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Mourning Serial

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Mourning Serial

Opinion Survey Gages Importance of Current Issues

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by Guest Contributor **Laura Ralstin**, Communications Coordinator, EBSCO Subscription Services

In the summer of 1993 EBSCO conducted an opinion survey among libraries in the United States. The main purpose of the survey was to develop marketing and communication strategies, but we also asked a few questions just to "take the pulse" of the library community in terms of important issues. We received some interesting answers.

Approximately 2,200 surveys were mailed randomly to four-year college, university libraries, academic departmental libraries, junior college libraries, biomedical and hospital libraries, main public libraries, law libraries, and corporate and special libraries. Mailing lists from the *American Library Directory*, the American Association of Law Libraries and Gale Research were used. We received 722 usable responses to the survey, including responses from a pretest so our response rate was about 33 percent.

Responses by library type were as follows:

Library Type	# of Responses
4-yr. college/univ.	202
Academic departmental libr.	17
Junior/community college	73
Health science/biomedical	42
Hospital	73
Public	75
Corporate	62
Law Library (not law firm)	40
Special	110
Other	27
No Answer	1
Totals	722

Issues of concern

We asked respondents to rate current library-related issues as very important, somewhat important, or not important; they could also respond "don't know." Among these issues were:

- the cost of scholarly communication/journals
- staffing shortages
- budget cuts
- providing services to all members of the community (for example, senior citizens, homeless individuals, latchkey children, etc.)
- access vs. ownership/document delivery
- integrating new technology into library management
- providing new technology to patrons
- helping patrons master new technology
- copyright compliance
- library standards development
- electronic data interchange (EDI)
- the decreasing number of library schools

Budget Cuts and Other Shortages

It is no surprise that budget cuts were of most concern to almost all respondents. An average of 88 percent of the survey respondents from all library types rated the issues of budget cuts as "very important." An average of 68 percent of all respondents cited staffing shortages as a major concern, with about 80 percent of junior college and corporate librarians rating staff shortages as a very important issue. Also rated as very important by an average of 76 percent of four-year college/university, academic departmental, junior college, biomedical, hospital and special library respondents was the "cost of scholarly communication."

Copyright

Copyright compliance was most important to junior college, biomedical, corporate and special librarians, with an average of 56 percent of the respondents in these library types rating compliance as very important. About 50 percent of the law library respondents said this issue was very important. Given the amount of coverage this topic has been given lately in library trade journals and conference agendas, these figures seem to indicate less concern about the issue than one might expect.

Technological Concerns

New technology in general was troubling to most respondents. An average of 58 percent of all respondents were concerned with using new technology to manage the library, providing new technology to patrons and then helping patrons master that technology.

For all the hype about EDI, the subject ranked relatively low on most respondents' importance scale. Less than 40 percent (average of 36 percent) of all librarians who completed the survey ranked EDI as very important. The issue of

library standards development received even fewer very important ratings — an average of 34 percent of all respondents ranked it as such.

Library School Decline Not Distressing

Ranking rather lowly among the list of very important issues was the decline in the number of library schools. Only an average of 33 percent of survey respondents chose this as a top concern.

Fill-in-the-blank

We also provided a blank for respondents to write-in other issues of concern. Some of the written-in answers included:

- service charges
- claiming
- decreasing number of libraries
- information literacy issues
- continuing education for library employees
- postage and handling charges
- librarians' salaries
- environmental issues
- the role of librarians in the future
- security
- ILL costs
- funding advanced technology and traditional print sources
- access to and education about Internet
- training staff to keep up with technology
- constant vendor price increases

It was surprising to us at EBSCO to see "constant vendor price increases" turn up on one survey. It is possible there is still some confusion about publisher price increases and agency service charge increases. "Price increases" most often are the result of publishers raising the prices of their journals. Increases can also be due to currency exchange fluctuation. As a general trend, *agency service charges have decreased* over the last 10-15 years as a result of improved technology and greater operating efficiencies. In the last few years discounts from major publishers to agencies have declined, causing some slight increases in service charges, but the overall trend has definitely been a decrease. We'll address this more fully in a future column.

Conducting this survey was certainly interesting, and it was gratifying to get such a good response from the library community. Many of the issues mentioned here will surely be topics for discussion for years to come while some will surely dissipate. EBSCO will use the information collected to develop informative regional and national seminars for librarians.

New Jersey Public Library Survey Shows Increased Use

EBSCO also sponsored a survey, which was commissioned by the New Jersey Library Association and conducted by the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University, that found an increase in public library use among adults. A positive link was not found. The survey found that 58 percent of the adult (18 and older) New Jersey population said they had visited a public library within the last 12 months. This shows that public library use has increased since 1989, when Eagleton found 52 percent of the population had used a public library within the last 12 months, and since 1975, when a Gallup survey found 46 percent had done the same.

Here are just a few other interesting findings from the most recent Eagleton study:

- The top reason cited for going to the library was to "borrow books." The second and third most popular reasons were "getting information" and "using the reference section."
- The respondents in the 18-29 age group were most likely to use a public library (73 percent of the respondents in this age group said they had been to the library in the last 12 months), followed by those in the 30-49 age group (67 percent of the respondents in this age group said they had been to the library in the last 12 months).
- People who live in rural areas were most likely to visit the library, followed by those who live in new suburbs, those who live in the city and old suburbs, and lastly, those who live in the center city.

NJLA is now analyzing the data gleaned from this survey and its implications on future building and policy decisions. The Eagleton Institute will publish a full report in the near future. ☞

We welcome any suggestions from ATG readers regarding items to include on surveys in the future or topic suggestions for future "Mourning Serial" columns. — PG