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Results of a SELA Planning Survey

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Introduction
This study arose from the need for member input into the development of the Southeastern Library Association's (SELA) Strategic Plan. Additionally, the Planning and Development Committee felt it was important to obtain a better understanding of what services and activities the librarians in the southeast would like to see provided by the regional association. The Committee also recognized that it was important not only to ask for possible areas of improvement, but to also ask for ideas on how to achieve those improvements.

The survey was drafted at the 2003 SELA Leadership Conference in Atlanta and was refined in email communication among committee members. Early in the development stages, it was determined that the survey would be web-based and hosted by the Southeastern Library Network (SOLINET). The method proposed at the Leadership Conference for distribution of the survey was to email the survey's URL to SELA members. Distribution ultimately took place via announcements posted on the SELA listserv and state library association listservs. The original distribution plan proved too difficult due to inaccuracies in the list of SELA member email addresses. As a result of the listserv distribution method, the survey elicited the opinions of many non-members; a few of whom were unaware that the regional association even existed.

Who Responded
A total of 411 survey responses were received. Surprisingly, the total number of responses by active members was only 22.9% (94 responses) with a much larger 77.1% (317 responses) from inactive members [Figure 1]. The majority of the written comments reflect this difference in that the inactive members offered more written comments on what they would like to see offered by a regional association.

Figure 1.
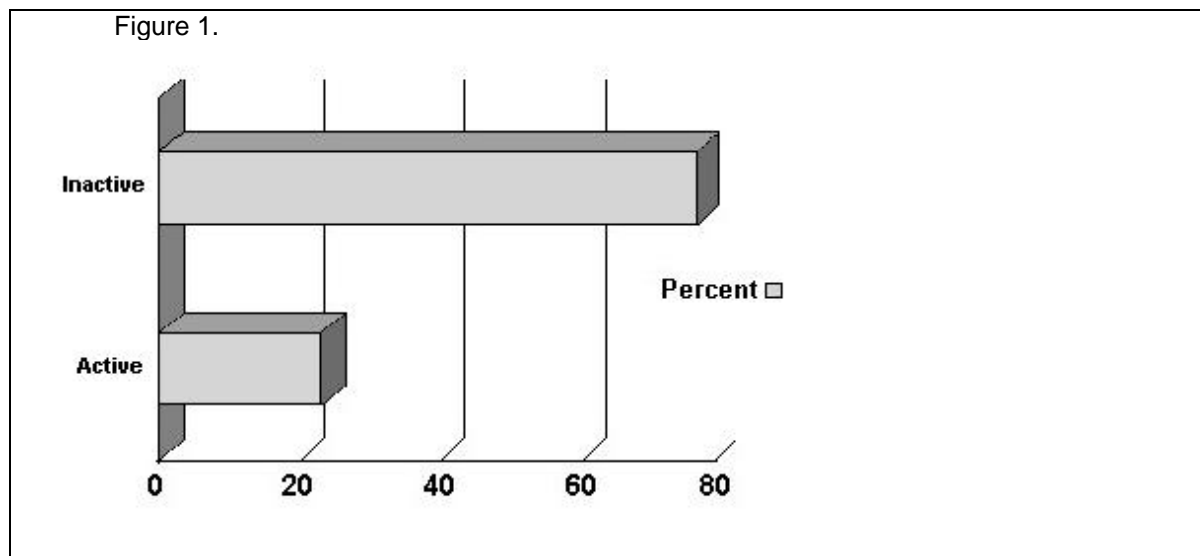
The number of responses from each state was fairly reflective of librarians in the southeast region. The highest percentage of responses was from North Carolina (19.8%), followed by Florida (14.1%) and Tennessee (12.2) with the states of West Virginia (2.7%), Kentucky (1.7%) and Mississippi (1.7%) being underrepresented [Figure 2]. The low response rates may be explained by the fact that email notifications sent to the listservs of these three states were "bounced back" as undeliverable with the result that the notices were never posted or were posted too late to elicit a high number of responses.

Figure 2.
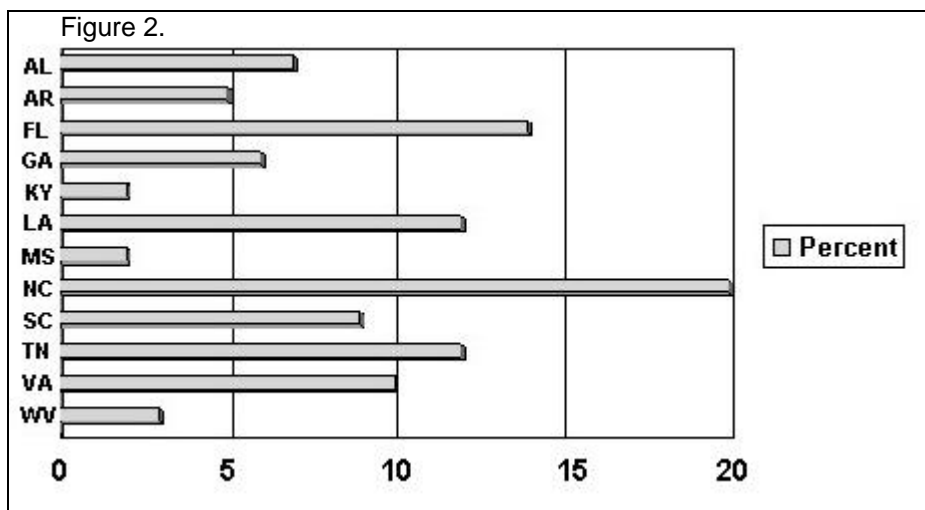
Analysis by category shows the largest numbers of respondents were librarians working in public libraries (34.3%) and university libraries (29.7%). The 7% who marked the "Other" category indicated they were primarily students, people in other educational functions or in one case, a librarian who worked part-time in two different categories. Additionally, there is evidence by the number of survey responses (2.2%) from retired librarians that librarians in the southeast remain involved in the profession even after retirement [Figure 3].

Figure 3.

Choice	Count	Percentage
Public Library	142	34.3%
University Library	123	29.7%
Community College	41	9.9%
School Library	33	8%
Special Library	18	4.4%
State Library	12	2.9%
Federal Government	3	.7%
State Government	2	.5%
Other	29	7%
Retired	9	2.2%
Self-employed	2	.5%

What Was Said

The following section of this article will be a discussion of responses for each question. Whenever possible, responses have been categorized for the purpose of analysis and discussion.

Question # 1: What top 3 resources would you like to see SELA provide?

Of the choices listed in the survey for this question, the two receiving the highest number of responses were Staff Training and Job Posting Service. Services mentioned in the "Other" category can be broken

into three broad areas: education, communication, and assistance. Comments related to education included requests for good quality programming at the conference, leadership training and continuing education, professional support programs, scholarships for continuing education, and assistance in getting an MLS program back in Virginia. Communication needs were: opportunities for information sharing, networking, publishing and "school library news". The need for a "stronger journal" was also mentioned. Some requests were for assistance in a specific area but were not specific as to what was needed. These comments were: "assistance for special libraries", "assessment" and "assessment tools", "standards", and "recruitment and retention or librarians, particularly minorities".

Question # 2: Aside from budget, what will be the top 3 issues in your library over the next 3 years?
The three choices for this question which received the highest percentage of responses were Electronic Resources, Technology, and Staff Training [Figure 4]. The issues listed under "Other" were reflective of current issues in libraries worldwide. Five comments dealt with issues of library employment: shortage of librarians, education of librarians, recruitment and retention of librarians, professionals replaced by paraprofessionals, career ladder for paraprofessionals, & pay equity. There were four comments each on planning (strategic planning, 5-year planning, assessment of library services, & assessment tools) and budget (budget, capital campaign, development and fundraising, "funding, funding, funding!"). Three respondents listed instruction issues (information literacy, instructional services, and relevance to the curriculum/instruction). One mentioned consortiums and another listed communication as top issues they would face in the next three years. A total of 7 respondents listed what might be generally categorized as "political issues": filtering and censorship (2 responses), copyright & fair use (2 responses), intellectual freedom, economic impact of libraries on communities, and developing political awareness [Figure 4].

Figure 4

Choice	Count	Percentage
Electronic Resources	227	54%
Technology	210	50.0%
Staff Training	179	42.6%
Library Buildings	123	29.3%
Digitization	94	22.4%
Marketing	90	21.4%
Change Management	88	21.0%
Advocacy	64	15.2%
Leadership Training	58	13.8%
Accreditation	47	11.2%
Mentoring	20	4.8%
Other	34	8.1%

Question # 3: Of these issues, which issues/roles would you like to see SELA address?

Most respondents indicated they would like to see the association address issues of Staff Training (42.6%), Electronic Resources (36.9%) and Technology (35.7%). - essentially restating the top three issues from question # 2 above. Likewise, the "Other" category for this question included issues mentioned under "Other" for question # 2. These other areas were planning, assessment of library services and assessment tools, copyright and fair use, intellectual freedom, consortiums, economic impact of libraries on communities, and issues related to the library employees ("librarian/paraprofessional roles, relations", "shortage of librarians", "cross-training, retirement, flex-time, merit pay, increasing salaries and performance evaluations", "pay", and "internships") [Figure 5].

Figure 5

Choice	Count	Percentage
Staff Training	179	42.6%
Electronic Resources	155	36.9%
Technology	150	35.7%
Leadership Training	104	24.8%
Marketing	92	21.9%
Change Management	90	21.4%
Advocacy	84	20.0%
Digitization	77	18.3%
Library Buildings	64	15.2%
Mentoring	51	12.1%
Accreditation	38	9%
Other	17	4%

Question # 4 - Can you suggest a way to address these issues/roles?

There were a number of interesting suggestions and proposed solutions put forth by survey respondents. The bulk of the responses fell into one of the following categories: Training and Continuing Education, Leadership and Mentoring, Advocacy, and Assessment. There were a few suggestions or comments that were unique and have been grouped into a General category for discussion.

Training and Continuing Education
By far the most comments were on how to provide training or continuing education, and what topics to cover. Publications - including journal articles, online newsletters, proceedings, and staff handbooks - were mentioned by 17 respondents. Twenty-six respondents suggested online or distance education methods including web courses and tutorials, web casts, and teleconferencing, web resources, web pages, listservs, e-mail notification of continuing education opportunities, and "electronic: forums". More than 26 respondents expressed a desire for local or regional programs, with many citing time and costs as factors that make local training more desirable. There were many who simply suggested conferences, workshops, etc. without adding anything more specific. Others suggested topics including: technology, electronic resources, web page development, collection management, and facilities planning. Comments with more substance are provided below.

"Offer the librarians that attend and participate in the training sessions 'continuing education credits' or CEU's. Ask vendors to sponsor paid speakers from ALA. Ask SOLINET about the Speaker's Bureau and ask SOLINET to pay some of the speaker to come. Offer controversial topics with some heavy hitter speakers."

"WORKSHOPS! WORKSHOPS! WORKSHOPS! Offered at a "low" cost, multiple times, in multiple locations. Pre or Post Conference sessions/workshops. Subsidize partially the cost of experts in selected fields / topics who are willing to travel to libraries to (a) facilitate planning sessions w/Directors, Library Trustees, governing officials, (b) present programs to library staff planning major project in that field (examples: library system reorganization, building expansion/renovation). At minimum create/post such a list of vetted experts from within the Southeast."

"Low-cost training workshops at various locations around the state covering such topics as 'the reference interview in the electronic age' etc."

"Workshops and articles. Have both introductory and advanced information. For example, at the SELA Annual Conference, have two workshops running at the same time, one for 'beginners' and one for 'advanced' participants."

"Put together online classes with ideas in each of these areas. We do not have the time to travel to classes, nor is the cost of travel for classes conducive to repeat attendance."

"Create a list of available people who can train others on digitization, workflow issues due to technology and format changes."

Leadership and Mentoring

Although leadership and mentoring are also training needs, comments regarding these issues have been separated from other training needs due to the number of respondents who mentioned these as areas where SELA should play a greater role. Internships were also mentioned by several respondents, as seen in the following comments.

"Collaboration on a Leadership Institute for newer librarians. I attended the NCLA leadership institute when I was a librarian in North Carolina. I learned all kinds of things and the networking is still valuable today!"

"Sponsor a Southeastern Leadership Retreat instead of a conference. Don't aim at new librarians. Developing leaders for the future always sounds nice, but we need immediate relief. The shortage of librarians has resulted in many people moving into management positions relatively late in their careers. They need to develop planning, management, and leadership skills and don't have a ready resource."

Marketing and Advocacy

The increasing importance of marketing and advocacy is seen in budget cuts, library school closings and the number of librarians who retire each year. Survey responses indicate the need to promote libraries, library services, and the library profession to all governing bodies - Congress, state legislators, and accrediting agencies - as well as to user populations and our own employees. Some comments from respondents are:

"Advocacy is just that. Get the library community's contribution to society out in the public forum."

"Spearhead an effort to persuade Congress to reinstitute federal funding for public library construction."

"SELA needs a strong lobbying effort in the state legislature, or else hundreds of libraries in this state will be forced to cut back because of lack of financial support."

"Provide/develop marking campaign templates or guides that can be downloaded – I am thinking of marketing to an academic student population. One possibility would be to borrow or learn from creative directors the process of marketing / advertising a product(s) to specific groups – could this be a training class?"

"Give idea packets, suggestions, etc. for marketing libraries effectively to the community, local fiscal agents, state legislative folks and in-house with staff. Help develop a video that could be used with local cable and TV stations to promote libraries."

Assessment

Another issue of increasing importance, and one that goes hand-in-hand with marketing and advocacy, is assessment. The following comments, regarding the need for SELA to take an active role in assessment, were received in response to the survey.

"Develop assessment tools or partner with initiatives like LibQUAL and SAILS to provide these tools for SELA members."

"Assessment increasingly is required both on campus and off campus, e.g. for SACS accreditation reviews. We need to develop useful assessment measures for library services and then make those measures available to member libraries and librarians. It does not make sense for short staffed libraries to try to reinvent the wheel when it comes time to assess a particular library service—let's work together to develop measures that we all can use.

"Provide guidelines for standards that can be used for accreditation."

General

Comments that did not fall into one of the categories above are provided below. These cover a number of issues including the need to market SELA among librarians in the Southeast.

"Work in conjunction with the ALA-APA to set guidelines for salaries in the Southeast."

"Consultants listing of librarians who have experience for building programs."

"The library buildings in the Southeast has been a successful, informative program. Would like to see this program continued at future conferences with updates, of course."

"Come up with 'essential lists' i.e. every library should subscribe to these types of electronic resources, etc."

"I didn't know there was such a thing as SELA, and I have been a librarian in Georgia and Florida for 20 years. Is it part of ALA?"

Question # 5 - Are there other committees that you would like to see in SELA?

The survey listed the committees that were currently active, but not the sections and roundtables.

The committee suggested most often was one on "Technology", "Digitization" or "Electronic Resources". This was no surprise, and it supports the data collected on the question "what were the top 3 issues". Tied for the second most suggested committee were "Advocacy and Marketing" and "Mentoring". Comments regarding mentoring included: "Mentoring for new librarians and/or aspiring librarians" and "A committee specifically focused on new librarians". One respondent wrote the following regarding advocacy: "If SELA could attract sufficient Library Trustees and Friends of Library members to support an Advocacy Committee, that would address needs this locale will be facing but in which library staff cannot actively get involved." Multiple requests were also made for committees on Information Literacy and Funding Issues (development, fundraising, grants, and consortia purchasing).

There were quite a few single requests for committees that will be listed here by general category. Related to patron services, respondents requested committees on disability services, youth services, resources, and "Community Information and Referral". Requests for a committee to deal with professional issues included: "Encourage people to attend library school", "Salary and Status", "Please address the trend toward replacing professional librarians with paraprofessional", and "Leadership". Librarians in specific types of libraries feel a need for a committee to support their interests as evidenced by the following comments: "Joint-use libraries (academic-public)", "... library administrators share many common problems so maybe library administration", "Small (1 and 2 person) libraries", and "Do you have a rural libraries committee, section, or round table? Are rural libraries a priority of SELA?".

Requests that could not be categorized included: library history, poor library bindings, assessment, regional communication initiatives, and "special web resources for members". In addition there were a number of respondents who felt that SELA already has "enough" or "too many" committees. Below are some of these comments:

"Too many committees already and no reporting/accountability to the Board or membership. What, if anything, do some of these committees do?"

"Looks like you have plenty of committees. The important thing is having the committees currently in place function effectively."

Question # 6: Would you be willing to serve on such a committee?

Out of the 411 who responded to the survey, only 78 responded to this question. Of those 78, a total of 64 gave email addresses indicating their willingness to serve on a SELA committee. Only one respondent answered "No". Of the others, five said they were already serving on committees, two listed the committee of interest but gave no email address, 2 are not members, and one said "If the Director allows" but gave no email address [Figure 6].

Figure 6

Response	Count
Yes	64
No	1
Maybe	3
Already serving	5
Not a member	2
Listed a committee, not email	2
Yes, if my Director allow	1
TOTAL	78

Question # 7: Would you be willing to receive your copy of the Southeastern Librarian solely in an electronic format?

The response to this question was that an overwhelming 80.5% of the respondents are willing to receive the journal online only. However, a cross tabulation of those that were willing to receive it solely online with their indicated current membership was slightly lower at 71.3%.   Additional comments in the final section of the survey indicate that access to both formats would be ideal, as there is still the desire for a print "cumulative" or "reference" copy.

Question # 8: Is there anything else you would like to add that was not addressed here?

Many of the responses to this question reiterated comments made in response to previous questions, such as suggestions for training. There were several comments on the effect of budget cuts on travel and participation in SELA. Comments about SELA were both positive and negative. The majority of the responses to this question addressed the need for SELA to find an appropriate role, market itself, and increase membership. Meaningful comments are provided below.

"I think it may be time to reconsider the value added by regional library associations."

"I'd like to know more about this organization. I've been a member of SLA and ALA for 4 years and never heard of this organization."

"SELA must carve out a niche which state library associations do not currently address. I think the Interstate Cooperation Committee could become a very important one; it is something that is uniquely regional. Also the Legislative committee should try to give region-based support to national legislative efforts."

"I have to admit that I am not a member of SELA and have not yet been convinced of the importance of belonging to this regional professional organization. This survey is a good first step to increasing SELA's visibility. I'm not certain what the answer is but SELA could benefit from greater exposure."

"SELA committees should permit virtual membership-library travel budgets are increasingly tight and most communication can be handled via email during the year."

Conclusion

The information gathered through this survey provides insight into the needs and concerns of librarians throughout the Southeast. It also reflects the image of SELA and the need to revitalize and promote the Association. The Planning and Development Committee will use this information to prepare the 2004-2007 Strategic Plan. An edited version of this data (to conceal the identity of respondents) will be sent to the SELA Webmaster, upon approval of the SELA Executive Board, to be added to the Website. It is the hope of the Planning and Development Committee that this data will serve as a resource in organizational planning and future programming.

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