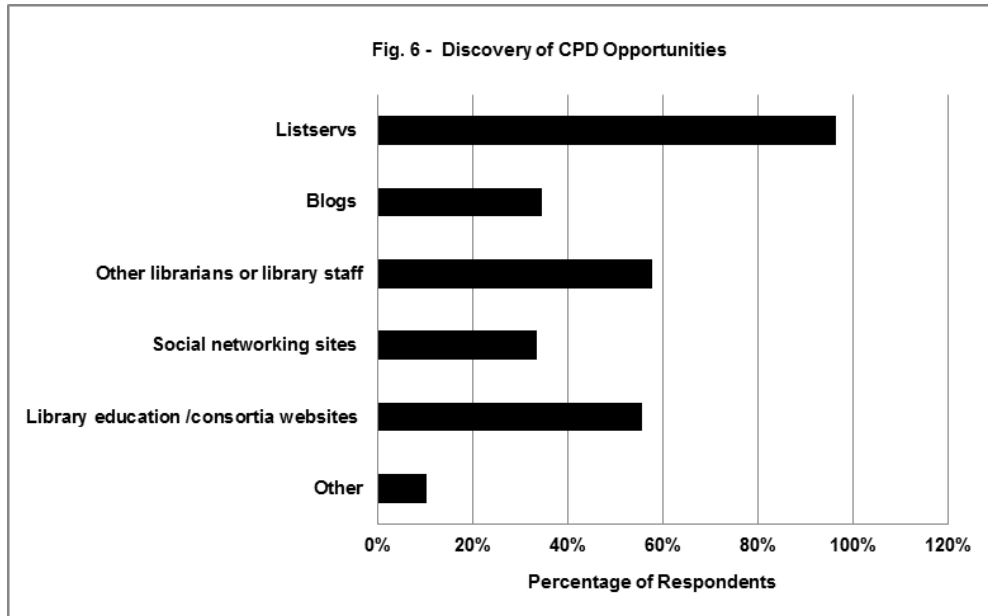
Continuing Education Topic Areas

Survey respondents were asked to identify which subject areas were most important for their CPD (Figure 5). Technology was ranked as the most important area for librarians at small and rural academic libraries (86%). Information literacy/instruction was also ranked highly by respondents, with 75% citing its importance for professional development. Respondents also noted the importance of the following subjects: digital libraries/institutional repositories (43%), collection development (33%), reference (30%), scholarly communication (28%), technical services (25%), and archival/rare books and manuscripts (14%).



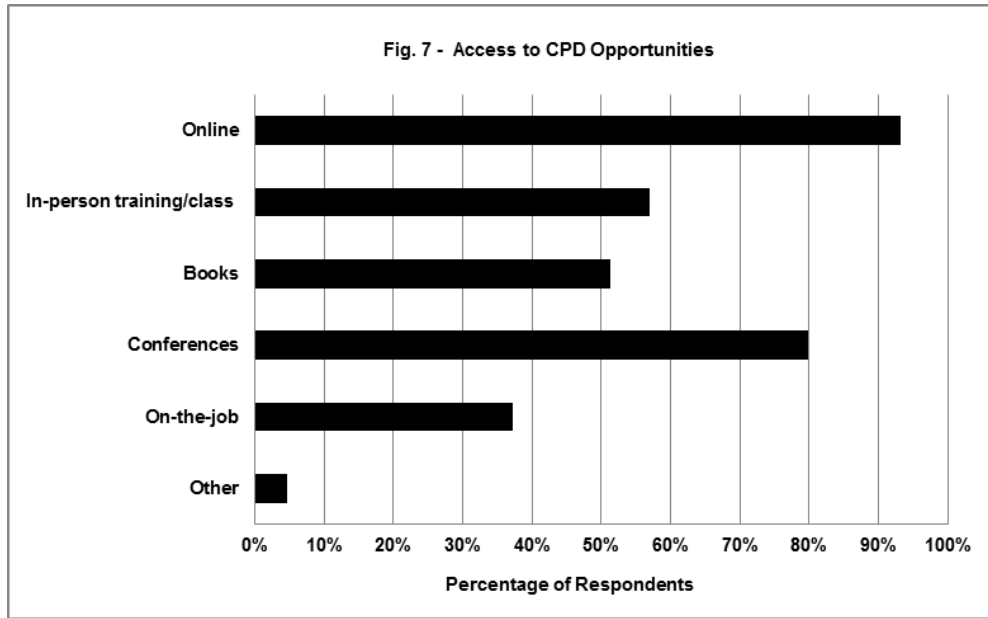
Discovery of Professional Development Opportunities

Varlejs’ best practices call for “[w]idely disseminated information about continuing education and resources, accurately described.”⁴⁷ When asked where they learn about professional development opportunities, 96% of respondents identified LISTSERVs as their primary method of discovery. Fifty-eight percent (58%) cited the assistance of other librarians or library staff in helping them learn about CPD opportunities. Fifty-six percent (56%) of respondents also used library education/consortia websites (e.g., OCLC, LYRASIS, etc.) to discover CPD opportunities. Social media played an important role in helping respondents learn about educational opportunities: one-third of respondents cited blogs and another 34% cited social networking sites (Figure 6).



Access to Professional Development Opportunities

Online access to CPD opportunities exceeded other methods of access to CPD for librarians at rural and small academic libraries (93%). Eighty percent (80%) of respondents attended conferences to access CPD. While 57% attended in-person training/classes, 51% of respondents took a more independent approach and read books for CPD. Since LIS is a practice-based profession, it is not surprising that 37% accessed professional development opportunities on-the-job (Figure 7).

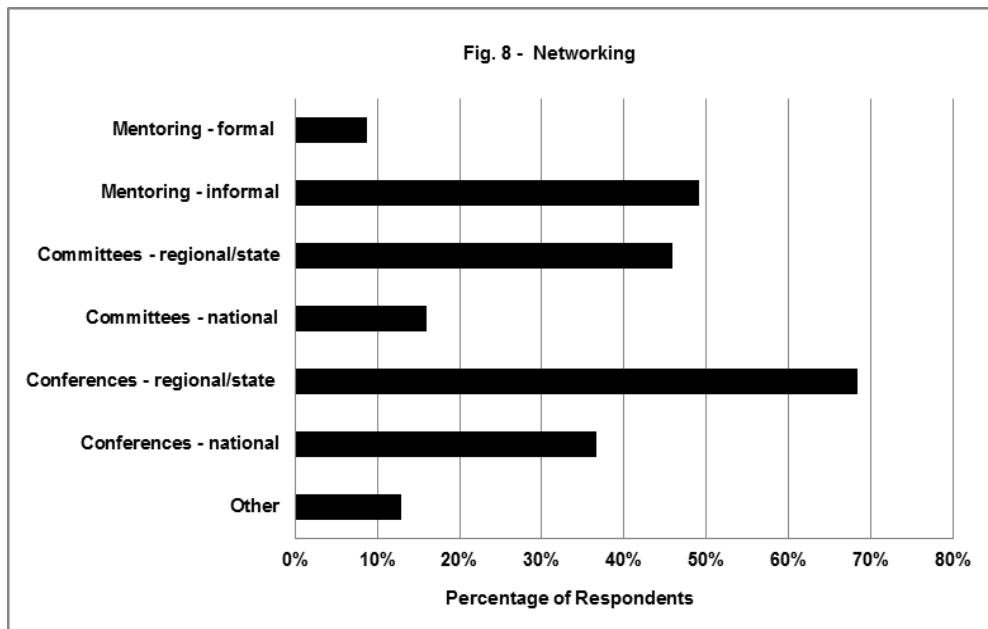


Frequency of access to professional development opportunities varied for small and rural academic librarians. Just over a quarter (27%) accessed professional development opportunities monthly and 23% accessed CPD once a quarter. Sixteen percent accessed CPD once every six months and 14% accessed CPD once a year. While 3% accessed CPD daily, 3% also indicated they do not seek any professional development opportunities.

Networking

Networking with other librarians is an essential form of CPD. When asked how they network with other librarians, 48% of respondents indicated involvement in informal mentoring relationships, while only 9% have taken advantage of formal mentoring. Another avenue for networking is through committee work. Forty-six percent (46%) of respondents claimed participation in regional or state committees for networking, while only 16% said they joined national committees in order to network with other librarians. Respondents also were asked about conferences as an avenue for networking. Respondents primarily used regional or state conferences for networking sixty-eight

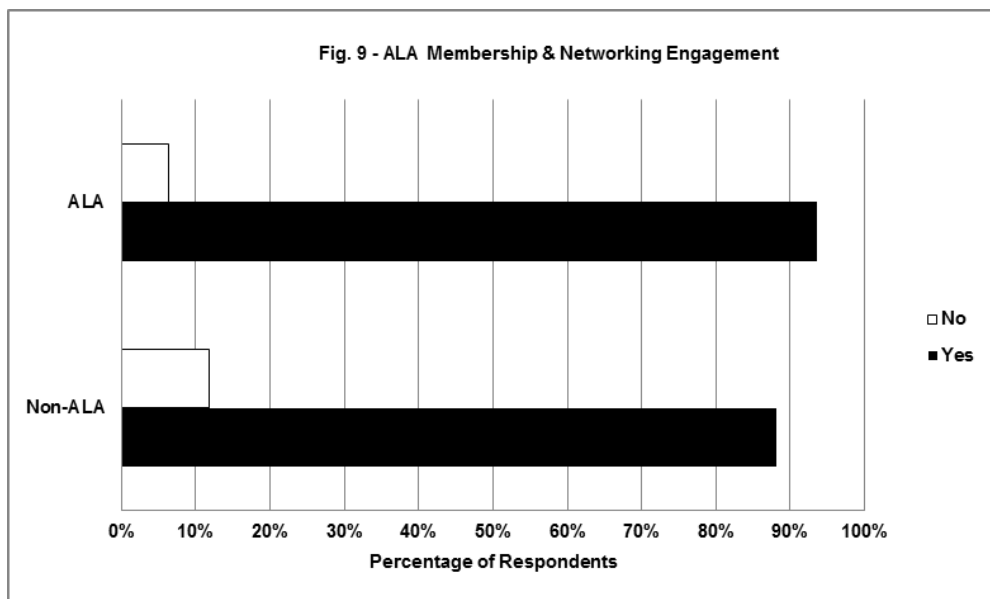
percent (68%) and only 37% of respondents indicated they attended national conferences for networking (Figure 8).



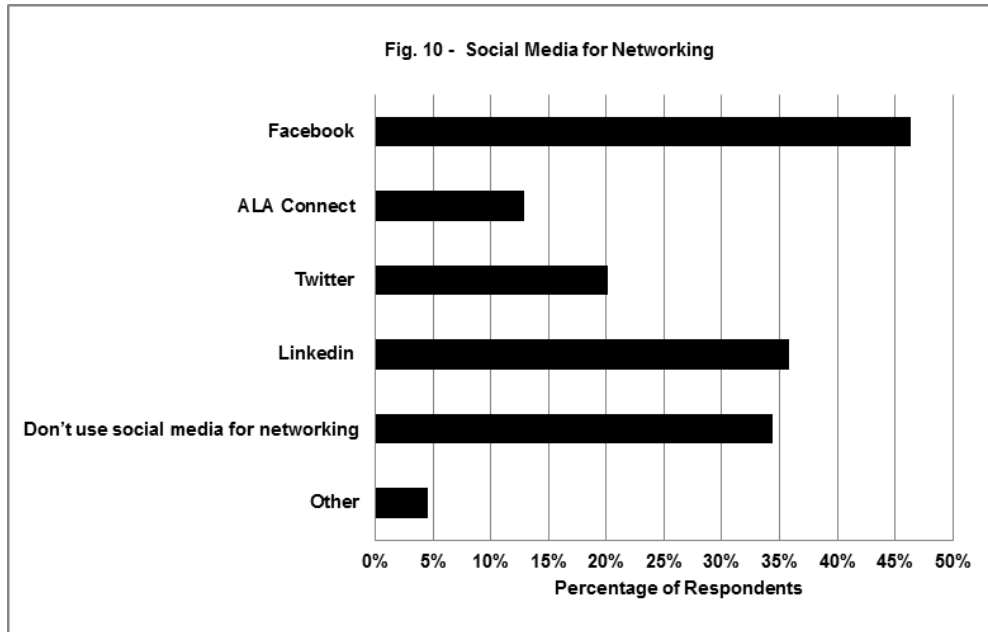
Association membership. A major component of networking and connecting with the profession of librarianship and other librarians is through association membership. Interestingly, only 65% of librarians from rural and small academic libraries claimed membership in ALA. Fifty percent (50%) of respondents indicated they were members of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) and 11% indicated they were not members of any professional library association. The remainder of responses fell at 3% or fewer: Special Libraries Association (3%), Association of Small and Rural Libraries (2%), and the American Association of Law Libraries (1%). The responses in the “other” category were state, regional or specialized association memberships (48%).

The authors tested association membership data to determine whether ALA membership had a significant impact on the ability of academic librarians at small and

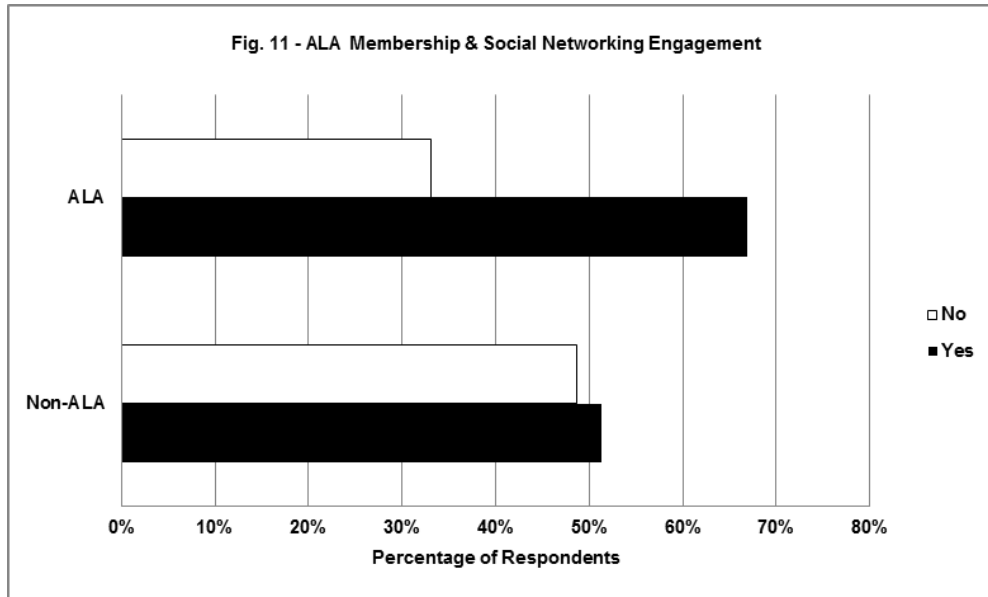
rural libraries to take advantage of networking opportunities. Figure 9 shows the number of ALA members versus non-members who were able to take advantage of networking opportunities. A chi-squared goodness of fit test indicated no significant relationship between ALA membership and networking opportunities ($\chi^2 (1) = 1.99$; $p = .16$). Respondents who are members of specialized, regional, or state library associations -- but who are not ALA members -- are as likely to seek out networking opportunities (conferences, mentoring, committees) as respondents who are ALA members.



Social media. In a related networking question, respondents were asked about the role of social media as a vehicle for interacting with other librarians. Forty-six percent (46%) of respondents utilized Facebook for networking, 36% used LinkedIn, 20% used Twitter, and 13% used ALA's social networking site, ALA Connect. Thirty-four percent (34%) of respondents said that they did not use social media for networking (Figure 10).

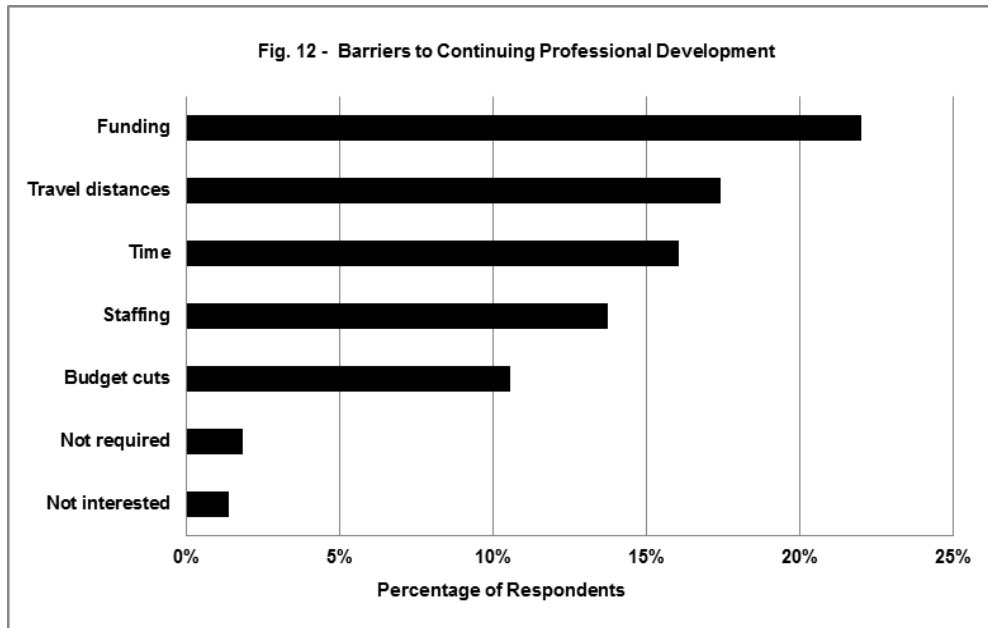


The authors tested association membership data to determine if membership had a significant impact on the likelihood of librarians at small and rural academic libraries to use social networking sites for professional development. Figure 11 shows the number of ALA members versus non-members who identified as utilizing a social networking site. A chi-squared goodness of fit test indicated a significant relationship between ALA membership and social networking engagement ($\chi^2 (1) = 5.1; p = .03$). Respondents who are ALA members were more likely to report using social networking than non-ALA members.



Barriers to Professional Development

Academic librarians working in small or rural environments are keen to locate CPD opportunities. In fact, a lack of interest in seeking CPD was cited as a barrier by just over 1% of respondents. At the center of this study is the identification of barriers that prevent small and rural academic librarians from seeking CPD opportunities. Figure 12 provides an overview of barriers to CPD as identified by respondents. These variables were also tested against ALA membership to determine if ALA members were less likely to face barriers to CPD opportunities. While testing revealed no significant results regarding relationships between CPD barriers and ALA membership, in open-ended comments and interviews study participants underscored the existence of hurdles to accessing professional development.



Funding. Keeping in mind that just over three-quarters of respondents indicated their institutions provide financial support for CPD, there is an inverse relationship to how that financial support is presented. Respondents indicated the primary barrier to seeking CPD was funding (22%). Open-ended comments included frustrations about limits on travel for professional development purposes:

We have \$500 to spend on development for the five of us each year. I regularly look for webinars and such but even many of those are \$200. We can't do anything that costs that much. And in spite of the fact that we are within forty miles of one of the largest cities in the southeast, there are few development opportunities (workshops/conferences/training/etc.) within reasonable driving distance. - Respondent

My colleagues at bigger institutions are able to attend more conferences and training opportunities, most of the time with full funding. I am generally limited to attending only those where I am presenting something unless it's very local and cheap. – Respondent

However, a comment from an interviewee highlights that even when set funds are available, it may not get used. When asked if every librarian takes advantage of the established travel/CPD budget available to each librarian, one respondent stated:

Not every librarian. Some of the librarians have tenure and they are no longer doing as much conference work, and some of them just don't for whatever reason.
- I1

Conversely, another interviewee noted that her library focuses and uses available funding to attend local and state conferences without fail:

Well, we are able to go to the [state library association] conference every year. That is standard procedure for us... from a financial standpoint, but also from a people resources standpoint, it seems much more intelligent to do as much training as we could either regionally through [the state college and university library association and the state library association], or with the webinars. – I4

Travel distance. For small and rural academic librarians, travel distances were identified as the second most significant barrier (17%).

There are not as many opportunities in small communities that are far from metropolitan areas. Travel to attend many sessions can be prohibitive because of time and funding. - Respondent

Many of the national organizations (ALA, SAA, etc.) hold many of their most useful/applicable prof. development sessions and conferences in major metropolitan areas which are not easily accessible from our rural location. Longer travel times, coupled with lack of direct financial support by the institution for prof. development, mean that costs of attending such events are higher than others in more populous locations or with easier access. – Respondent

Time. Having insufficient time to participate in CPD opportunities is a major barrier to CPD. In this study, time was a barrier to CPD for 16% of respondents.

Respondents explain:

There is so much to do that getting each day's required tasks done is an accomplishment; taking time out to do something that is not critical at this moment is hard to do.- Respondent

I tried to do a webinar once... I was sitting at the desk trying to do this webinar. I was able to sit in on it for ten minutes. I had to close out because I was constantly being interrupted. - I2

Staff. Fourteen percent of respondents indicated that staffing limitations prevent them from seeking out CPD opportunities. Respondents and an interviewee agree:

Because of staffing issues, it can be hard to get the time to attend conferences. As a solo librarian, I find it important to actually attend conferences and network with other professionals person to person. - Respondent

Although my institution provides funding and time off to attend conferences and such, it is a strain on my staff. – Respondent

...[B]ecause we are a small teaching library staff, it's not always convenient to go ALA Midwinter, that kind of thing, because it requires shifting a teaching load to other library staff who already have their own teaching load. – I4

Budget cuts. Eleven percent (11%) of respondents cited the reality of budget cuts as a barrier to seeking CPD opportunities. Sometimes these cuts include conflicting fiduciary goals, highlighted succinctly by a respondent:

I hesitate to budget monies for continuing education because the money could be used to add to an electronic resource or to buy a treatise for a professor's research. – Respondent

Conversely, some librarians find limited budgets are a boon for innovation and creativity:

[W]e don't have huge budgets, but there's a lot of things that we do creatively, and I think we do a lot because we do so much professional development informally and flexibly. Then when we go see what other people do, we're disappointed that they're acting like this is a novel idea, and we've been doing it for a while already. - I3

Other Barriers. While the following issues were not choices in the survey instrument, open-ended comments and interviews revealed more barriers to small and rural librarians' access to and engagement with CPD.

Isolation. Several respondents mentioned the negative emotional impact of being physically separated from larger professional communities of practice and how it plays a

role in preventing continuing education:

I find that the isolation is the hardest. Little or no opportunity for face-to-face collegiality. Many great ideas cannot be implemented with very small staff. - Respondent

We have to be very intentional about finding opportunities and must find ways to attend conferences. The isolation can stagnate. – Respondent

Perceptions of libraries and professionalism. Respondents and interviewees recognized a negative perception of the LIS profession could adversely affect access to CPD opportunities:

I think that sometimes the reason why the professional development is somewhat overlooked by others in positions like deans and directors is because they don't see our positions as professional. - I2

I feel that working for a private university, the importance of librarians and their knowledge set is greatly overlooked. Funding is not allocated for continuing ed for librarians, the way that it might be for full time faculty members. - Respondent.

Conversely, other interviewees acknowledged positive links between professional development and perceptions of LIS professionalism on their campuses, as well as the strides their library or university administration has taken to encourage equitable access to CPD for LIS professionals:

[The library dean] really wanted us to be able to make an impact as being real faculty members, because we have faculty status. We're not necessarily seen that way on campus...[s]o he has strived to build relationships with the provost and the president and the university to really show them the need for having tenure track librarians, and to validate that through our own research and development. - I1

I think it's pretty impressive that although we're not considered officially faculty, the university has made it plain to us that librarians should participate in professional development and making the funds available to go, especially to the state library conference, it's great. – I4

CPD for small and rural academic libraries. Locating quality, relevant, and useful CPD opportunities was also mentioned as a barrier to active participation in continuing education. Varlejs' best practices for CPD also highlight the significance of applicable and quality training, including a "[b]road range of opportunities – both formal and informal; formal offerings in a choice of formats, designed to meet identified needs, in modules structured to cover topics from introductory to advanced,"⁴⁸ and "CE activities design that includes learning objectives aligned with identified needs; selects course instructors on basis of both subject knowledge and teaching ability, attends to transfer of training and feedback."⁴⁹

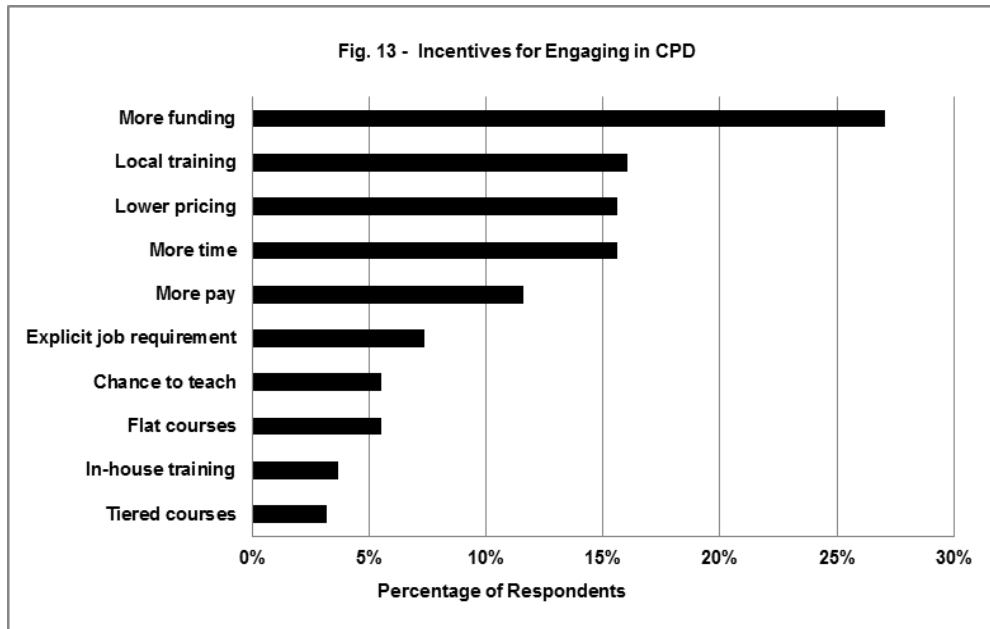
Echoing the challenges of small and rural academic libraries in locating relevant CPD opportunities, one study respondent asserted:

[I]deas presented at larger conferences are geared more towards academic libraries where there are more staff members and people can do some specialization and have time to pursue a wider variety of activities. I've not found a niche in ALA or even my state association that truly addresses the needs of small academic libraries. Small public libraries are supported, but the academics are generally forgotten when it comes to training tailored more specifically to our needs. – Respondent

Incentives to Professional Development

Survey respondents were asked what incentives might prompt them to seek CPD (Figure 13. More funding (27%) was identified as the primary motivator for seeking CPD opportunities. The existence of local CPD opportunities was seen as an incentive for 16% of respondents. More time was identified by 16% of respondents and lower pricing/more free training was also viewed as an incentive by another 16%. More pay or other recognition was a perceived incentive for 12% of respondents. All other responses fell at or under 7%: explicit job requirement or change in duties (7%), opportunity to teach

others (6%), flat training courses (6%), in-house training (4%), and tiered training courses (3%).



Overcoming Barriers

Finally, interviewees were asked about how they circumvented barriers to professional development. Table 1 summarizes their responses.

Tab. 1

Interviewee Description	Barrier	Strategies
Instruction librarian	Travel distance, Funding	Library dean encourages participation on state committees and seeks out local service opportunities for the librarians; each librarian currently has \$1000/year funding, but not all use it (tenured librarians). Plans to give appropriate more money to new librarians should be implemented in the upcoming fiscal year.
Solo librarian	Isolation, Perceptions of professionalism	Heavy use of internal discussion/knowledge board for librarians on different

		<p>campus across the U.S.;</p> <p>Active attendance at internal webinar trainings that in turn assist with proactive outreach to library staff;</p> <p>Chair of system-wide Learning Resource Center committee that offers opportunities to speak with and advocate for library staff; joining Toastmasters.</p>
Instruction librarian	Travel distance, Time, Funding	<p>Read an article and meet once a week to discuss it;</p> <p>Review other school's websites; Review different technologies and share anything another librarian may be interested in.</p> <p>Librarians attend at least one national conference a year.</p>
Public Services librarian	Travel distance, Staffing	<p>The [State Library] supplies frequent free webinars with regard to library-related topics; especially technology, The [state library association] coordinator sends an email every month about free continuing education events;</p> <p>[The state college and university library association] has quarterly meetings where presentations about library-related topics are held (presenters from inside and outside the state are invited).</p>

Discussion

A majority of small and rural academic librarians' CPD goals are supported by their institution, primarily through offering time off and secondarily via providing financial support; however, this same group recognized that support – especially financial

support – may be sporadic. Many respondents rank technology and information literacy/instruction as the most important areas for CPD. Consistency in funding is a key factor impacting the ability of small and rural librarians to stay abreast of the latest best practices, tools, and resources in these and other areas of applied academic librarianship.

Small and rural academic librarians use the Internet, relying heavily on LISTSERVs to discover and access CPD opportunities. This group also prefers to access training when it is available online, with conference attendance a close second. Considering the issues regarding consistent financial support, it is likely that conference attendance would be preferred overall if fiduciary constraints were lessened.

The important link between networking and CPD is evident in this study, especially at local and regional levels: in addition to over half the respondent group indicating their participation in formal and informal mentoring relationships, a little less than half of the group have also joined local or regional committees in order to create professional networks. Additionally, over two-thirds attended state and regional conferences for the purpose of networking. Unfortunately, these numbers drop significantly when it comes to national networking opportunities: less than 20% joined national committees and just over a third indicated that networking was a concern when attending national conferences.

Regardless of the lesser role national conferences play in networking, small and rural academic librarians remain loyal to the main LIS professional association (ALA) and appropriate division (ACRL), at least in membership. Only 35% of respondents are not members of ALA, and exactly half are members of ACRL. However, with the exception that ALA members are more likely to use social media as a CPD tool, testing

shows that there is no significant relationship between professional membership and the likelihood of small and rural academic librarians to seek out CPD opportunities.

This study asked small and rural academic librarians to identify CPD barriers. Funding was a major issue, followed by travel distance, having sufficient time to train, staffing issues, and budget cuts. These variables were tested against ALA membership to determine if such membership gave librarians an “edge” in overcoming barriers to CPD opportunities; however, results show that regardless of professional association memberships, all respondents were just as likely to report all listed barriers. In addition to these major barriers, qualitative data presented themes of isolation, external perceptions of LIS professionalism, and concern about the quality of CPD courses.

Realizing that a major barrier to CPD is funding, it is no surprise that access to more financial support is the primary motivation for seeking and participating in continuing education offerings. Other motivating factors include having access to local training, lower fees for trainings, and having more time to participate in CPD. Additionally, about 10% of respondents indicated pay and recognition as motivators for seeking CPD. This low percentage supports the idea that librarians believe continuing education is a professional obligation:

I mean the biggest thing is doing our jobs better... Trying to keep current with what other people are doing or what technologies help us serve people better. – I3

Well, I think what it's supposed to do is give us more knowledge that so we can impart this information to our students and our faculty better. – I2

Continuing education [is] to help serve our patrons as well as to get tenure. – I1

Beyond service improvement and tenure-track or work performance goals, CPD has other positive outcomes, including an increased desire to engage professionally and improved collegiality in the workplace or in the field. Interviewees reported:

[W]e have developed more close relationships with librarians throughout the state that we might not ordinarily connect with except at annual conference. I think that we feel more connected to the [state library association] – I4

I think it definitely helps with staff bonding and you learn more about the people that you work with and what they do through it. – I3

Conclusion

This investigative study sought to shed light on how librarians in small and rural academic libraries seek and access continuing professional development. Additionally, the study identified the barriers small and rural academic librarians face when attempting to access and participate in continuing education opportunities. Using Varlejs' best practices for continuing professional development as a guide, all tenets came up repeatedly in some form, with the exception of assessment.

Quantitative and qualitative results show that funding is a major concern and has a definite impact on the ability of small and rural academic librarians to engage in CPD opportunities. Additionally, having access to consistent funding or offering free or lower priced trainings would motivate more professionals working in small and rural academic library environments to engage in CPD.

Small and rural librarians are active in professional associations at all levels, and a majority are members of ALA; however, those who are ALA members do not experience less barriers to CPD than those who are not members or who are members of other associations at state or local levels. Conversely, ALA members are more likely to report

using social networking sites, and this group may be able to create wider-reaching networks than those who do not use social networking. More research is needed to understand the benefits of social media utilization and CPD for this group of LIS professionals.

Research surrounding rural and small academic librarianship and continuing education could be expanded to include the impact of tenure on this group's pursuit of CPD; initiatives that foster connections between librarians at small and rural academic libraries; factors that influence institutional support of CPD at small and rural academic libraries; and research investigating the quality and relevance of CPD opportunities for small and rural academic libraries. It should also be noted that despite Rothstein and Varlejs' calls for a centralized professional body to take ownership and create sustainable leadership of continuing education for LIS professionals (and despite the good work of the Continuing Library Education and Networking Exchange/ALA Learning Roundtable), the challenge remains open.

The Population Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs has projected a steady decline in the American rural population through the year 2050, and in the last decade, these populations have already lost over 3.6 million people due to urbanization.⁵⁰ When rural populations shrink, academic librarians continue to assist and educate those who remain in these communities. Often, academic librarians become vital links between their campus constituents and the very best resources, tools, and services available to support courses and curricula. These links become especially tenuous for rural and small academic libraries during times of economic hardship; however, CPD opportunities must continue to be supported, not only

for the edification and professionalism of credentialed librarians working in these often overlooked library environments, but for the continuous improvement and academic success of the teaching faculty, students, and surrounding communities they serve.

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Appendix:

Link Up the Sticks: Access and Barriers to Professional Development for Small and Rural Academic Librarians
Questionnaire

General Characteristics

1. Are you a credentialed librarian (you have earned an ALA-accredited Master's degree or its equivalent)?

- a. Yes
- b. No

2. Do you work in a small (FTE= <500 - 2,999 students; having between 1 to 7 librarians) or rural (area population <50,000) academic library?

- a. Yes
- b. No

3. Please select the category that best represents your age:

- a. Under 25
- b. 25-35
- c. 36-44
- d. 45-54
- e. 55-64
- f. Over 65

4. Please select your gender:

- a. Male
- b. Female

5. Have you earned/are you earning another advanced degree? (choose all that apply)

- a. No
- b. Yes - I have another Master's degree
- c. Yes - I have a Ph.D. or its equivalent
- d. I'm currently working towards another Master's degree
- e. I'm currently working towards a Ph.D. or its equivalent

6. How long have you been a credentialed librarian (ALA-accredited MLS or equivalent)?

- a. 0-4 years
- b. 5-9 years
- c. 10 -14 years
- d. 15 years or more

7. In what type of academic library do you work?

- a. 2 year public junior, technical or community college
- b. 2 year private junior, technical or community college

- c. 4 year public college or university
- d. 4 year private college or university
- e. Other (please specify): _____

8. In which U.S. region is your library located?

- a. North
- b. Northeast
- c. Southeast
- d. Midwest
- e. South
- f. Southwest
- g. West
- h. Pacific Northwest
- i. Not applicable

9. What is your primary work function?

- a. Administration/Management
- b. Circulation
- c. Reference/Instruction
- d. Interlibrary Loan
- e. Technical Services
- f. Acquisitions
- g. Collection Development
- h. Electronic Resources
- i. Outreach/Programs
- j. Government Documents
- k. Archives/Special Collections
- l. Other (please specify): _____

10. How many professional librarians are employed in your library?

- a. solo librarian
- b. 2-3
- c. 4-5
- d. 6-7
- e. 8 or more

Professional Development

11. Does your library or institution actively support professional development of library employees?

- a. Yes
- b. No

12. How does your library/institution promote professional development? (Choose all that apply)

- a. Financial support
- b. Time off to attend conferences/continuing education courses

- c. Allows you to teach or present in-house training
- d. Has an active in-house library training/development department or staff person
- e. Recognizes continuing education credits
- f. Offer merit rewards commensurate with employee professional development involvement
- g. Other (please specify): _____

13. What area(s) do think are the most important for your continuing education? (Choose all that apply)

- a. Technology
- b. Information literacy/instruction
- c. Reference
- d. Collection development
- e. Archival / rare books & manuscripts
- f. Technical services
- g. Scholarly communication
- h. Digital libraries/institutional repositories
- i. Other (please specify): _____

14. Please choose the professional organizations in which you are a member (choose all that apply):

- a. American Library Association
- b. Special Libraries Association
- c. Association of Small and Rural Libraries
- d. Association of College and Research Libraries
- e. American Association of Law Libraries
- f. I am not a member of any professional associations
- g. Other (please specify): _____

15. Where do you learn about professional development opportunities?

- a. LISTSERVs
- b. Blogs
- c. Other librarians or library staff
- d. Social networking sites
- e. Other (please specify): _____

16. How do you network with other librarians? (Choose all that apply)

- a. Mentoring - formal
- b. Mentoring - informal
- c. Committees - regional/state
- d. Committees - national
- e. Conferences - regional/state
- f. Conferences - national
- g. Other (please specify): _____

17. If you use social media to network with other librarians, which services do you use?
- a. Facebook
 - b. ALA Connect
 - c. LinkedIn
 - d. Twitter
 - e. I don't use social media for networking
 - f. Other (please specify): _____
18. How do you access professional development opportunities? (Choose all that apply)
- a. Online
 - b. In-person training/class
 - c. Books
 - d. Conferences
 - e. On-the-job
 - f. Other (please specify): _____
19. If you do access professional development, how often do you seek opportunities?
- a. Daily
 - b. Weekly
 - c. Monthly
 - d. Every quarter
 - e. Every 6 months
 - f. Yearly or less
 - g. I don't seek professional development opportunities
20. If you don't seek professional development opportunities, why not? (Choose all that apply)
- a. Time
 - b. Interest
 - c. Funding
 - d. Staffing
 - e. Budget cuts
 - f. Not an explicit requirement for my job / irrelevant
 - g. Travel distances
 - h. Other (please specify): _____
21. If you don't seek professional development, what would prompt you to seek such opportunities?
- a. More time
 - b. More funding
 - c. Explicit job requirement or change in duties
 - d. In-house training
 - e. Local opportunities

- f. Tiered training courses (Level 1, then level 2, etc.)
- g. Flat training courses (learn about a resource/tool/issue in one sitting)
- h. Lower pricing or more free training
- i. Opportunity to teach others
- j. More pay or other recognition/ remuneration for education
- k. Other (please specify): _____

Conclusion:

- 22. If you like, discuss your concerns about professional development for academic librarians working in small or rural libraries.
- 23. Please leave general comments about this study here.
- 24. If your library has a unique take on/approach to professional development, please leave your email so we may contact you for an interview.