

Deborah J. Hirsch. Readers' Advisory in North Carolina Public Libraries: Does Database Access Matter? A Master's Paper for the M.S. in L.S. degree. July, 2016. 55 pages. Advisor: Claudia Gollop

One tool that public library staff use for readers' advisory is NoveList, which until 2014 was accessible to North Carolina's public librarians and patrons through a public-private partnership known as North Carolina Libraries and Virtual Education (NC LIVE). In 2014, NoveList along with other databases were dropped from NC LIVE due to financial constraints. Public library systems in North Carolina were surveyed to investigate the impact of losing access to NoveList via NC LIVE. 95% of respondents indicated that RA is either extremely or very important to the mission of their library system. The only readers' advisory tool ranked higher than NoveList was personal knowledge of the library's collection. Seven interviews with public librarians support the findings and demonstrate the continued resourcefulness of NC's public library professionals.

Headings:

Readers' Advisory Services

Databases

Public Libraries – Services to Users

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READERS' ADVISORY IN NORTH CAROLINA PUBLIC LIBRARIES: DOES DATABASE  
ACCESS MATTER?

by  
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## Introduction

Readers' Advisory (RA) has been a core feature of library services since public libraries were founded in the United States in the 1800's (Crowley 2005). Perhaps one of the earliest discussions of RA can be found in Samuel S. Green's 1876 paper "Personal Relations Between Librarians and Readers," where he describes the kinds of "personal assistance" that readers might expect of their librarians. Cordiality, courtesy, and hospitality were high among his list of requirements for practitioners of RA. More recently, Joyce Saricks and Nancy Brown (1997) specify a "patron-oriented library service for adult fiction readers." For the purposes of this paper, RA will be construed as a patron-oriented library service that assists readers in choosing discretionary reading materials. This assistance has taken a variety of forms as with the rise of the internet and e-resources.

The nature and practice of RA has changed over the years as access to books has expanded to include e-books and downloadable audiobooks available on-demand. Libraries continue to create materials (brochures, "shelf talkers," staff picks lists, etc.) and displays to address readers' desire to find new informational and recreational titles. In addition, there has been a proliferation of online services designed to help the public track their reading, manage their personal libraries, and discover new titles and authors. (Baker et al. 2010; Dilevko 2007) Nevertheless, patrons continue to turn to library staff for advice in deciding what to read next. (Yu 2000, Smith 2015, May 2000) One of the resources that staff have used in the past is NoveList, which until 2014 was accessible to North Carolina's public librarians and patrons through a public-private partnership known as North Carolina Libraries and Virtual Education (NC LIVE). NC LIVE is an online service that provides people in North Carolina access to digital content. Currently, NC LIVE provides "free access to ebooks, audiobooks, videos, online magazines, newspapers, journals, and more" (What is NC LIVE n.d.).

## Historical Background

The experience of resource sharing among a few NC academic libraries and nearby examples of statewide resource sharing both influenced the project of building an online library resource in NC (TRLN 2014). Local resource sharing was exemplified by the Triangle Research Library Network, which arose from the difficult economic circumstances of the 1930's (TRLN 2012). Resource sharing among geographically proximate universities such as the University of North Carolina and Duke University diminished the impact of budget reductions while maintaining quality library services (TRLN 2012).<sup>1</sup> The goals of the TRLN network included “achieving excellence and serving users by providing resources for research that the libraries could not afford otherwise. The objective was to create coordinated, interdependent, and interlocked collections that minimized the unnecessary duplication of materials, rather than solely to save money” (TRLN 2014). As new formats became available, TRLN extended their agreements to include them. These cooperative experiences created advantages for libraries that shared their purchasing power, and once online databases transformed the research landscape, the power to negotiate licensing as a group became another advantage.

NC LIVE was established in 1996 when a steering committee made up of representatives of public, academic, and community college libraries convened in hopes of establishing a statewide online library (Case n.d.). The steering committee examined two instances of statewide licensing of internet-based resources. One, the Georgia Library Learning Online (GALILEO) system, was launched in 1995 and quickly added school, academic, and public libraries to its network. GALILEO provided member libraries with over 100 database resources and a portal to the state's union catalog. The steering committee in NC also studied the Virtual Library of Virginia (VIVA), which was established in 1994. Like GALILEO, VIVA provided each member library with access to a standard set of databases. Individual member libraries saved money by

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<sup>1</sup> NC State University joined TRLN in the 1970's and North Carolina Central University joined TRLN in the 1990's.

not having to individually purchase resources. Both GALILEO and VIVA demonstrated that they added value to the state's library resources in that information became more widely accessible, regardless of a member library's size, location, or budget (Case n.d.). The development of NC LIVE can be seen as an outgrowth of this kind of resource sharing and the cooperative endeavors that had already taken root in North Carolina and regionally.

Deciding to move forward with the development of an online library resource, the NC steering committee created a working group (Case n.d.). Advisory committees made up of "communities of interest" (public and private universities, community colleges, and public libraries) developed plans for the implementation of the working group's recommendation to form a North Carolina Electronic Project Library. The libraries that made up the various committees had been managing a sharp 150% increase in the cost of serials between 1994 and 1999, while the average library material budget rose only 7% (Case n.d.). With the financial constraints of collection development in mind, the leadership intended to provide "equal access to a range of electronic information resources and to the resources housed in libraries statewide" (NC LIVE "Working together" n.d.). Regardless of location, public library patrons would have "universal access to [a] core group of reference and research materials" (NC LIVE "Working together" n.d.). The University of North Carolina, State Library of North Carolina, and the North Carolina Community College System requested state funds to support the overall budget, and member libraries also provided funds to establish a pool to pay for the resource licenses that would be purchased for the new system, which was re-named NC LIVE.

NC LIVE licenses materials and makes them available to NC public libraries, the UNC system, private colleges and universities throughout the state, and community colleges. NC LIVE's goals and the needs of these four constituencies determine which resources are selected for inclusion in NC LIVE. NC LIVE addresses four main needs: educational goals, cultural enrichment, serving as a "positive force" in North Carolina's economic development, and

positively impacting the lives of North Carolinians (Hewitt 2005). Contracts with database vendors are evaluated on the basis of use data, overlap studies, usability studies, and cost (Hewitt 2005). Thus, NC LIVE provides a heterogeneous constituency and a variety of libraries with access to a standard set of electronic resources encompassing a range of interests and needs. These resources include reference works, academic journals, magazines, government, economic, public policy, and cultural information, business and work force-related materials, RA materials, medical and health information, maps and other geographic resources, and e-books (<http://www.nclive.org/>). Each library may individually license additional electronic content to supplement that which NC LIVE provides.

The advantages that NC LIVE has provided to libraries, library patrons, and vendors themselves are many. The cost of licensing databases is negotiated centrally rather than by individual libraries, freeing up library administrators for other duties. For the vendors, this means that they have a single point of contact and negotiation (Hewitt 2005). This economy of scale translates into reduced costs for the libraries and increased access to information. For the vendors, it means increased distribution of their product because “The principal factor, of course, is that the large majority of libraries in NC LIVE would never be able to license this content using their own financial resources” (Hewitt 2005). The vendor must calculate whether the larger aggregate fee resulting from a license to NC LIVE outweighs a lower average fee per library.

### NC LIVE's Funding and Budgetary Concerns

NC LIVE is funded via an appropriation from the NC General Assembly and via contributions from the members of the North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities (NCICU). Vendors calculate the cost of subscriptions, and this cost determines the dues the NCICU members pay to help support NC LIVE. Since 2004, the General Assembly has cut funding to NC LIVE by \$445,000 (Rogers 2014). In 2014, the rate of inflation and lack of additional support from the state made it impossible for NC LIVE to continue to offer the same



resources for the 2015-2017 biennium. As a result, NC LIVE changed the content of its offerings. Many EBSCO databases were dropped (including NoveList) and replaced with 17 other databases, including ProQuest Central, which encompasses 30 databases (Rogers 2014).

Readers' advisory is one facet of connecting patrons with information (McKiernan 2002). The public library remains relevant for readers despite technology changes and the proliferation of forms of entertainment; the most recent Pew Research Center study found that the public remains convinced that their interests are served by libraries, with over 78% of respondents saying that they believe that "libraries are effective at promoting literacy and love of reading" (Horrigan 2015). As Sarah Ann Long (2002) says in "Library Service for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," "[T]he public library can't be beat on books to lend, programs for adults and children, literacy services, classes and being a safe haven, a community gathering place." This is exactly where NC LIVE plays a role, at the nexus of the 21<sup>st</sup> century's ability to use technology to assist with longstanding library roles. NC LIVE has given public libraries access to academic and research databases and also to a database that assists with one of the library's main functions, RA. Until 2014, the RA database supplied by NC LIVE was EBSCO's NoveList.

## Literature Review

Readers' advisory provision in public libraries has not attracted much empirical research. Most of the published literature is descriptive in nature, outlining tool options for RA practitioners or case studies describing programs instituted by particular libraries. The University of North Carolina School of Information and Library Science, however, has produced a modest wealth of studies examining different aspects of readers' advisory. Examining the work of two SILS graduates will lead us into a discussion of the different trends in RA research.

In her master's paper, Alexandra E. Duda (2005) performs a content analysis of 400 fiction book reviews taken from periodicals used for collection development and RA. She finds that two of the review sources had a high percentage of non-neutral (i.e., qualitative) comparisons; Duda recommends that reviews incorporate a high percentage of such comparisons so that readers and the librarians who help them can make judgments about suitability more effectively. Furthermore, Duda suggests that users of databases which include book reviews need to be aware of whether the language used is neutral or non-neutral. The results of this study have implications for how book reviews are written for professional periodicals and for periodicals aimed at the general audience. Database vendors that include reviews in their products should also take these kinds of review characteristics into account when gathering content.

Danielle W. Allison's master's paper (2010) also looks at relevance criteria, this time with regards to the language used to make suggestions about what to read next. Allison examines the criteria that librarians use when determining the relevance of reading recommendations. The study also looks at the effectiveness of reading recommendations made by readers' advisory databases marketed to libraries (i.e., excluding retail sites such as Amazon and social media sites

such as Goodreads). In addition, Allison found that Web 2.0 methods such as online chat RA, social tagging in catalogs, and digital RA (in which readers fill out a form to specify their interests) can enhance readers' advisory.

Another instance of research-oriented RA literature is Duncan Smith's 1996 chapter, "Librarians' abilities to recognize reading tastes" in *Guiding the Reader to the Next Book*, edited by Kenneth Shearer. Smith adapts the methodology used in studies of reference services to examine the qualities that comprise successful RA interactions. Smith, a SILS graduate and founder of NoveList, compares the RA service that three different librarians provide to a single patron query. Though Smith calls for more researchers to expand the model of the RA transaction, he effectively illustrates the different approaches used by each of the librarians. Smith's chapter, written just as online databases were becoming available, underscores the complexities of RA service and highlights the gap in knowledge with respect to best RA practices.

Mary Chelton's 2003 article, "Readers' Advisory 101," takes up Smith's call to describe more fully the processes of effective RA delivery. Chelton describes a readers' advisory class in an unnamed school of library science in which master's students are asked to use the "secret shopper" method<sup>2</sup> to replicate the experience that patrons have when seeking readers' advisory in a public library. The students find that the librarian may fail to connect with the patron, is unable to step outside his or her own personal experience to provide meaningful guidance, or lacks an understanding of appeal factors (here Chelton cites Joyce Saricks' taxonomy of appeal terms). Chiding the lackluster library staff for not availing themselves of resources, Chelton lists resources commonly available to public librarians such as Genreflecting, NoveList, and *What Do I Read Next?* Genreflecting is a series of RA texts that classifies and describes genres (and

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<sup>2</sup> In the secret shopper method, students approach librarians without identifying themselves as such. Instead, they adopt the persona of a patron who seeks information, RA advice, or other direction. This approach allows the students to naturalistically observe how the library staff manage such interactions.

subgenres) to help identify read-alikes (Orr 2013). As we've already seen, NoveList is a RA database available through EBSCO. *What do I read next?* is a website created in 2005 that uses an algorithm to derive book suggestions. (What Do I Read Next? n.d.) These tools are necessary because RA practice demands the same rigorous use of resources and deployment of best practices that is standard for reference service. Retail sites are inadequately authoritative sources for RA because they fail to account for the appeal factors of books. While Chelton's recommendations for improvement include such remedial steps as simply greeting the patron, she also envisions "readers' corners" with bookmarked online tools as well as print RA tools to assure the 95% of the public that look to libraries for literacy support that providing information includes providing information regarding reading material (ALA State of America's Libraries n.d.).

Overviews of new tools are published regularly, perhaps in response to the advent of new technologies and social media. In keeping with several of the articles described above, Barbara Hoffert (2003) advocates retaking ownership of RA from online retailers like Amazon, citing librarians' superior training in information retrieval and information literacy as well as their vested interest in the well-being of their communities. Even basic resources like book lists can be useful, especially when they are annotated. Annotating book lists for a diverse population is, however, extremely time-consuming, which is why she suggests using and promoting RA databases (she names NoveList) as librarian-curated tools that gather the latest publisher news and reliable information in one place. Other tools that Hoffert recommends for actively promoting reading include emails to patrons, newsletters, and even live chat.

In "Reading the future of the public library," Joyce Saricks points out that unlike a reference query, an RA query doesn't have a correct answer. To answer an RA query, librarians draw upon tools such as book clubs, book displays, annotated book lists, and the good communication skills required in every patron interaction. To help librarians learn about these

tools and develop the skills to use them, the Reference and User Services Association has an RA committee that sponsors programs and publishes an annotated guide to RA resources (Saricks 2009). Likewise, the Public Library Association offers pre-conferences and workshops devoted to RA (Saricks 2009). Neal Wyatt's 2010 column in *Reference & User Services Quarterly*, an excellent complement to this Saricks article, highlights (and in some cases annotates) 13 RA books, 15 RA articles, 15 RA blogs, and 15 RA websites, all freely available. The column also describes key features of five subscription databases, including NoveList. The availability of online RA tools varies from library to library as some are subscription-based. Changes in budgets and changes in priorities may necessitate substituting or even eliminating tools, which is why it is important to examine how a sudden change in availability affects practice.

Databases have received particular attention from authors wishing to highlight their particular utility in RA. An early article (2002) by Gerry McKiernan saw the rise of specialized RA databases as an organic development within the field in that RA is intended to link library users to books as well as other information materials. In other words, readers' advisory is one type of information provision, and librarians have historically implemented new technologies as they became available. A diversity of e-resources can be beneficial to staff (who are able to quickly perform more extensive searches) as well as to patrons (who get a wide range of results quickly).

Kaite M. Stover's article (2005), "Working without a net: Readers' advisory in the small public library" addresses head-on the issue of why readers' advisory is important and how different issues can impact its provision. Even the small library can promote RA services to patrons and enact their mission to serve their public. RA is one way that librarians support the community, support literacy, and support their institutions simultaneously. Despite the centrality of RA to libraries and their communities, logistical issues can preclude the effective delivery of RA due to the need for staff training, the availability of Internet and other technology, and other

issues. Some of the most desirable RA tools are inaccessible, however, due to cost. RA, though one of the most popular and fastest growing services in libraries, requires time and an investment in training in resources. Ultimately, this investment may be beyond the reach of some small libraries. As explained in the introduction, this disparity is exactly the issue that the founders of NC LIVE tried to address.

In fact, databases can be a rich source of information for practitioners of readers' advisory. In a rare quantitative study, Ann C. Cox and Kelsey L. Horne (2012) compared three different types of search results from four databases to determine overlap among those results. Like Stover, Cox and Horne position RA at the center of the public library's mission. Among the many reasons that people use libraries is to enrich their leisure reading activities, and if readers' advisory is central to the library's function, librarians' skills at delivering it are critically important. In their comparison of RA databases, the authors expected to find more crossover in results. Instead, they found differences in the results that searches retrieved; each database had some strengths and weaknesses. Thus, access to a variety of tools is essential in retrieving a broad range of results.

In the current environment of continuous technological innovation, the provision of electronic resources both to librarians and to patrons is becoming a central feature of collection management decisions. Shona L. Koehn and Suliman Hawamdeh (2010) describe a case study of how one public library justified the rising cost of acquiring and licensing digital resources. In the current digital information environment, the licensing of electronic resources is replacing the traditional acquisition of printed material. Databases have become the library's avenue for maintaining access to a variety of serials. The provision of these needed and desired resources is costly, and libraries must calculate whether or not to keep a given database. Budgetary factors may dominate when deciding which resources to maintain, and as the cost of acquiring e-resources increases, fewer resources can be purchased. This is the issue that the Library Services

and Technology Act (LSTA) of 1996 sought to address: how to enable libraries to equitably access digital resources.

Public library budgets fluctuate as states adjust their budgets from year to year and as the overall economy expands and contracts. Thanks to the Library Services and Technology Act of 1996, electronic library connections to information services were improved and library services to communities throughout each state were extended. To date, LSTA remains libraries' only source of federal funding; the funds are administered by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (ALA 2013). This money, together with mandated matching money from states, is used to support statewide initiatives. (State Library of NC 2014) Among other initiatives, the LSTA grant program administered by the State Library of North Carolina funds projects that support literacy and expand access to library resources and expertise (State Library of NC 2015). Howard Falk (2005) describes the availability of online databases for public library patrons state by state. While the number of online databases available varies from one local library to another (depending on databases the library may choose to suppress), funding by state and federal governments has allowed library patrons in many states to access online databases remotely.

Even so, state-supported access to databases is not guaranteed. According to Mary Ann Bell's "State-Funded Informational Databases: You May Lose Them Even if You Use Them!" (2005) state-funded informational database funding is endangered. Bell focuses on the issue of the availability of databases in school libraries, which, like public libraries, are subject to state legislatures' budgetary decisions. To prove her hypothesis that databases are becoming less available, she tabulates the status of database availability in public school libraries in all 50 states. She provides suggestions for advocating on behalf of database access in public libraries and prescriptions for dealing with their absence if funding should be revoked. Bell concludes that the loss of these statewide databases will have a deleterious effect on the equal provision of resources in poor and affluent communities.

A change in database availability also impacts librarians' ability to perform readers' advisory. One article addressing the difficulties inherent in retraining staff and keeping up to date with best practices generally is "Ensuring that training pays off: transfer of training in libraries" by Robert Burgin and Duncan Smith. Burgin is a well-regarded figure in the world of readers' advisory, particularly in regards to non-fiction. Their article (1993) points to the difficulties in transferring knowledge via on-the-job training. Research that estimates that training results in observable changes in practices in only 10% of cases. Nevertheless, higher rates of transfer are possible with well-designed continuing education, follow-up activities, and training linked to actual job duties. The development of professional competence requires commitment from managers, trainers, and trainees throughout the training process in order to produce observable effects.

Nor are librarians necessarily launched from MLS programs ready to meet the RA needs of their patrons. Connie Van Fleet (2008) writes about the challenges and opportunities in teaching RA. She found that librarians come out of library school untrained because many library schools treat RA as a subcategory of reference. A full understanding of RA, though, requires that schools acknowledge that RA is more than an addendum to reference that can be taught in a single class session. The unique qualities, processes, and goals of RA service demand specialized instruction.

On-the-job training for librarians is also the subject of Janine Lockhart and Sulaiman Majal's 2012 exploration of how additional training can benefit library users. Libraries work to remain relevant in the current environment of digital innovation, and technological development necessitates the continuous upgrading of skills. Librarians then share these new skills with their patrons. As educators in the community, librarians work to transfer technology competencies as the bar for information literacy is continuously raised.



Ultimately, it is difficult to measure the economic or educational impact of readers' advisory on communities. In all, the very existence of such a broad literature describing the many facets of readers' advisory can be seen as continued affirmation that RA is a central part of libraries' public services. Recognizing that patrons turn to libraries for help in choosing their recreational literature, libraries use a variety of tools to satisfy patron needs. Numerous articles outlining creative approaches to RA provide encouragement for those libraries seeking to strengthen or enhance their RA services. Indeed, the spectrum of approaches speaks to the wealth of tools and processes available.

## Methods

This study investigated how the loss of access to an RA database has impacted NC public libraries. The following research questions were addressed in this study:

- How does the loss of an RA database impact public libraries?
- Do librarians adjust their practice of readers' advisory when a readers' advisory database is no longer accessible?
- Is there a correlation between the relative wealth of a library system and the likelihood that a library system will purchase a NoveList subscription to replace the access lost via NC Live?

Public library directors in NC were sent a link to take a short, self-administered online survey. The survey did not include information regarding basic services offered, as this information is available through the NC State Library website. Instead, the survey focused on the question of whether RA practices changed as a result of loss of access to NoveList via NC LIVE. The online survey is an ideal method because it provides both quantitative and qualitative data for analysis. Quantitative data were collected via binary questions with respect to whether or not the library chose to purchase a license to the NoveList database. Qualitative data were collected in order to elucidate public librarians' beliefs about the importance of RA and with respect to how library directors see RA fitting into their overall mission in public service. In addition, questions about the use of various RA tools were included in order to determine how much libraries rely on proprietary databases like NoveList (as opposed to blogs, social media, and retail websites, for example). These questions will use a Likert scale with five categories. A final question asked for contact information if the participant would be willing to answer follow-up questions in a short

telephone interview. The complete survey can be found in the Results chapter beginning on page 19.

Statistical analysis of the survey results describes the scope of decisions that public libraries have made in the face of this change in resources. Demographic information culled from the most recent Census enabled the use of GIS software to determine if there is a correlation between size of a community and which online RA resources are used in North Carolina public libraries.

### Survey Administration

Public library systems in North Carolina were identified using the publicly available list at NC State Library website, allowing for single-stage, purposive sampling via an online survey. Information on library websites and, when necessary, telephone queries to local reference librarians in each system enabled the researcher to determine the email address for the director of each library system. The library system directors were invited to fill out the survey based on an assumption that the senior administrative staff are responsible for choices regarding database licensing. Other identifying demographic data were not collected. A total of 80 NC public libraries were invited to participate, with 45 completed surveys received.

Potential respondents were sent an email inviting them to take the survey and indicating that by taking the survey, they indicate agreement to participate. The email also informed participants that their participation is completely voluntary and that they may stop answering questions at any time. The invitation directed the participants to the web-based survey platform Qualtrics and requested that the survey be completed over a three week period (Qualtrics Labs, Provo, UT). Follow-up emails reminding participants of the survey were sent two weeks and one week before the deadline (Babbie 260). This study was approved by the Academic Affairs Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill under reference number 15-3340.

## Benefits and Limitations

Given the constraints of the short period allotted to master's paper research and composition, an online survey allows the researcher to reach a large number of libraries in a short time. Furthermore, the online self-administered survey is the most logical choice for data collection due to the geographical dispersion of public libraries throughout the state. Reliability was maximized by administering the survey through a standardized stimulus with carefully worded questions. Electronic surveys are inexpensive and allow for the rapid collection of data. Furthermore, electronically stored records that are password protected offer a feeling of security to respondents. Surveys provide empirical data that can be easily tabulated as well as qualitative data that can be examined to further enhance findings. The qualitative data may increase the study's validity if the responses align well with quantitative data.

A weakness in the current study is that the library director may not be as involved in RA as staff librarians. Thus, the results regarding which RA tools are most useful indicate only the opinion of one staff member whose duties are not primarily related to RA. Nevertheless, library directors may choose to re-direct the survey to an appropriate staff member.

Another drawback is that online surveys may be subject to technological failures. If the participant has technical difficulties or if the hosting website undergoes maintenance during the survey period, the rate of return may be adversely affected. It is also possible that participants may not fully understand instructions and therefore choose not to continue filling out the survey.

Findings described some aspects of how the loss of access to NoveList through NC LIVE impacted libraries. As shown in the Discussion, some libraries have decided to budget their own money to adding NoveList to their online resources. A map using GIS tools showing average county resident income (according to Census data) together with an overlay of those libraries that chose to purchase access to NoveList documents the degree of relationship between the wealth of county residents and the ability of libraries to pay for online resources. Overall, the data

demonstrated how changes in tools can impact the resources (time and financial) that libraries have to devote to maintaining quality service for their patrons. With evidence of how sudden changes in database availability impacts libraries, the State Library will be empowered in the future to make the best possible decision for the benefit of North Carolinians.

## Results

Below are tabulations of results from the online survey. The results for this paper were generated using Qualtrics software, Version 06141912.427s of Qualtrics (Qualtrics Labs, Provo, UT). Discussion follows beginning on page 27.

1. Please rate the importance of the following types of Readers' Advisory tools.

Figure 1

Libraries with access to NovelList						
#	Choices	Extremely important	Very important	Neither important nor unimportant	Somewhat unimportant	Not at all important
1	Blogs such as BookRiot	0	5	9	0	0
2	Goodreads	0	8	6	0	0
3	Librarian-oriented publications such as Library Journal	4	9	1	0	0
4	Library Thing	0	2	8	2	1
5	NovelList	8	6	0	0	0
6	Online databases available through NC LIVE	4	6	4	0	0
7	Personal knowledge of your library's collection	11	3	0	0	0
8	Paid online databases licensed by your library system	7	5	2	0	0
9	Retail bookseller websites such as Amazon	3	7	4	0	0
10	Shelfari	0	0	8	2	4
11	Social media such as Facebook,	0	4	9	0	1

		Libraries without access to NovelList					
#	Choices	Extremely important	Very important	Neither important nor unimportant	Somewhat unimportant	Not at all important	
	Instagram, and Twitter						
1	Blogs such as BookRiot	2	4	10	5	5	
2	Goodreads	5	14	5	3	0	
3	Librarian-oriented publications such as Library Journal	11	15	0	1	0	
4	Library Thing	2	5	12	3	4	
5	NovelList	8	10	5	4	0	
6	Online databases available through NC LIVE	4	11	8	4	0	
7	Personal knowledge of your library's collection	16	11	0	0	0	
8	Paid online databases licensed by your library system	1	8	8	3	6	
9	Retail bookseller websites such as Amazon	10	11	5	1	0	
10	Shelfari	1	3	12	4	7	
11	Social media such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter	2	8	11	3	3	

2. Rate the importance of the social media that library staff use for Readers' Advisory.

Figure 2

Libraries with access to NovelList							
#	Choices	Extremely important	Very important	Neither important	Somewhat unimportant	Not at all important	We do not

				nor unimportant			use this social media
1	Facebook	1	6	6	0	0	2
2	Instagram	0	3	9	0	1	2
3	Pinterest	1	4	6	0	1	3
4	Tumblr	1	2	7	0	1	4
5	Twitter	4	3	4	0	2	2
Libraries without access to NovelList							
#	Choices	Extremely important	Very important	Neither important nor unimportant	Somewhat unimportant	Not at all important	We do not use this social media
1	Facebook	4	8	6	4	1	4
2	Instagram	1	1	11	4	2	8
3	Pinterest	2	7	8	3	1	6
4	Tumblr	0	2	11	2	1	11
5	Twitter	1	5	12	3	1	5

2. Rate the importance of book reviews from the following sources.

Figure 3

Libraries with access to NovelList							
#	Choices	Extremely important	Very important	Neither important nor unimportant	Somewhat unimportant	Not at all important	We do not use this source
1	Amazon	3	4	4	2	1	1
2	Book Page	2	5	4	2	0	2
3	Book Riot	0	2	7	1	0	5
4	Bookslut	0	1	6	1	0	7
5	Kirkus	3	6	3	0	0	3
6	New York Times	6	8	1	0	0	0
7	NovelList	4	7	4	0	0	0
8	NPR	2	9	4	0	0	0
9	Other	2	1	0	0	0	0
Libraries without access to NovelList							
#	Choices	Extremely important	Very important	Neither important	Somewhat unimportant	Not at all important	We do not use



				nor unimportant			this source
1	Amazon	2	17	6	1	0	1
2	Book Page	6	9	2	1	1	8
3	Book Riot	0	2	12	2	1	9
4	Bookslut	0	2	6	3	1	14
5	Kirkus	5	8	7	0	0	7
6	New York Times	7	15	4	0	0	1
7	Novelist	7	5	6	1	1	7
8	NPR	5	12	6	1	0	3
9	Other	5	5	1	0	0	2

Figure 4

Libraries with access to Novelist	
Other responses	
local newspapers	
Library Journals	
Barnes & Noble	
Libraries without access to Novelist	
Other responses	
Booklist, Library Journal	
School Library Journal	
Goodreads	
Local media, Library Journal, School Library Journal, Booklist	
Publishers Weekly	
Publisher's Weekly	
Booklist, PW	
School Library Journal	
Goodreads	
Fantastic Fiction	
General pop culture sources where average customers are likely to learn about books (entertainment weekly, for instance)	

3. In your professional judgment, how important is Readers' Advisory to the mission of your library system?

Figure 5

#	Answer	Access to Novelist	No access to Novelist
1	Extremely important	11	12
2	Very important	4	13
3	Neither	0	1

4	Somewhat	0	1
5	Unimportant	0	0
	Total	15	27

4. Does your library system track Readers' Advisory interactions as a statistic separate from general reference? Your library may use alternative terminology, such as Readers' Advisory transactions, interviews, etc.

Figure 6

#	Answer	Access to NoveList	No access to NoveList
1	Yes	2	4
2	No	13	23
	Total	15	27

5. Does your library system currently have a subscription to any of the NoveList products?

Figure 7

#	Answer	Access to NoveList	No access to NoveList
1	Yes	15	0
2	No	0	29
	Total	15	29

6. If your library no longer has access to NoveList, have you received any feedback from either patrons or librarians regarding the loss of this resource?

Figure 8

#	Answer	Access to NoveList	No access to NoveList
1	Yes	0	14
2	No	0	13
	Total	0	27

7. How would you characterize that feedback?

Figure 9

Libraries without access to NoveList	
Text Response	
	Disappointment. Staff relied on it heavily and some patrons did as well
	Library staff miss the resource. I have not had any patron feedback on the loss of NoveList.
	They really miss having access to NoveList
	Staff, patrons, and school teachers miss NoveList but the pricing is out of our budget. We now use multiple sources to try to serve our patrons.
	Library staff misses this resource to find titles in series, books of varied genres, and reviews of title.
	Disappointed we don't have this as an additional resource to provide complete and through Readers' Advisory Service.

Library staff miss this very valuable resource.
Nonexistent (sic)
Disappointment. It was integrated with our ILS and both staff and patrons found that helpful. Both patrons and staff are very upset about the loss of this resource.
Staff and Patrons alike are extremely bereft of our Novelist Plus subscription. It was used quite frequently and this librarian found it to be exceedingly helpful in matching patrons with the books they liked. Quite simply: Novelist Plus was the best and we want it BACK!
Both patrons and staff would like to have access to Novelist. Unfortunately, the Madison County Public Libraries are a rural library system with a small budget.
N/A
We all miss it. Cannot afford it on our own.
For the few who used it, they miss it. Otherwise, we've relied on other sources to get by.
We had/have access to LibraryThing and SelectReads/Dear Reader/Author Check which pull from our catalog. Some of the staff also use fan fiction sites.
Patrons and staff unhappy about the loss of such a valuable tool.

8. Please provide any feedback about this survey and select submit when finished.

Figure 10

Yes
Text Response
I am very glad to see research on this public library topic.
I would like to upgrade the importance of social media (first page of survey) to very important. My brain is a little fog this morning. :) Thank you.
Wake County Public Libraries also offers several RA based services (Custom Book Lists and Express Book Bags) which you can find on our reading page: <a href="http://www.wakegov.com/libraries/reading/Pages/default.aspx">http://www.wakegov.com/libraries/reading/Pages/default.aspx</a>
No
Text Response
While NovelList is useful, we have managed to fill the gap with other sources--half our staff did not use NovelList even when they had access to it
I would have liked to see a ranking of "important." Some sources I had to rank as "very important" instead, because the next category was "neither important nor unimportant." Good luck with your survey.
We integrated of LibraryThing for Libraries widgets for similar books, series, reviews, and tags into our catalog. These are our primary sources for readers advisory along with staff knowledge. We were early adopters; LibraryThing widgets generate results from within the library's catalog. At the time, NovelList did not integrate and results had to be searched separately in the catalog. That changed a few years later, but we still never were heavy users of Novelist even when it was in NC LIVE. Good survey.
Great survey! Congratulations on your upcoming graduation!!
You had a ranking category for "somewhat unimportant" but not for "somewhat important" in many of the questions. There were several questions that a ranking for "somewhat important" would have been my choice, but I could only say "very important" or "extremely important." You also left off a lot of standard review sources like Library Journal and Booklist. I added those in because we use those regularly.

Consider taking a look at Barnes and Noble when evaluating a title, as they link many of the popular editorial reviews all in one place.

Good luck with your results!

Adult selection is largely demand driven -- filling holds for the popular stuff & bestsellers, getting multiple copies for the book clubs (mainly bestsellers). Reader's advisory just doesn't come up that much any more, so losing Novelist is no big deal.

One of the greatest challenges in my new position has been the loss of Novelist. I used it extensively in my previous part time position and miss it greatly. That library system was able to afford the cost of Novelist after it was taken from NC Live and so it was only when I switched positions that I lost access. I would also add that reader's advisory is not always at the forefront of the minds of the staff at my current library so awareness of other blogs, review sites, etc. is not great.

## Discussion

### Introduction

As described above, an online survey was sent to the eighty directors of North Carolina public libraries, with 45 returned for a 56% return rate. The survey questions are analyzed here, beginning with basic information regarding RA.

The question which was aimed at confirming research quoted above that RA is a critical function of public libraries in NC received the most uniform response of all the questions in the survey. This question asked, “In your professional judgment, how important is Readers’ Advisory to the mission of your library system?” One participant rated RA somewhat important. One participant rated RA as neither important nor unimportant. The remaining 95% of responses fell into two categories, very important or extremely important, with seventeen participants rating RA as very important and 23 rating RA as extremely important.

This percentage is borne out by the follow-up interviews with seven librarians. (To protect confidentiality, librarians are referred to by number.) After speaking at length about the RA offerings in her system, Librarian 1’s final statement was

We do an enormous amount of one-on-one readers’ advisory with our customers. Everyone on staff has a job element that is on readers’ advisory. Whether you work with circulation, reference, even local history, you are actively engaged in readers’ advisory. What people really want is to talk to someone about what book is good to read. That kind of shoulder to shoulder customer service is very important to us, especially

because we are in a small town... We're really interested in the Aspen report, 'Rising to the Challenge.' The 'people' part of the 'people, place, and platform' is vital to who we are. Doing that kind of readers' advisory is our bread and butter.

What is interesting about this complex and heartfelt declaration is the effort that her library system puts into placing RA at the center of their work. Not only is her system responding to a demand for service among the community, but they are connecting their practice of a very traditional library function to the Aspen Report, which articulates a vision for the role of libraries in the age of technology (The Aspen Institute 2014).

The librarians interviewed discussed the many forms of RA practiced at their libraries. All of the interviewees mentioned book clubs, particularly those aimed at different age groups. One librarian spoke extensively about author readings and writing workshops offered by her system. Passive forms of RA mentioned by several librarians include book displays, bookmarks and signage, "what to read next," and title lists on the library's website. One library with access to NoveList has integrated the database into their catalog so that patrons can instantly see book suggestions that are available at their library. Several libraries also offer more labor-intensive and time-consuming personalized RA services which, one librarian pointed out, can take the form of "extensive meetings." This library also offers two less common forms of RA: delivery services for the homebound, where the patron is unable to get to the library and depends on a librarian for help in choosing titles; and a "drive-up window" for those who are not part of the delivery program but who have accessibility issues. These individuals will speak with a librarian before driving to the library so that books are ready when they arrive.

A similar kind of library service was discussed by Librarian 2. She spoke of a “reading concierge” program where library patrons fill out an online form with information about what books they have particularly enjoyed and which authors they prefer. Patrons can also specify which genres they are interested in as well as a book they didn’t like in order to provide a more complete picture of their tastes (Union County Public Library n.d.). A Readers’ Services librarian will respond with three to five personalized suggestions.

Interview results indicated that some library systems structure much of their RA around NoveList. The public library system served by Librarian 4 conducted a survey of staff before the end of 2014, asking for the top five resources to consider replacing after the database changes went into effect at NC LIVE. She said that NoveList got three times more requests than any other database. “It’s a heavy favorite among staff,” she explained. “There’s no question that we’d be subscribing to that ourselves after NC LIVE dropped it. Staff offer RA workshops [that] revolve around NoveList. It’s a regular workshop and it revolves around NoveList. I remember hearing concerns that they’d have to change their handouts, they’d have to change how they taught the staff, the bookmarks. It would add to their work and the changes they’d have to make. We were lucky we didn’t have to worry about that.” In all, the diversity of services supporting the practice of RA speaks to the centrality of RA to the mission of NC public libraries.

Question five of the survey asked whether or not the library system tracks RA interactions as a statistic separate from general reference (the question indicated that alternative terminology may be used by the library system). Seven “yes” responses (16%) and 36 “no” responses (84%) were recorded. (Future research might look into the reasons

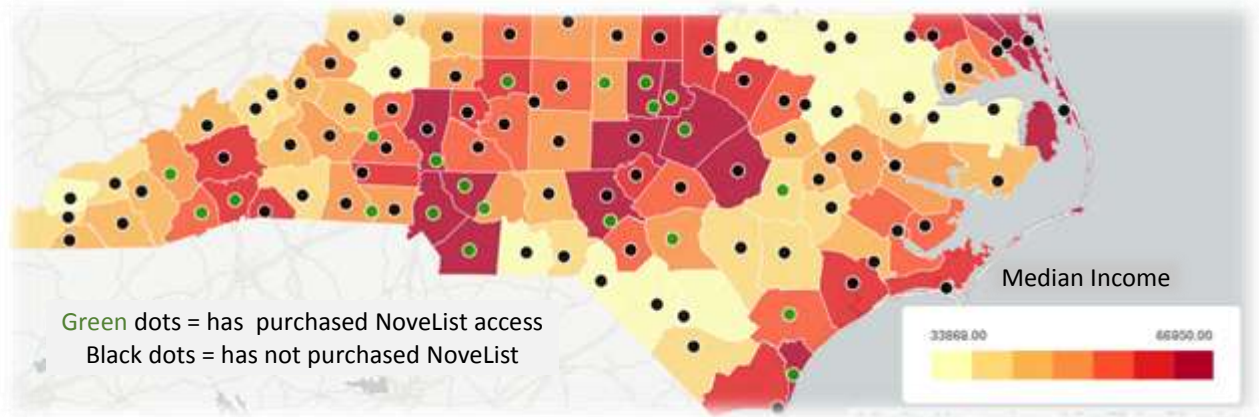
that libraries have for how they choose to manage this statistic.) RA may be perceived as a kind of reference; libraries may have other ways of tracking RA activity other than recording numbers of transactions.

### Mapping Access to NoveList

One survey question asked respondents to indicate whether or not their library system currently has a subscription to any of the NoveList products. Fifteen (34%) answered “yes,” and 29 (66%) answered “no.” This level of access is roughly reflected statewide among public library systems. Statewide, 20 library systems have purchased subscription access to NoveList and 88 have not. The map below gives information regarding NoveList access in public library systems throughout the state. Green dots represent library systems that have access to NoveList. Black dots represent library systems that do not.



Figure 11



To determine which library systems had access to NoveList, a survey was conducted of all of the public library system websites. The entire home page of a library in each system was visually scanned, and if a link to NoveList was not detected, the remainder of the website was reviewed. Particular attention was paid to tabs or links labelled as library resources, library services, readers' advisory, reading recommendations, book lists, research, e-library, online sources, digital sources, databases or reference. See Appendix A for a table of library systems and access to NoveList.

Median household income is also represented on the map, based on data from the 2012 Census. The map can also be viewed at [https://deborahhirsch.cartodb.com/viz/01e54a06-1242-11e6-b269-0e787de82d45/public\\_map](https://deborahhirsch.cartodb.com/viz/01e54a06-1242-11e6-b269-0e787de82d45/public_map). Viewing the map online will allow the user access to an interactive feature showing data for each county. Hovering over each county will produce a pop-up box listing county name and median household income. While there is a trend towards NoveList access in counties with higher median household income, there are outliers. The map shows entire areas of the state where NoveList is not accessible. Thus, even if a county library system has reciprocal agreements with surrounding counties (for example, granting library cards to out-of-county residents), access to this resource is not equitable throughout NC.

It is important to note that the map does not represent the diversity of library systems in terms of size or population (the number of potential patrons or the number of branches). Nor is library setting (rural, urban, or suburban) represented. This is significant because two of the librarian interviews indicated that the fact that their system

did not purchase a NoveList subscription could be traced at least in part to setting and size. For example, Librarian 5 is one of two youth services staff and the only librarian in her branch, implying that her library is small and lacks the resources to hire multiple MILS-trained staff. She pointed to her system's inability to add resources beyond NC LIVE, saying "From the vantage point of a very underfunded library system, without access to NC LIVE I would have no resources to offer my students and my parents...I think that the availability of the database [i.e., NC LIVE] simply by itself is important especially when the public library itself doesn't offer any kind of research database access other than NC LIVE." In other words, underfunded library systems cannot offer extra access beyond what is made available through NC LIVE. For these library systems, NC LIVE is the only source of database access.

Another interview raised similar concerns. Librarian 6 said "[My libraries] are a rural system so we don't have the funds to purchase NoveList outside of NC LIVE...I think they do a tremendous job supporting NC public library patrons. It's a great resource for us as a rural library system." Librarians 5 and 6 spoke expressively of how rural and underfunded library systems rely heavily on NC LIVE for resource access. (While Librarian 7's system also chose not to purchase a subscription to NoveList, the choice was based on how much of an "enhancement" the database offered given the expense.)

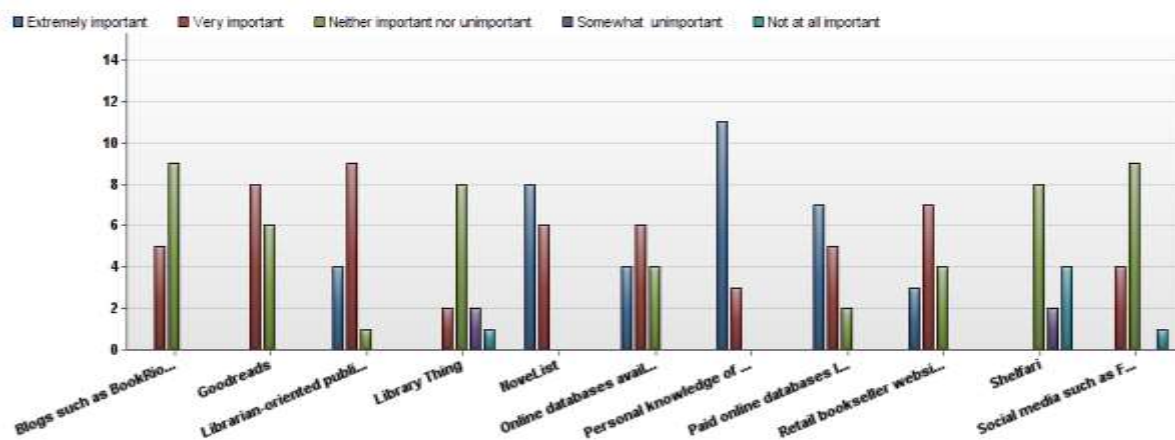
Survey participants who do not have access to NoveList were given the opportunity in a subsequent question to indicate whether or not they had had any feedback from patrons or librarians regarding the loss of this resource. Fourteen (54%) had received feedback; 13 (48%) had not. The characterizations of this feedback will be analyzed below.

## Tool Importance

The heart of the survey asked respondents to rank the importance of various tools that are commonly used in RA. One question presented an assortment of tools; another question pertained to social media, and a third question pertained to sources of book reviews. Using Qualtrics' data sorting capacity, responses were grouped according to whether or not the respondents indicated that their library system had access to NoveList (question number 6 in the survey).

Participants rated the importance of eleven different RA tools. Libraries with access to NoveList rated these tools as follows:

Figure 12



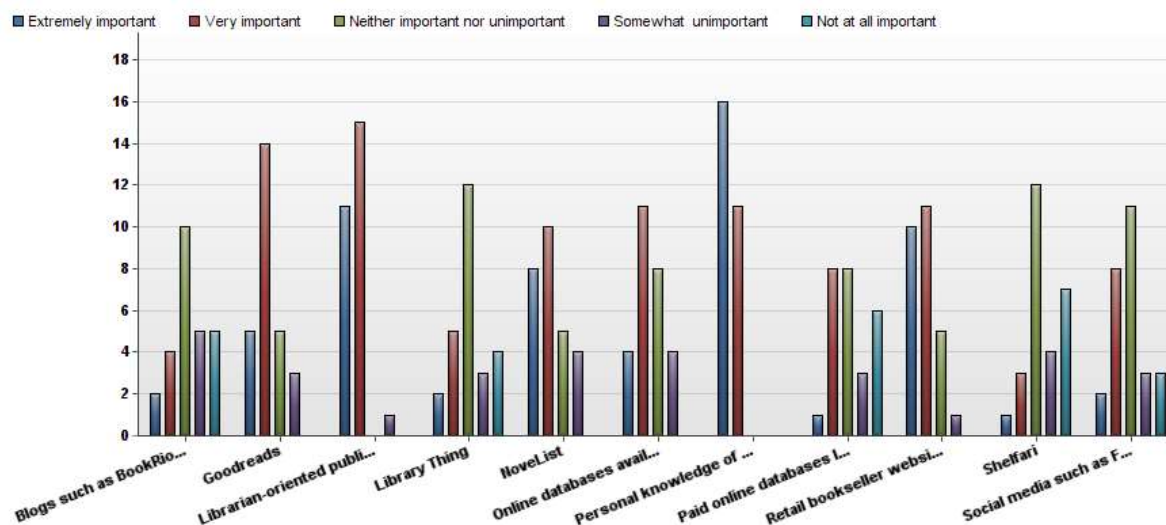
The librarian's personal knowledge of the library's collection received the highest overall rating. This holds true for libraries without access to NoveList as well. Without in-depth questioning regarding how exactly this knowledge is put to use, it is difficult to say how knowledge of the library's collection impacts the practice of RA. It is possible that simply knowing what's on the shelf has a significant impact on what a librarian chooses to recommend.

On the other hand, the interview with Librarian 5 made it clear that relying too heavily on staff can be detrimental to RA. Her experience is that “As someone who’s worked in multiple public libraries, I would say your staff is always your first tool. To count your staff as an RA tool, that means you have a problem.” She explained that the staff at her library is not “diverse” in their reading habits; therefore, only a limited kind of RA is available. In essence, a staff member can know what’s available to check out, but being able to recommend a title that falls outside of one’s regular reading habits requires a higher level of skill in terms of being able to discern why a particular book might be appealing to a certain type of reader.

For libraries with access to NoveList, the next most important tool is in fact NoveList, with eight “extremely important” and six “very important” ratings. Librarian-oriented publications such as *Library Journal* are the next most highly rated tool, with four “extremely important” and nine “very important” ratings. Library Thing and social media each received “not at all important” ratings from one participant.

Libraries without access to NoveList rated the same tools as follows:

Figure 13



Again, the librarian’s personal knowledge of the library’s collection received the highest rating. Goodreads is of great importance to these libraries, with 70% of participants giving it either an “extremely” or “very” important rating.

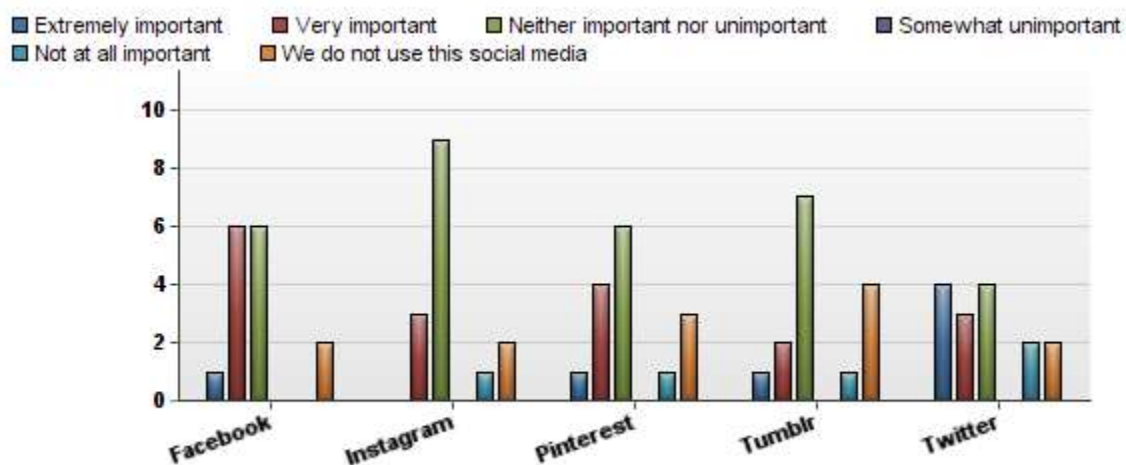
Interview data supports the importance of Goodreads. Librarian 6 talked about Goodreads when asked about RA services offered by libraries in her system. Not only do the librarians in her system use Goodreads to practice RA, they teach classes so that patrons “can access it themselves so they have that power on their own.”

In libraries without NoveList, librarian-oriented publications such as *Library Journal* and retail bookseller websites such as Amazon also have very high ratings, with 100% and 81% with “extremely important” or “very important,” respectively. On the other hand, five tools are ranked “not at all important” by at least one respondent: blogs such as BookRiot, Library Thing, paid online databases licensed by the library, Shelfari, and social media such as Facebook. Interestingly, NoveList gets very high ratings even at

libraries with no access, with 20 out of 29 participants ranking it “extremely or “very” important.

Participants were then asked to rate the importance of social media that staff use for RA. Libraries with access to NoveList rated five social media sites as follows:

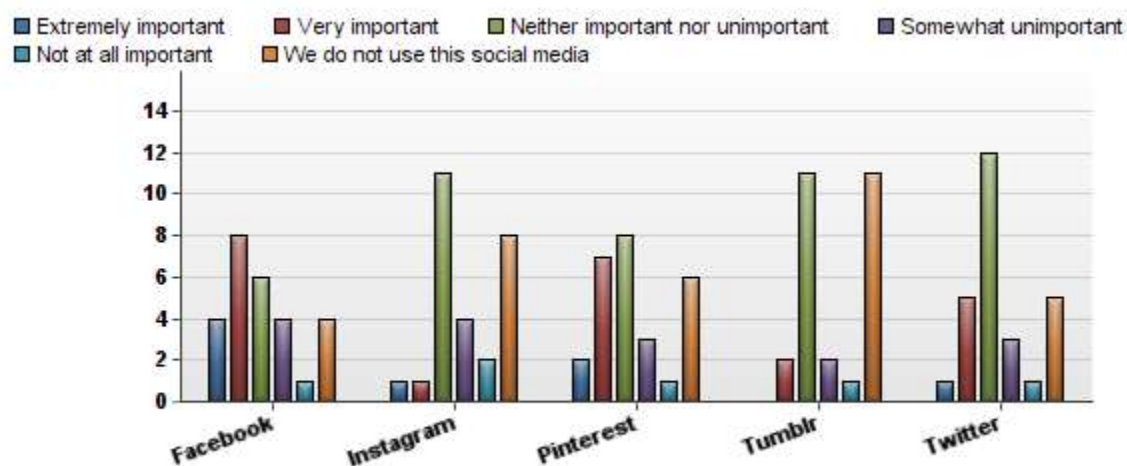
Figure 14



Facebook, Pinterest, and Twitter are the most important social media sites for these libraries. All five, however, are either unused by some libraries or rated as “not at all important” to their practice of RA.

Libraries without access to NoveList rated these five social media sites as follows:

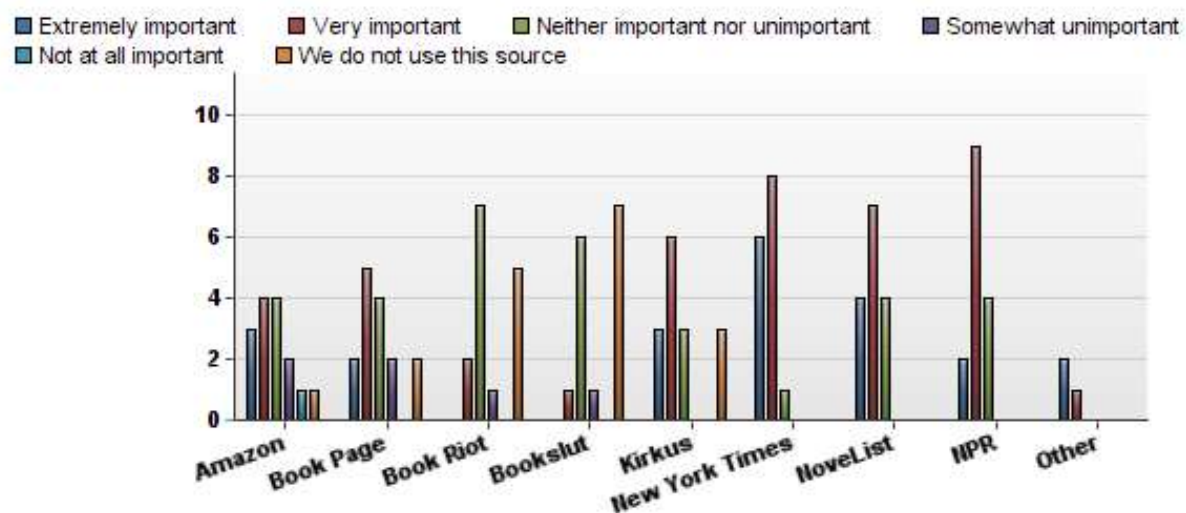
Figure 15



The libraries without access to NoveList were even less likely to use social media when practicing RA. However, Facebook and Pinterest are more important to these libraries.

A final question asked participants to rate the importance of various sources of book reviews. Libraries with access to NoveList rated book review sources as follows:

Figure 16

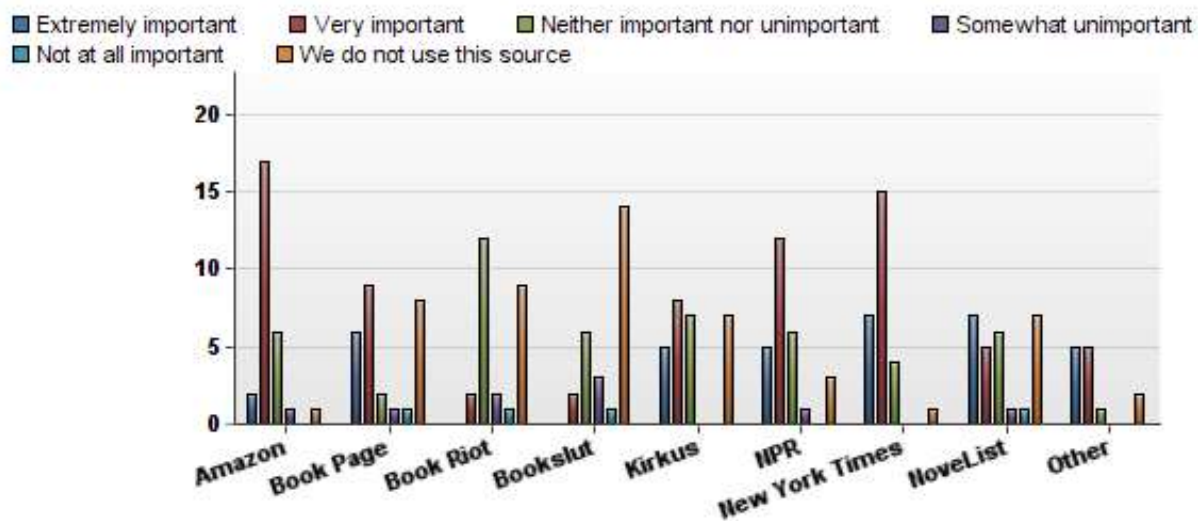




The most important sources of book reviews are the New York Times, NoveList, and NPR. These three choices are notable in that no respondents rated them as unimportant. Amazon, Book Page, and Kirkus received lower overall ratings, yet some responses indicate that there are public libraries where these sources are not consulted. Book Riot, Bookslut, and Amazon rounding out the choices with the lowest importance scores. Again, some responses indicate that these sources are not consulted at some public libraries. The “other” category will be discussed below.

Libraries without access to NoveList rate book review sources as follows:

Figure 17



The most striking difference in this table is that Amazon receives ratings in the important category much more often. The New York Times continues to be very highly rated. Compared with the table above, Book Page and Kirkus also receive stronger scores. Book Riot and Bookslut remain the sources attributed with the lowest scores of importance. Strangely, NoveList is still listed as extremely important or very important by a number of libraries. It is unclear how to account for these responses.

The “other” category was an opportunity for survey participants to indicate any additional book review sources they consulted. The responses from library systems that had access to NoveList were local newspapers, *Library Journal*, and Barnes & Noble. The responses from library systems that do not currently have access to NoveList included Booklist, *Library Journal*, *School Library Journal*, Goodreads, local media, *Publishers’ Weekly*, Fantastic Fiction, and “general pop culture sources where average customers are likely to learn about books (*Entertainment Weekly*, for instance)” (Qualtrics Survey Instrument). The crux of this set of responses is that libraries that do not currently have access to NoveList rely on a far greater range of sources for book reviews than libraries that do.

With regards to Goodreads and *Library Journal*, participants had an opportunity to indicate how important these tools are to RA in question one of the survey. Booklist, *Library Journal*, *School Library Journal*, and *Publishers’ Weekly* are publications that should be included in future research. Barnes & Noble, like Amazon, draws book reviews from publishers’ websites and can be considered a comparable source. Fantastic Fiction offers publisher-produced reviews, an author recommendations feature, and links to online booksellers. Unlike Goodreads, users do not create accounts to track the books they have read or want to read, nor is there a forum where users post reviews. According to the privacy policy, Fantastic Fiction is an associate of Amazon and Abebooks, indicating that revenue derives from online book sales generated by click-throughs (Fantastic Fiction Privacy n.d.).

### Feedback Regarding Loss of Access

The table below lists the 17 comments provided by participants whose libraries chose not to purchase a subscription to NoveList after it was dropped by NC LIVE. The table of responses is repeated here for the reader's convenience:

Figure 18

Feedback to the loss of access to NoveList	
Text Response	
1.	Disappointment. Staff relied on it heavily and some patrons did as well
2.	Library staff miss the resource. I have not had any patron feedback on the loss of NoveList.
3.	They really miss having access to NoveList
4.	Staff, patrons, and school teachers miss NoveList but the pricing is out of our budget. We now use multiple sources to try to serve our patrons.
5.	Library staff misses this resource to find titles in series, books of varied genres, and reviews of title.
6.	Disappointed we don't have this as an additional resource to provide complete and through Readers' Advisory Service.
7.	Library staff miss this very valuable resource.
8.	Nonexistent (sic)
9.	Disappointment. It was integrated with our ILS and both staff and patrons found that helpful.
10.	Both patrons and staff are very upset about the loss of this resource.
11.	Staff and Patrons alike are extremely bereft of our NoveList Plus subscription. It was used quite frequently and this librarian found it to be exceedingly helpful in matching patrons with the books they liked. Quite simply: NoveList Plus was the best and we want it BACK!
12.	Both patrons and staff would like to have access to NoveList. Unfortunately, the Madison County Public Libraries are a rural library system with a small budget.
13.	N/A
14.	We all miss it. Cannot afford it on our own.
15.	For the few who used it, they miss it. Otherwise, we've relied on other sources to get by.
16.	We had/have access to LibraryThing and SelectReads/Dear Reader/Author Check which pull from our catalog. Some of the staff also use fan fiction sites.
17.	Patrons and staff unhappy about the loss of such a valuable tool.

Four of the statements can be read as ambivalent (8, 13, 15, 16). For example the statement “For the few who used it, they miss it. Otherwise, we’ve relied on other sources to get by” (#15) shows that not all of staff necessarily used NoveList prior to December 2014. This could be because some staff simply didn’t perform RA (technical services staff, for example), or because RA queries were directed to specific staff members (thus

many staff members didn't use it), or because library staff already relied on different tools. The statement also shows that other sources of information are available.

The interview with Librarian 7 supports this analysis. She said that "It [NoveList] would be nice to have it, it's an enhancement, but it's not worth that amount of money." In her opinion, the price for NoveList is "just not reasonable for most libraries." She noted that other resources, even if they are not as convenient, are available: "It's not that you can't find other material, it's just not as easy to access."

Other comments indicate that other tools are being relied upon in the absence of NoveList. Statement #6 speaks of NoveList as an "additional" resource that enabled "complete and thorough" RA. Statement #16 refers to other RA tools by name but it is unclear if those tools were in place before the end of 2014. Statement #4 hints that the functions NoveList performed may have had to be replaced by more than one tool: "We *now* use multiple sources to try to serve our patrons" (emphasis added).

The remainder of the statements express that NoveList was a highly regarded tool for librarians and, in some cases, patrons and teachers. There are those who are "very upset" and "extremely bereft." Several responses speak of missing access to this "valuable resource" and "valuable tool." The uses of NoveList mentioned include matching patrons to books, finding titles in a series, finding title reviews, and finding books of varied genres. Integration into the library's catalog was also mentioned as a benefit, and in fact, Librarian 2 mentioned this added value.

## Conclusion

From the results of the survey and the content of the follow-up interviews, it is clear that libraries with access to NoveList practice RA differently than libraries without access. A two-tailed t-test was performed to analyze the data presented in the discussion. The importance ratings attributed to RA tools, social media, and sources of book reviews can be predicted by whether or not a library has access to NoveList ( $p < .0001$ ). While the present study looks at only the change in access to this database rather than all of the databases dropped at the end of 2014, the strength of the survey results do indeed describe a difference in RA practice. The implication is that libraries need time and support in carrying out a transition to the new information conditions. More research is needed to determine the optimal kinds of assistance during transition.

In fact, there was a great deal of uncertainty among all of the librarians interviewed regarding the process of reviewing databases for inclusion in NC LIVE. Furthermore, there was a general perception that NC LIVE was dominated by the needs of academic libraries.

- Librarian 2 said, “I don’t feel like the public library sector is represented enough. We only have three votes, and we are kind of overruled by the universities. What we’re looking for and what they’re looking for are not always the same thing.”
- Librarian 4 said, “...I really don’t know how much attention they pay towards academic versus public versus community. For some reason I feel like they’ve put a little more emphasis on academic libraries. And I don’t know the breakdown of the member libraries. They may play a big part of the decisions they make.”

- Librarian 6 said, “Sometimes rural library systems are not fully represented compared to university, community college, large public library systems. I don’t think our voice is always heard.”
- Librarian 7 said, “...the scuttlebutt, which I have no way to know if it’s accurate, is that academic libraries get more attention than public do. I think that there are some things that get taken off [NC LIVE] that public libraries use quite a bit...I wouldn’t say that all libraries feel the same way, but to the public libraries it’s worse.”

The need for greater communication is underscored by the fact that this perception exists and the fact that there is a lack of basic information regarding NC LIVE processes. Future study could examine how other statewide consortia address the imperative to communicate with constituents.

NC LIVE enjoys a great deal of good will among the librarians surveyed. In addition to the comments noted elsewhere in this paper, several statements stand out. First, at least one librarian is willing to overlook perceived inequalities out of appreciation for the resources offered by NC LIVE. When asked what she knew about NC LIVE’s process of database review and whether, in her opinion, this process is adequate, Librarian 6 responded, “I don’t focus on that too much, because we really couldn’t afford any databases [without NC LIVE].” Moreover, the librarians generally like resources available through NC LIVE. Asked about how well NC LIVE’s database offerings adequately serve NC’s public library users, Librarian 3 said, “I think they do a good job of serving the users, as far as a variety of material on different subjects.” Librarian 7 said, “I think that there’s some really good things on the list [of databases].” Finally, Librarian 1 expressed an understanding of the difficulties of choosing adequate resources for stakeholders that have varied interests: “Until we can come up with a better funding mechanism or until we can get the [NC] General Assembly to cough up the money that is going to be a challenge.”

This study may be considered a pilot study for a larger exploration of resource access in NC public libraries. Even the small sampling achieved in this study indicates the diversity of opinions, needs, and interests present in public library staff. Capturing a larger range of opinions by surveying a librarian at each public library branch would give a clearer picture of the range of practices and how database access fits in with those endeavors.

The question of how to balance the requirements and demands of the various communities of interest is ongoing. Libraries of all types function within an environment that includes financial constraints. It is hoped that the information documented in the present paper can help ease the complex task of balancing the interests of the libraries that use NC LIVE.

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## Appendix A: NC Library Systems and Access to NoveList

yes	Alamance County Public Libraries
no	Albermarle Regional Library System: Bertie County
no	Albermarle Regional Library System: Gates County
no	Albermarle Regional Library System: Hertford County
no	Albermarle Regional Library System: Northhampton County
no	Alexander County Library
no	Appalachian Regional Library System: Ashe County
no	Appalachian Regional Library System: Avery County
no	Appalachian Regional Library System: Mitchell County
no	Appalachian Regional Library System: Watauga County
no	Appalachian Regional Library System: Wilkes County
no	Appalachian Regional Library System: Yancy County
no	Beaufort Hyde Martin Regional Library System: Beaufort County
no	Beaufort Hyde Martin Regional Library System: Hyde County
no	Beaufort Hyde Martin Regional Library System: Martin County
no	Bladen County Public Library
no	Braswell Memorial Library
no	Brunswick County Libraries
no	Buncombe County Public Libraries
no	Burke County Public Library
yes	Cabarrus County Public Library
no	Caldwell County Public Library
no	Caswell County Public Library
no	Catawba County Library
yes	Chapel Hill Public Library
yes	Charlotte Mecklenburg Library
no	Chatham County Public Library
no	Cleveland County Memorial Library
no	Columbus County Public Library
no	Craven Pamlico Carteret Regional Library System: Carteret County
no	Craven Pamlico Carteret Regional Library System: Craven County
no	Craven Pamlico Carteret Regional Library System: Pamlico County
yes	Cumberland County Public Library & Information Center
no	Davidson County Public Library
no	Davie County Public Library
no	Duplin County Library

yes	Durham County Library
no	East Albermarle Regional Library System: Camden County
no	East Albermarle Regional Library System: Currituck County
no	East Albermarle Regional Library System: Dare County
no	East Albermarle Regional Library System: Pasquotank County
no	Edgecombe County Memorial Library
no	Farmville Public Library
no	Fontana Regional Library: Jackson County
no	Fontana Regional Library: Macon County
no	Fontana Regional Library: Swain County
yes	Forsyth County Public Library
no	Franklin County Library
no	Gaston County Public Library
no	George H. & Laura E. Brown Library
no	Granville County Library System
no	Greensboro Public Library
no	H. Leslie Perry Memorial Library
no	Halifax County Library
no	Harnett County Public Library
no	Harold D. Cooley Library
yes	Haywood County Public Library
yes	Henderson County Public Library
yes	Hickory Public Library
no	High Point Public Library
no	Iredell County Public Library
no	Lee County Library
no	Lincoln County Public Library
no	Madison County Public Library
yes	Mauney Memorial Library
no	McDowell County Public Library
yes	Mooresville Public Library
no	Nantahala Regional Library System: Cherokee County
no	Nantahala Regional Library System: Clay County
no	Nantahala Regional Library System: Graham County
no	Neuse Regional Library System: Greene County
no	Neuse Regional Library System: Jones County
no	Neuse Regional Library System: Lenoir County
yes	New Hanover County Public Library
no	Northwestern Regional Library System: Alleghany County
no	Northwestern Regional Library System: Stokes County
no	Northwestern Regional Library System: Surry County
no	Northwestern Regional Library System: Yadkin County
no	Onslow County Public Library

yes	Orange County Public Library
yes	Pender County Public Library
no	Person County Public Library
no	Pettigrew Regional Library System: Chowan County
no	Pettigrew Regional Library System: Perquimans County
no	Pettigrew Regional Library System: Tyrrell County
no	Pettigrew Regional Library System: Washington County
no	Polk County Public Library
no	Public Library of Johnston County & Smithfield
no	Randolph County Public Library
no	Roanoke Rapids Public Library
no	Robeson County Public Library
no	Rockingham County Public Library
no	Rowan Public Library
no	Rutherford County Library
no	Sampson-Clinton Public Library
no	Sandhill Regional Library System: Anson County
no	Sandhill Regional Library System: Hoke County
no	Sandhill Regional Library System: Montgomery County
no	Sandhill Regional Library System: Moore County
no	Sandhill Regional Library System: Richmond County
no	Scotland County Memorial Library
no	Sheppard Memorial Library
yes	Southern Pines Public Library
yes	Stanly County Public Library
yes	Transylvania County Library
yes	Union County Public Library
yes	Wake County Public Libraries
no	Warren County Memorial Library
yes	Wayne County Public Library
no	Wilson County Public Library