

Disability and Accessibility: Understanding the Education Needs of Library Graduate Students

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INTRODUCTION

This project began through causal conversations with current library graduate students at the iSchool at UIUC as well as library colleagues. This led to a grant application for a series of surveys across several groups of library professionals, as well as a cross-disciplinary scoping review of training literature that incorporates emotional intelligence, mindfulness, compassion, or empathy. This poster highlights results from the survey of current library graduate students.

Thesis: Ascertain the level of training and comfort level of library graduate students relating to accessibility and interacting with people with disabilities.

Guiding Research Questions:

- How do library graduate students themselves feel about their educational experiences regarding accessibility and disability as they prepare for their first library jobs as credentialed librarians?
- What is the library graduate student comfort level in interacting with people with disabilities and troubleshooting assistive technologies?
- How relevant do current library graduate students feel that topics surrounding accessibility and disability will be to their careers?
- What training format do current library graduate students prefer to utilize when learning about topics of accessibility and disability?

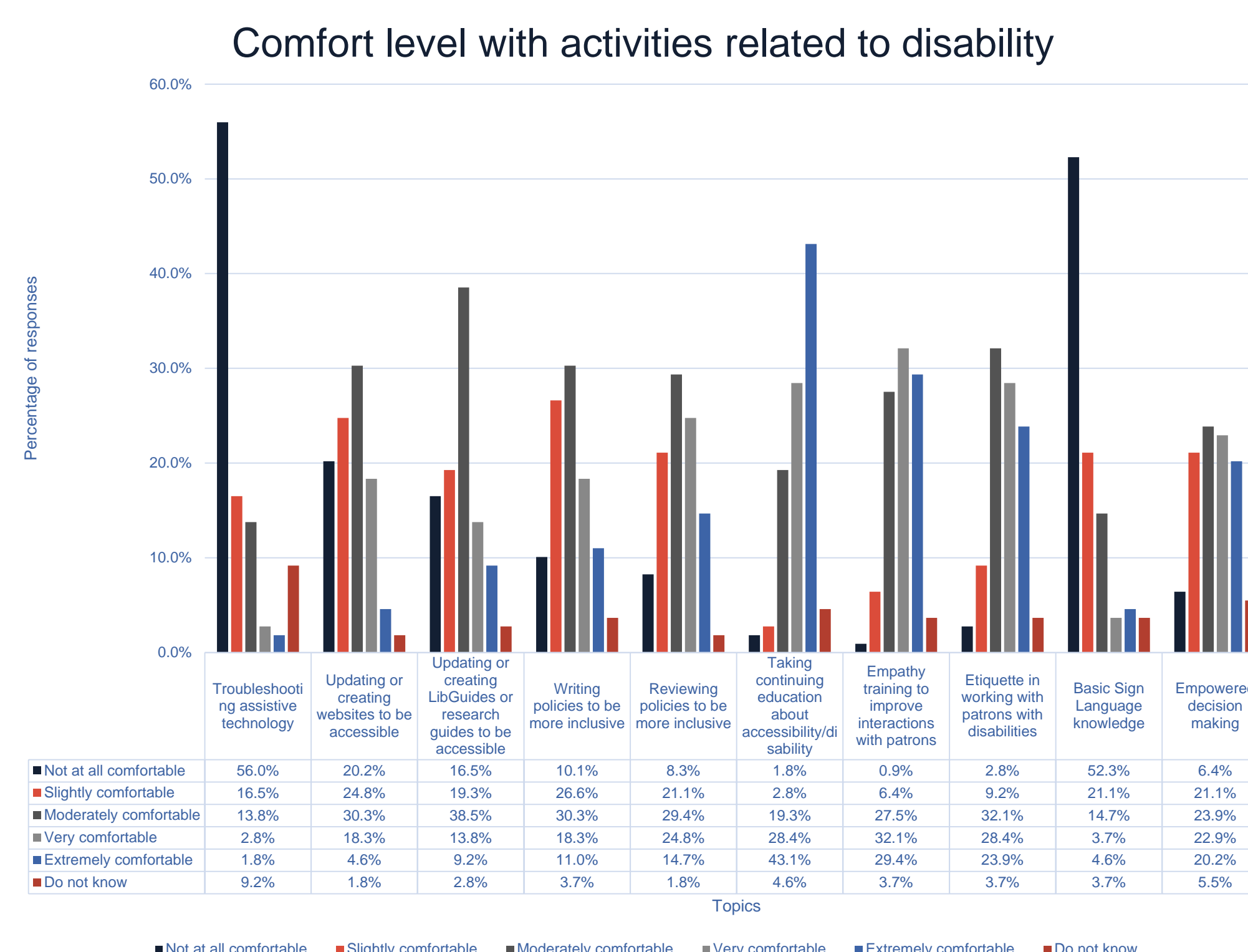
METHOD

- Internet based survey using Qualtrics.
- Survey administered in Fall 2019 and was open for two weeks.
- Recruitment was through email and social media.
- Snowball sampling was used.
- Library graduate student was defined as anyone currently enrolled in library graduate degree program. Current library employees who were seeking their library degrees were not excluded.
- 11 total questions = 9 multiple choice, 2 open ended.

BASIC RESULTS

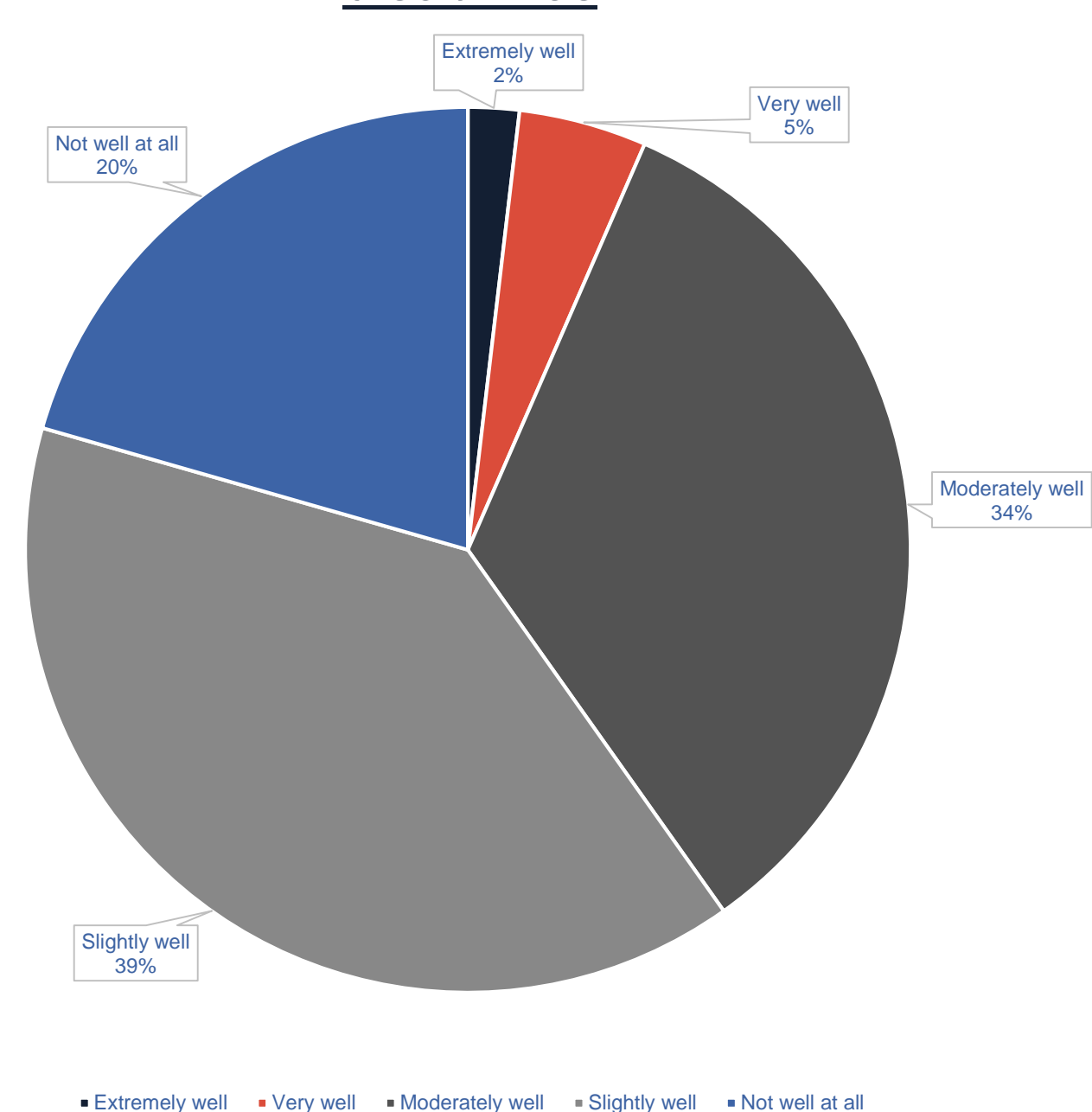
- 187 validated surveys (all questions were answered).
- 41% want to work in Academic Libraries, 31% want to work in Public Libraries, and the rest were distributed across different library types like government, special, and corporate.
- 24% want to work in reference and instruction, 21% public services, and the rest in single digits across other possible answers like outreach, preservation, administration, etc.

RESULTS



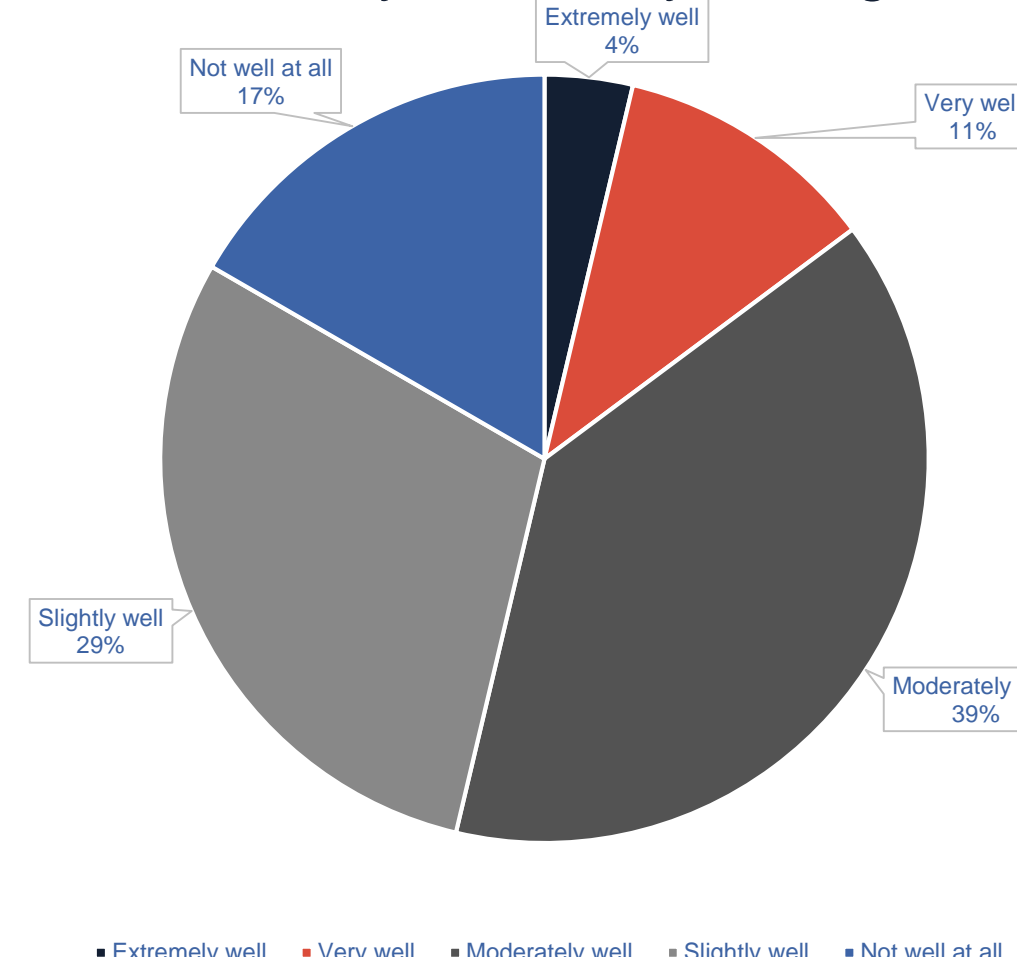
Key Finding: Largest area of discomfort was troubleshooting assistive technology.

How well library graduate students feel they are prepared by their graduate programs to assist patrons with disabilities



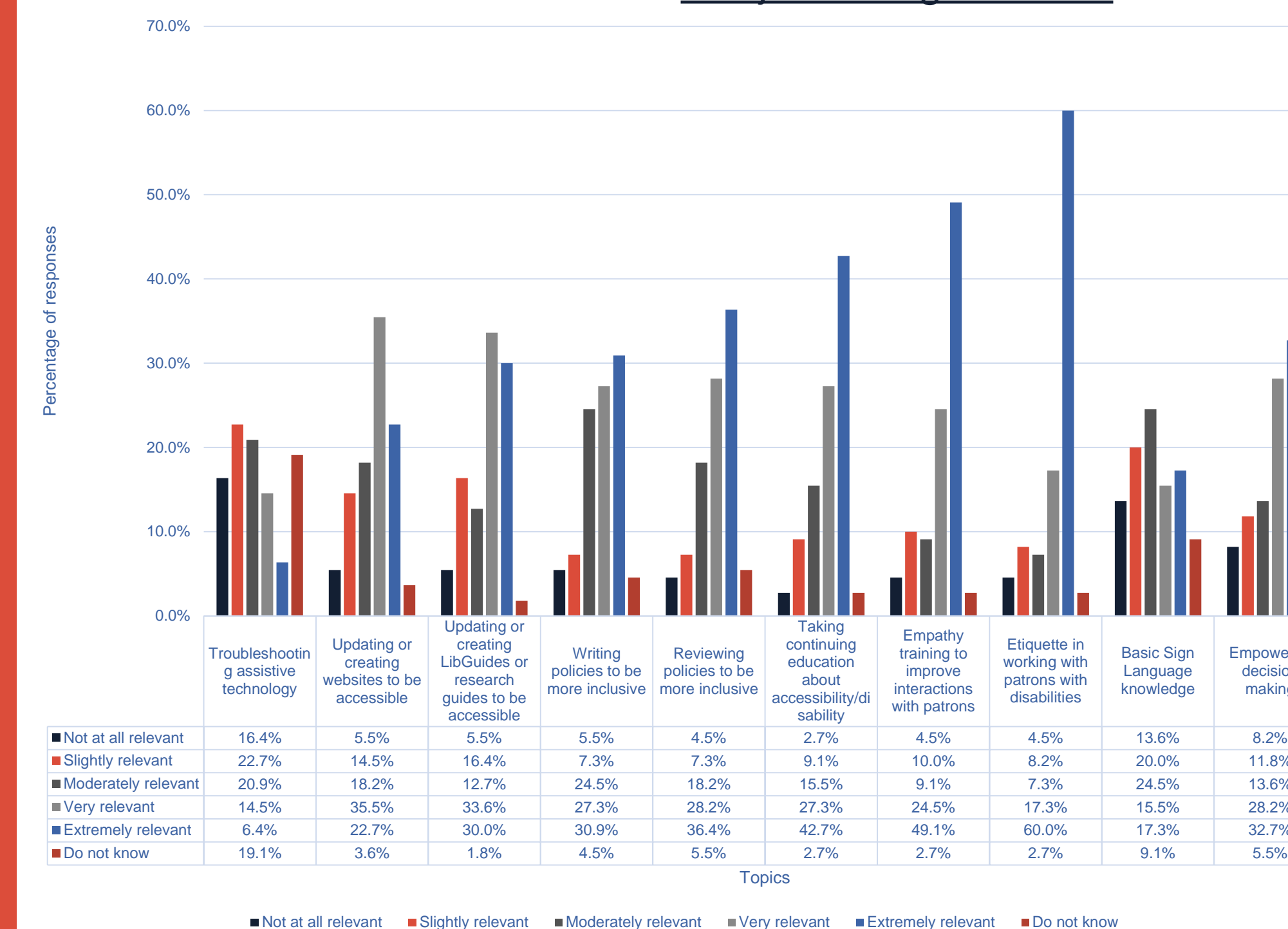
Key Finding: 59% of respondents feel that they are only slightly well or not well at all prepared to assist patrons with disabilities.

How well library graduate students feel prepared to address accessibility issues by their graduate program



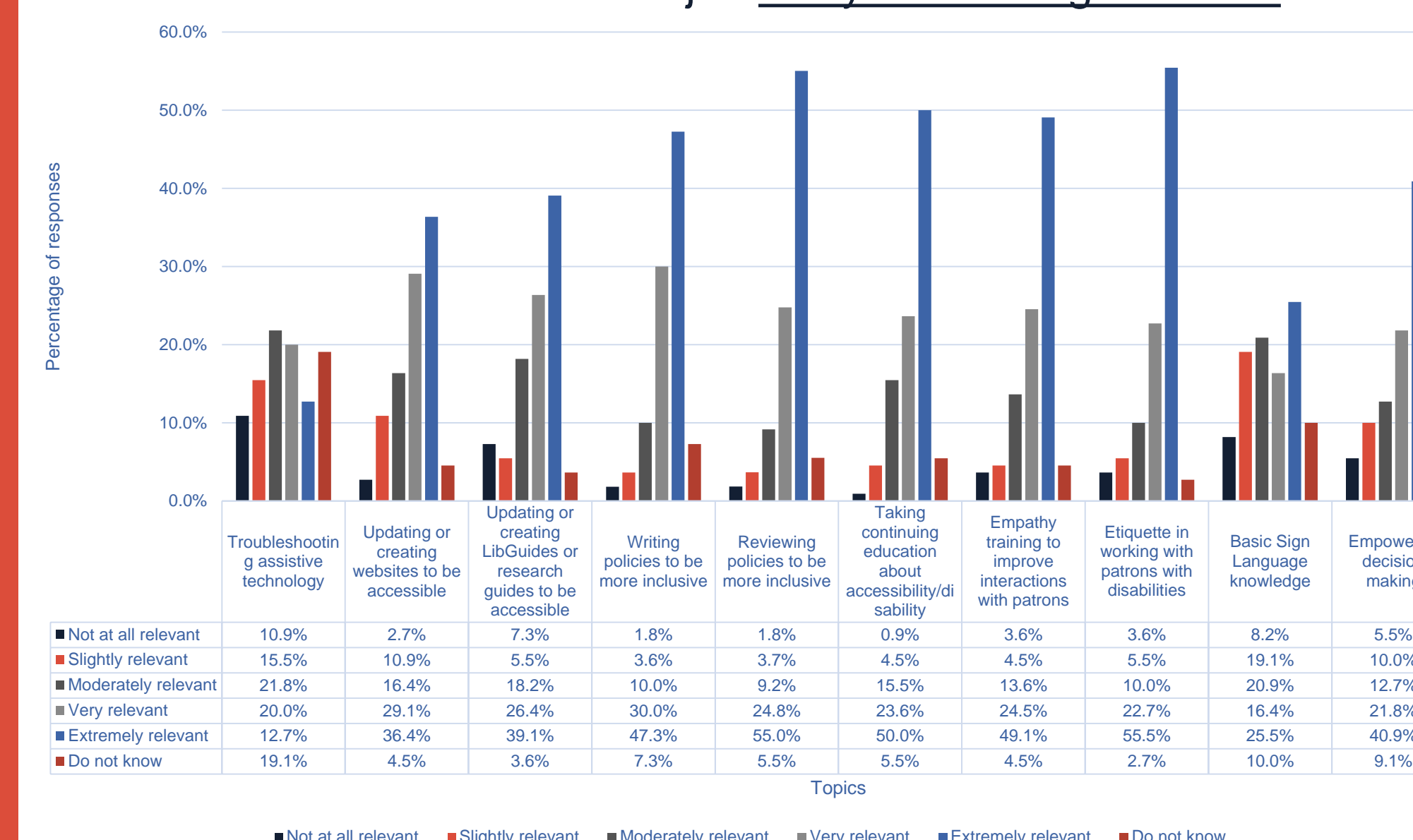
Key Finding: Only 15% of respondents felt that they had been extremely well or very well prepared by their graduate program to address accessibility issues.

How relevant library graduate students believe these activities will be in their first job after graduation



Key Finding: Empathy and etiquette were the two activities that library graduate students believe will be the most relevant in their first job after graduation.

How relevant library graduate students believe these activities will be in their job five years after graduation



Key Finding: Respondents marked four areas nearly equally as extremely relevant: Reviewing policies to be more inclusive, Taking continuing education about accessibility and disability, Empathy training to improve interactions with patrons, and Etiquette in working with patrons with disabilities.

Students had a lot to say about the education that they were getting including:

"My MLIS program...is far too worried about theory and does not have nearly enough about practice. It's been very frustrating for me."

"The only real education I have gotten is from fellow students who are self-advocates, from a conference, and research that I have done myself. I do not feel our library school courses address these issues enough, and I feel inadequately prepared to push for a more inclusive space at my workplace as a result."

Students also indicated that they are generally comfortable with learning about issues and activities related to disability and accessibility. Their top three training formats were:

- One-day workshops
- Online tutorials/webinars/seminars
- Print/PDF handouts/guides

DISCUSSION

Several themes emerged from the survey including:

- Frustration with the lack of practical application of what is being learned.
- A strong desire to know more about disability and accessibility than just the bare minimum of ADA compliance.
- Concern over interacting positively with people with disabilities via etiquette and empathy.
- Dismay over the lack of inclusion of people with disabilities in the conversations and policy making about them.

CONCLUSIONS

Library graduate students generally feel ill prepared to address issues around accessibility and to confidently interact with people with disabilities.

Recommendations:

- Incorporate concepts of universal design, accessibility, and disability across the curriculum.
- Create an inclusive curriculum.
- Provide learning experiences in and out of the classroom regarding accessibility and disability.

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