



The Room Where It  
Happens: Academic  
Librarians at Non-  
Library Conferences



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STEM South 2020

# Who we are

## **Roxanne Bogucka (she/her)**

Health Sciences Liaison Librarian

~15 years of STEMM Librarianship

B.S. in a STEMM field

- American Association for the Advancement of Science – 5x
- American Public Health Association – 2x
- American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy – 2x

## **Hannah Chapman Tripp (she/her)**

Biosciences Liaison Librarian

>1 year into STEMM Librarianship

No STEMM degrees

- American Association for the Advancement of Science – 1x

# Overview

Through the next 20 minutes we will discuss:

- Importance of librarian attendance at subject conferences
- Themes in the literature
- Survey methodology to assess attendance at subject conferences
- Results will explore funding trends, self-reported value, list of conference opportunities

## Interchangeable Terms

Subject conference

Non-librarian conference

Discipline conference

# Liaison challenge

Many academic librarians have liaison duties with a subject area or department.

Conference choices may be based on job duties, committee obligations or self-selected specialty within librarianship.

Not many members of served communities attend librarian-specific conferences.

## Traditional Librarian Conferences?

ALA

ACRL

LITA

LOEX

SLA

MLA

Consortia Specific

**Missed opportunity for engagement?**

# Literature

Of available literature on the subject of librarians attending non-librarian conferences, nearly all are in support (Tysick, Bennet, Lyons, Hankins et al. & Tomaszewski and MacDonald).

Focus on personal experience persisted (Tysick). Several small studies pull quantifiable evidence (Bennet, Lyons).

Themes drawn out through the literature:

- Building skills. Strengthening connections. Collection benefits. Overcoming barriers. Conference diversity.

# Building skills

Tysick states:

**"many of us benefit from attending library-related electronic product demonstrations or sitting in on "best practices" presentations, we may sometimes be ignorant of the skills crucial to students and faculty in the disciplines we support."**

Keeping abreast with emerging trends in assigned subject areas and identifying new means of engagement:

- Teaching, student interaction, LibGuide building, technology, useful workshop topics... and more.

# Strengthening connections

Hankins et al. states:

**“As libraries seek to raise the level of librarian and faculty interaction, attendance at subject conferences allow librarians to become active participants in the discipline through the discussion, debate, and development of new ideas and technology.”**

Highlight the role of librarians in a new way to scholars.

- Potential collaborations, illustrating subject-matter engagement, heightening the awareness of the librarian profession.
- Refreshed sense of community engagement beyond the library.

# Collecting materials

Harrison notes opportunities to:

**“speak with faculty members in the fields they are responsible for liaising with, giving them insight into the information needs of their potential patron base. This interaction can help inform collection development decisions.”**

Lyons in 2007 did a comparison of conference content between ALA and APSA and highlighted several strengths of the discipline specific conference:

- Generalist vs specialist vendors
- Awareness of discipline specific publishing strengths



# Overcoming barriers

Tomaszewski & MacDonald state:

**"Subject conferences can help the librarian to understand the breadth and scope of a topic and identify trends in current research. The only real challenge is finding the right conference to attend."**

But, attending any conference is not without its barriers:

- Financial: institutional support may be limited
- Emotional: feelings of isolation (Hankins)
- Choice may be difficult (Tysick)

# Conference diversity

Subject conferences should not replace entirely librarian-specific conference attendance.

A majority of survey respondents ranked professional rejuvenation as “very important” in Connell and Vega’s survey on librarian attitudes toward conference attendance (Vega & Connell, 501).

Rejuvenation in both subjects and librarianship is integral for the liaison role.

- Articles made recommendations to strike a balance between subject specific and librarian focused conferences.

# Methodology

Developed a survey in Qualtrics with questions targeting non-librarian conference attendance, perceived benefit, presentation at conference, & demographic information.

Survey included:

- Perceived value question
- Opportunity to list up to 3 non-librarian conferences
- 4 conference specific questions
- 2 funding questions
- 3 demographic questions

# Methodology

Post IRB approval, survey distributed to participants via organization-based library listservs

- April - June
- Wide-subject range
- Focused on self-identified STEMM respondents today
- Participants self-selected

Your primary role is ...

liaison librarian/subject specialist--area studies

liaison librarian/subject specialist--fine arts

liaison librarian/subject specialist--humanities

liaison librarian/subject specialist--social sciences

**liaison librarian/subject specialist--STEM**

topic specialist (including GIS & data)

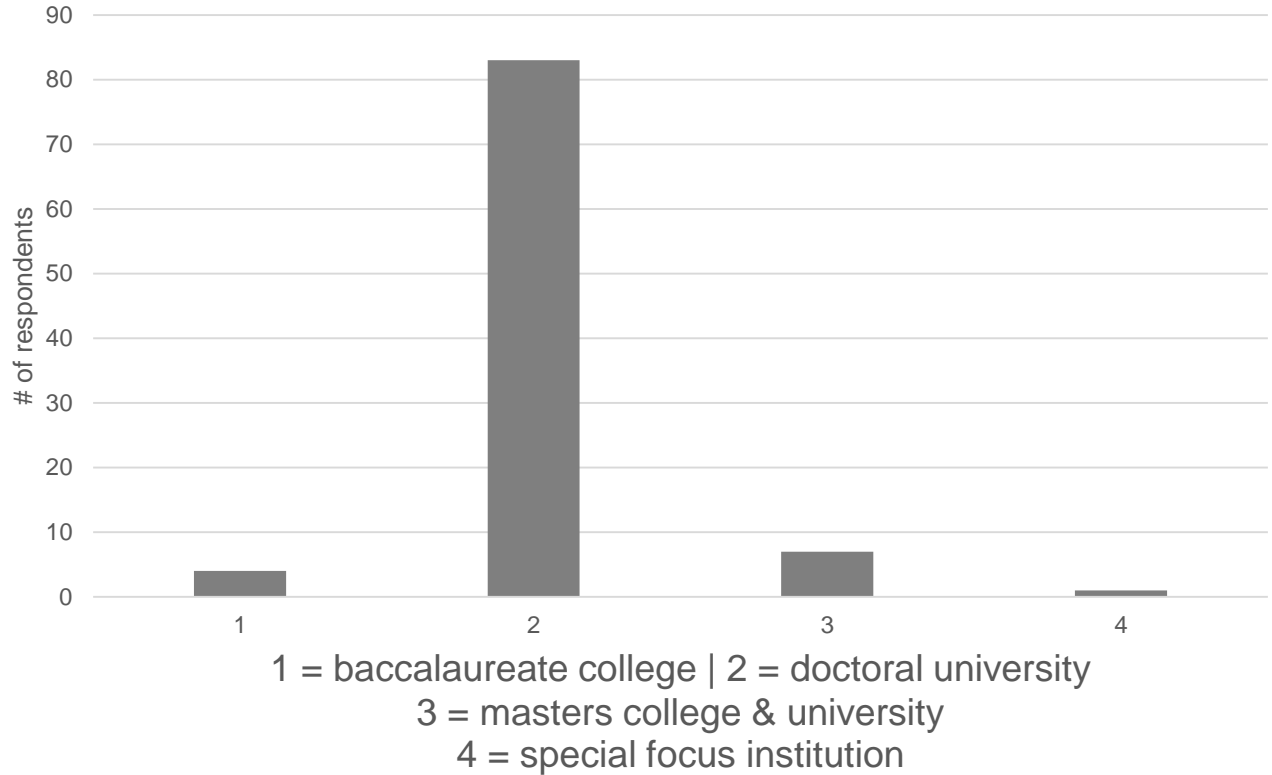
instruction librarian

collection management librarian

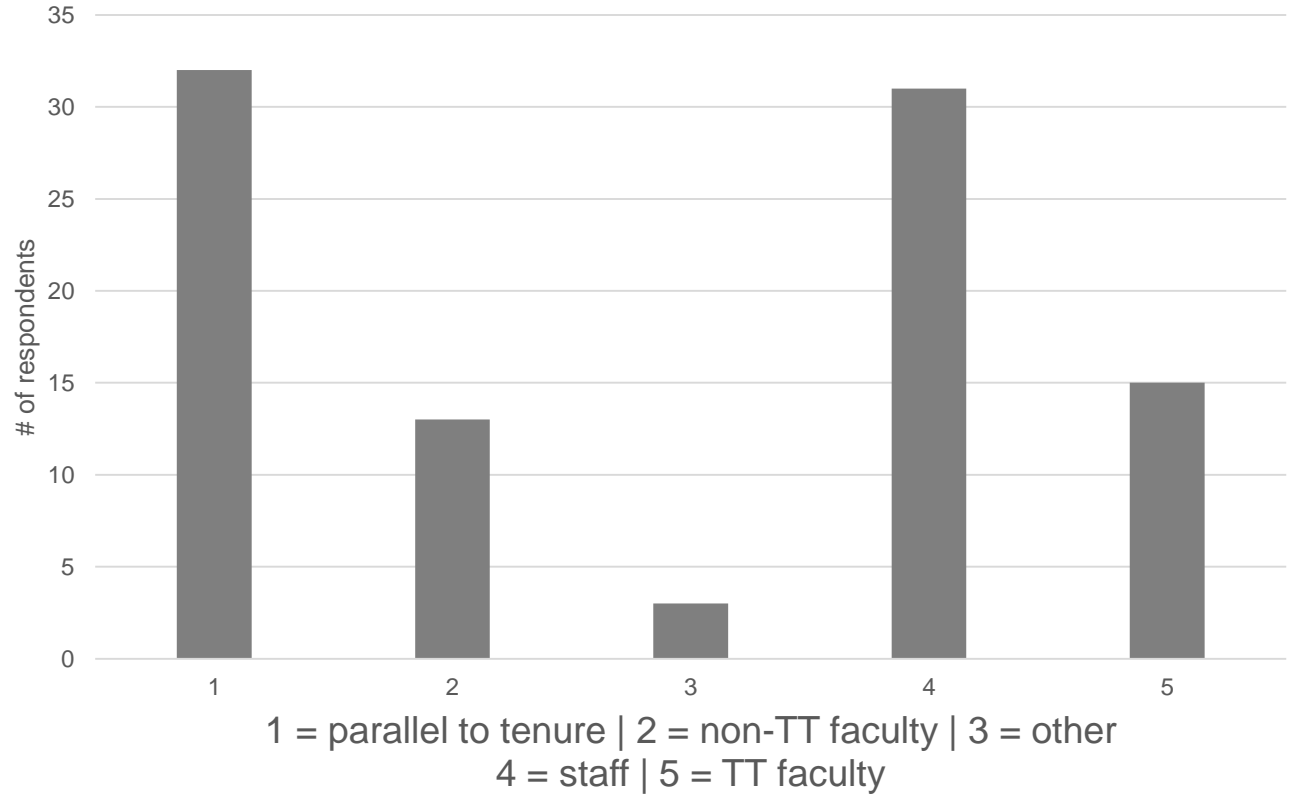
library management/administration

other

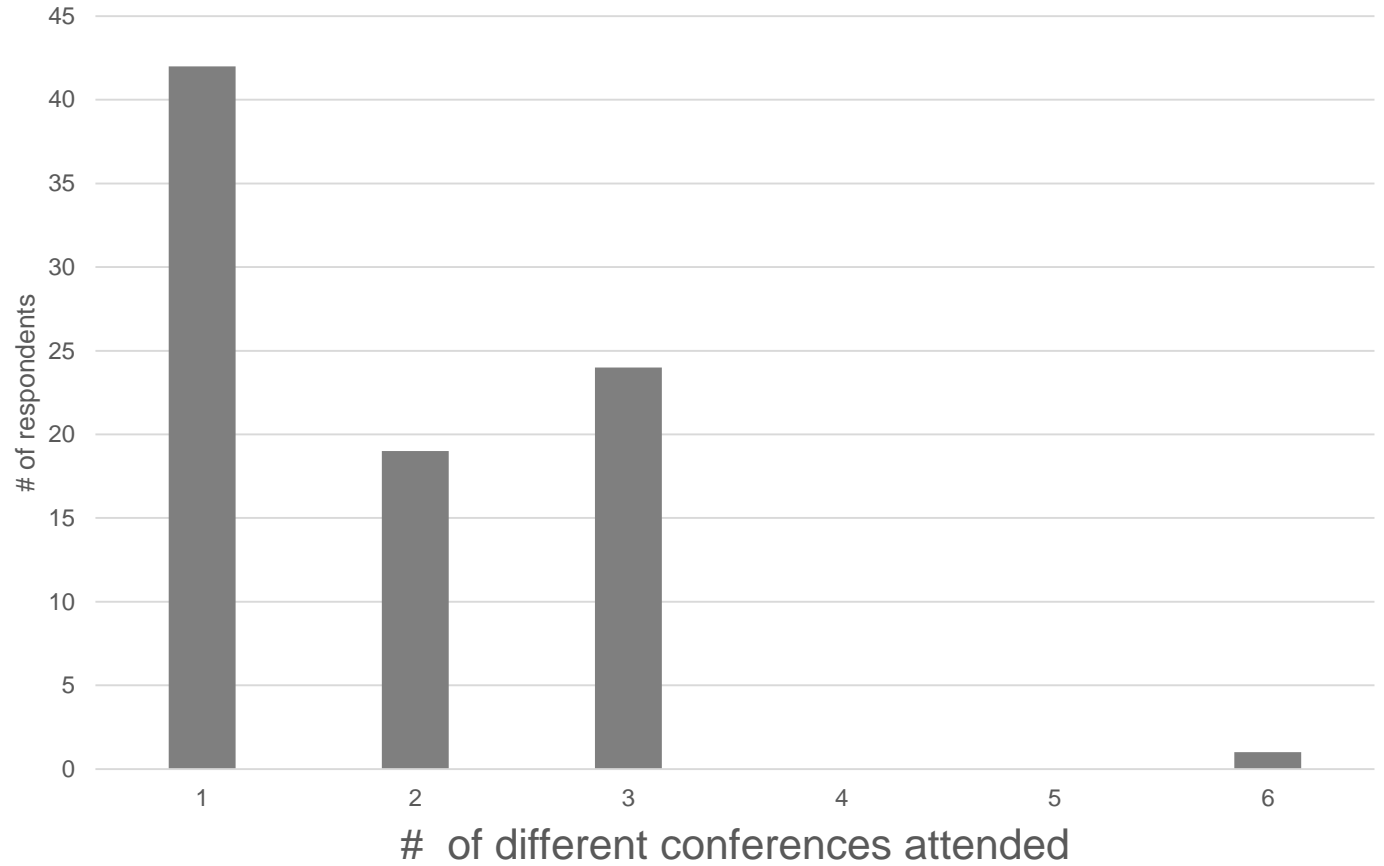
The Carnegie  
Classification of the  
institution where  
you work is ...



Your position is...

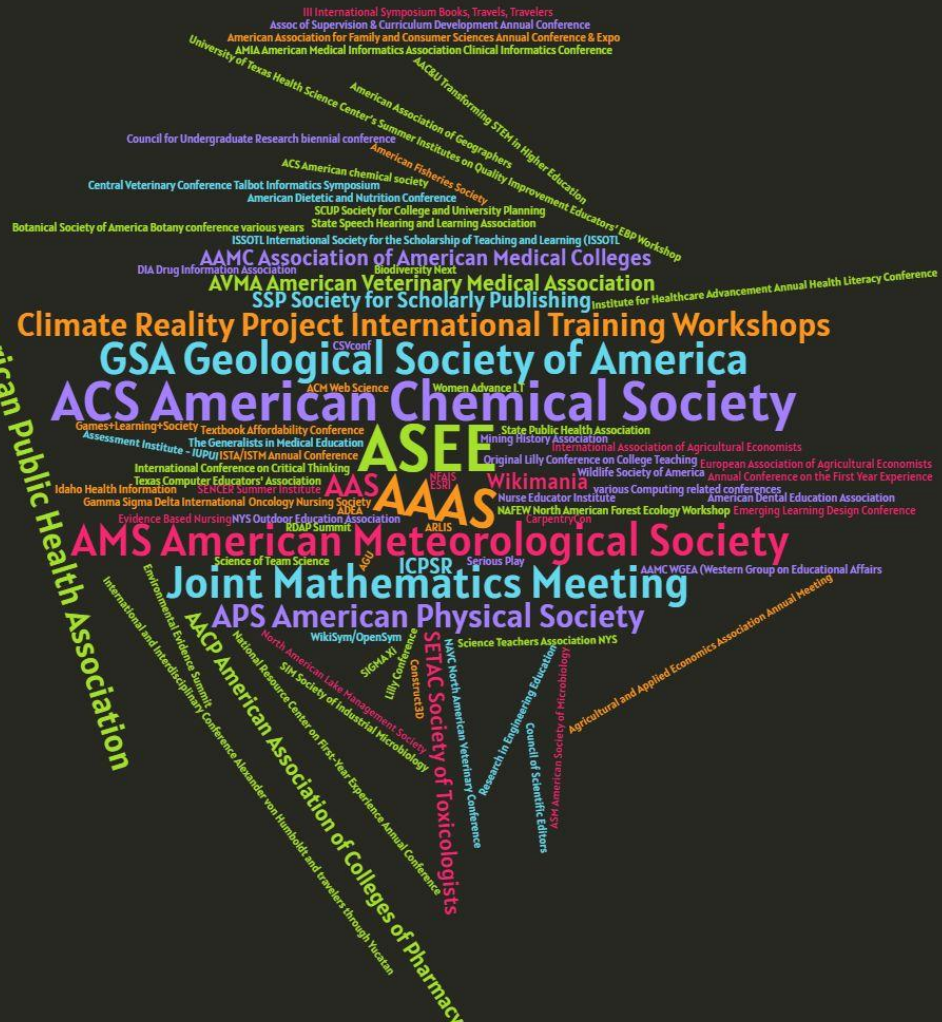


Different  
conferences  
attended



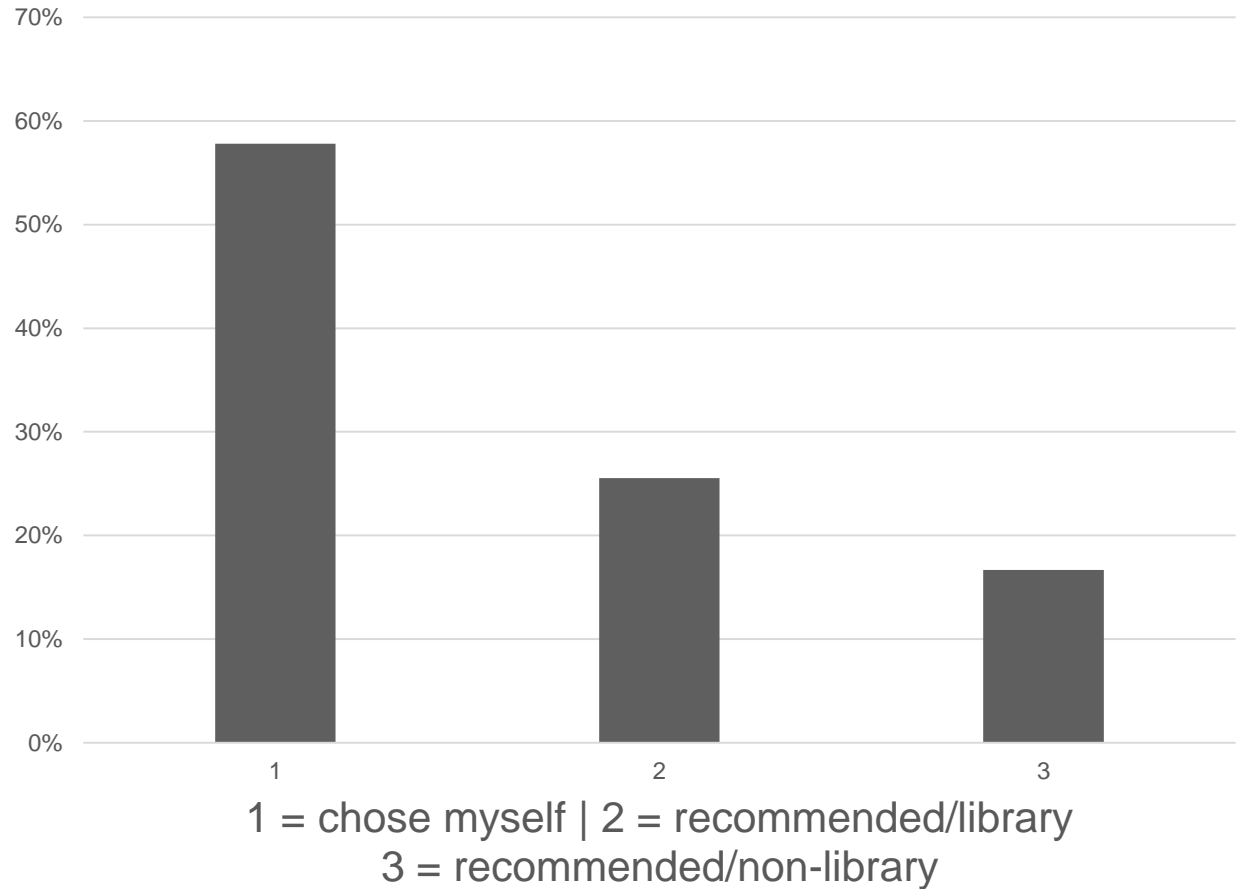
What conferences do people attend?

APHA American Public Health Association

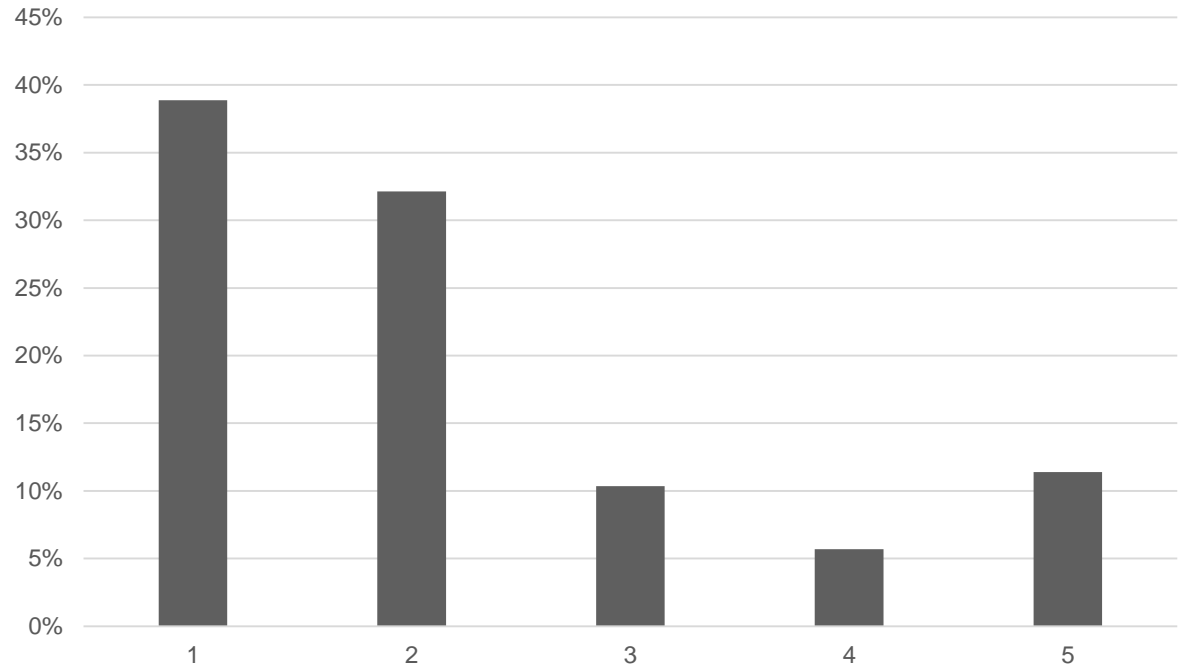




How did you  
decide to  
attend this  
conference?



Did you, or  
will you  
present at  
this  
conference?



1 = no | 2 = self/librarians, home inst.  
3 = non-library, home inst.  
4 = non-library, other | 5 = librarians, other

## CONFERENCE FUNDING

These questions address how your institution funds conference travel and attendance, as a possible influencing factor on conference choice, and **ARE NOT** specific to non-library conferences.

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How does your library or institution provide funding for conferences?

My library or institution does not provide funding for conferences.

My library or institution only provides funding for librarians who are presenting at conferences.

My library or institution gives all of its librarians the same amount for conferences.

My library or institution apportions annual travel funds based on librarians' conference requests.

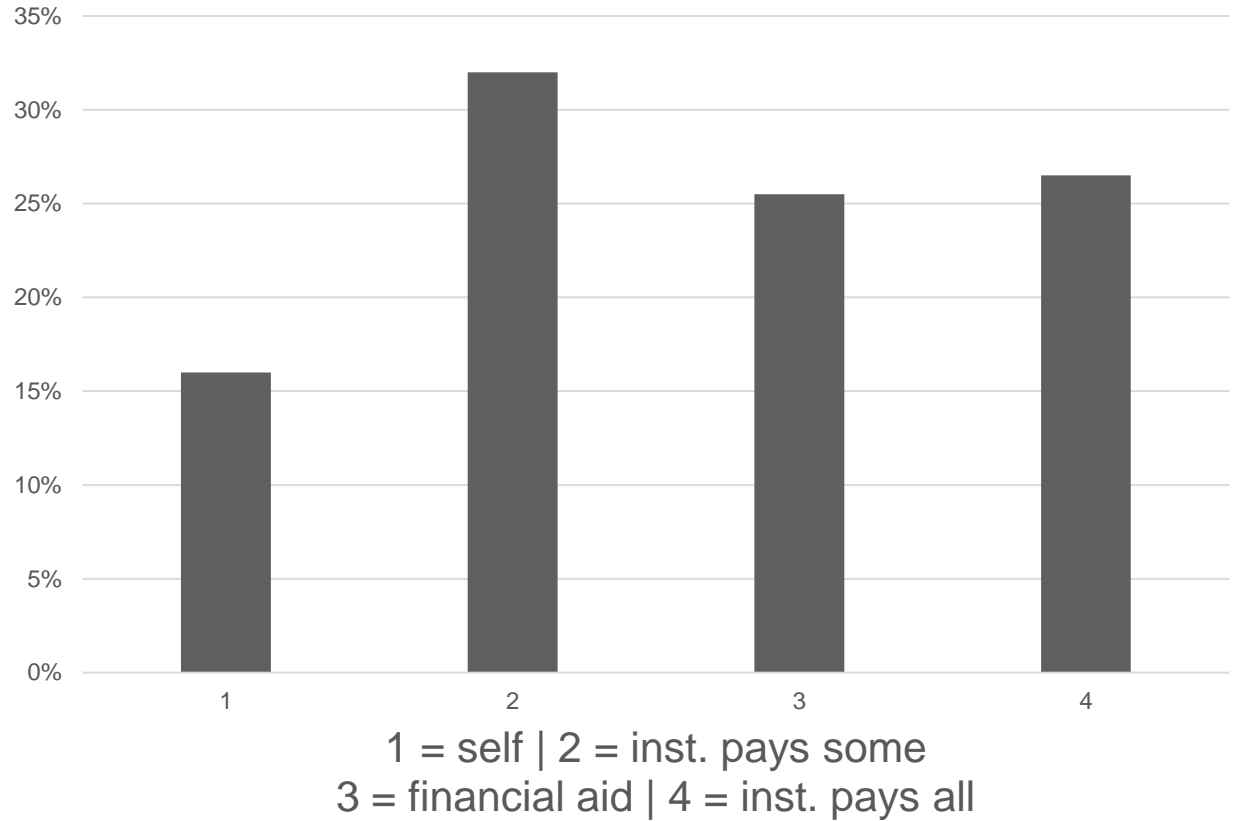
Other

How much was your most recent annual allocation for conference attendance including travel/lodging/per diem?

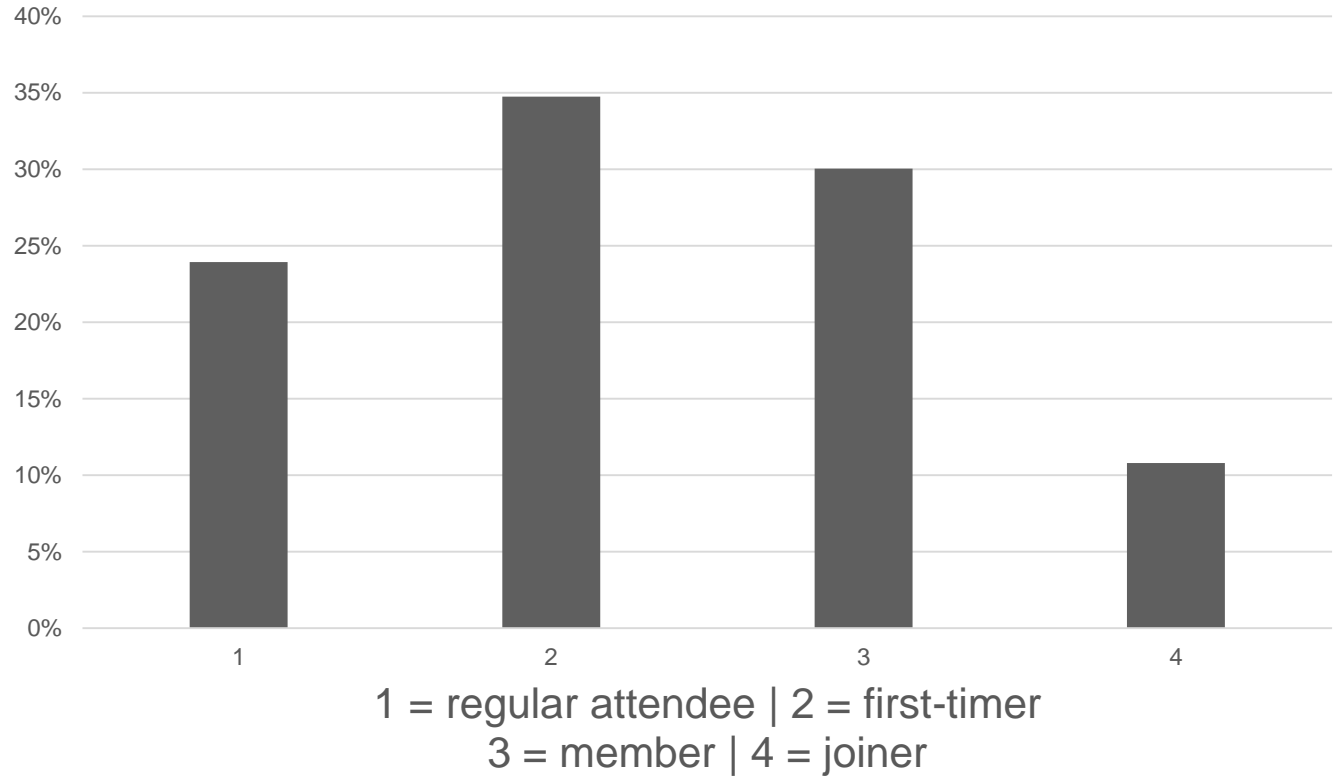
In US\$

In €

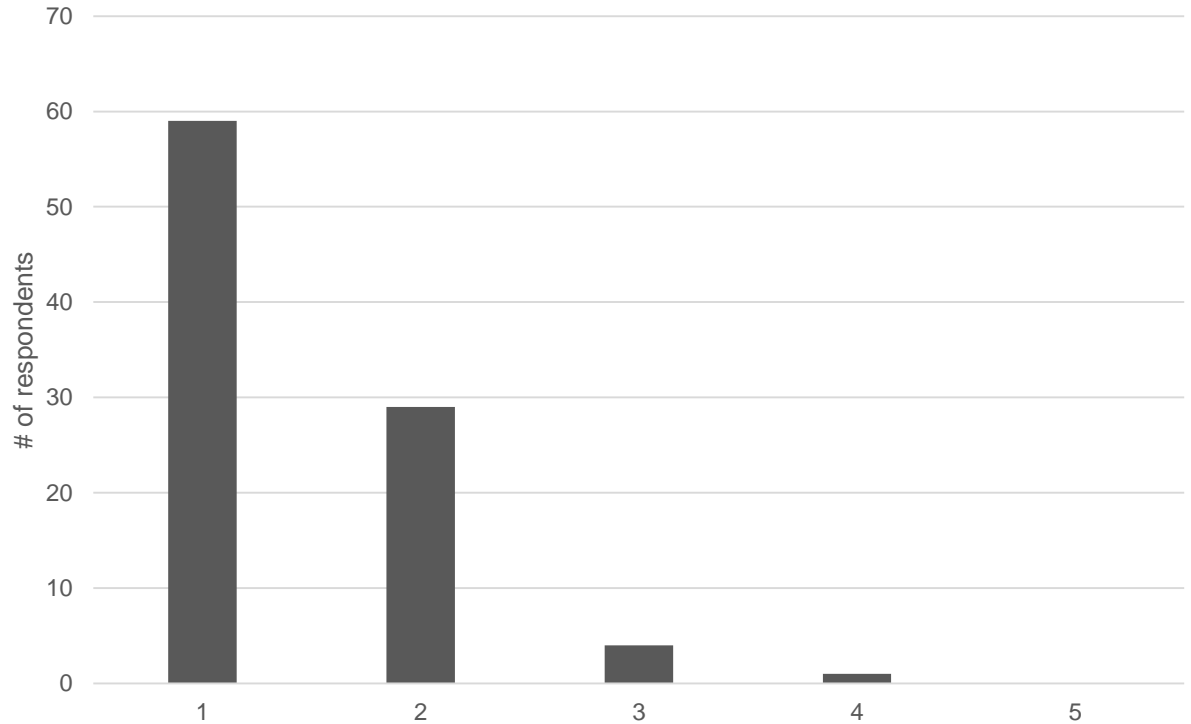
How did you, or  
will you pay for  
this conference?



What is your involvement with this conference?



Please rate your overall impression of the value of attending conferences in disciplines other than librarianship.



1 = extremely positive | 2 = somewhat positive  
3 = neither positive nor negative  
4 = somewhat negative | 5 = extremely negative

**Hard To Build Long**

Devalues Library Associations

**Few Service Opportunities**

**Time**

Uses Limited Conference Funds

**Money**

Harder To Justify To Supervisors

**Less Relevant To Libraries**

**Term Relationships**  
So Many To Choose From



**Emerging Areas**  
**Strengthen Ties**

Meet Potential Collaborators

**Network**

**Involvement**  
**Conversations**

Rewarded For Expertise

**Interact**

**Broader Perspective**

**Observe**

Needs Better

**Collegiality**

Disciplinary And Research Focus

**Connect**

**Keep Current**

**Street Cred**  
Escape Librarian Bubble

Deepen Subject Expertise

**Bring Back Ideas**

Know Users' Needs Better

Gain Insight Into Disciplines

Represent Librarianship

**Learn**  
**Engage**

Know Users

## Things we wish we could've asked...

- Does the non-library organization you belong to have a Library & Information Science section?
- Have you served on a committee in a non-library organization?
- Have you served in an office in a non-library organization?
- For specific non-library conferences, it would've been nice to know how many times people had attended them. For example, I've attended AAAS 5 times...
- Provide full names of conferences, not just acronyms
- Geographical info
- How many years have you been a librarian? How many years have you been a science librarian?
- Do your departments ever underwrite your attendance?

# Our future questions

Will more virtual meetings = more librarians at non-library conferences?

How will non-STEMM librarians' results compare to STEMM-librarians' results?

How do institutions fund institutionally recommended conferences?

Do early-career librarians and established librarians have different likelihoods of attending non-library conferences?

Are some disciplines more likely to have librarians attending their conferences?

If you'd like to be informed of the results of this study,  
sign up at <https://tinyurl.com/yaepj5rs>

Questions?

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