



Who Thinks What About Research?

Librarian Research According
to Librarians, Faculty, and
Collective Agreements

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UNIVERSITY
OF MANITOBA

Introduction

- ❖ MLIS Thesis
- ❖ Completed at the University of Alberta in 2016
- ❖ Working towards publication





Study Overview

- ❖ To explore the role and perception of academic librarians as researchers according to:
 - ❖ Academic Librarians
 - ❖ Non-Librarian Faculty
 - ❖ Collective Agreements



Background

- ❖ Research expectations for academic librarians
- ❖ An ALA core competency
- ❖ Supported/encouraged by organizations like CARL and CAUT
- ❖ Research education in MLIS programs
- ❖ Evidence-based librarianship
- ❖ Librarian research is diverse
- ❖ Librarians provide research support
- ❖ Threats to librarian research and academic freedom

Justification

- ❖ Lack of awareness
- ❖ Lack of support
- ❖ Relationships between librarians and faculty
- ❖ Supports/barriers
- ❖ Value
- ❖ Multiple perspectives





Research Questions

- ❖ How do academic librarians perceive their own status as researchers and the status of their own research?
 - ❖ Do academic librarians perceive themselves as researchers and/or academics?
 - ❖ What is the perceived value of librarian research?
- ❖ How are academic librarians perceived in a university setting by non-librarian faculty?
 - ❖ Do non-librarian faculty members perceive academic librarians as researchers/academics?
 - ❖ To what degree are non-librarian faculty aware of the research capabilities of librarians?
 - ❖ To what extent do non-librarian faculty employ the services of librarians in their own research?

Definitions

❖ For the purposes of this study:

❖ Academic

An individual who is required to conduct research regularly and publish their findings in a peer-reviewed journal as a major expectation of their position within the institution. Research is a central duty of an academic.

❖ Researcher

An individual who undertakes research as part of their position, but is not expected to do so with the explicit intention of publishing the findings in a peer-reviewed journal and is not bound by a publish-or-perish obligations, making it distinct from the Academic definition above. Research is permitted or required as part of a researcher's duties.

❖ Research

Generating or discovering new knowledge, or solving problems of a theoretical or practical nature, thus including both basic and applied research as well as more general scholarship.

Methodological Framework



- ❖ Sequential mixed-methods
- ❖ 3 Phases
 - ❖ Surveys
 - ❖ Interviews
 - ❖ Pilot
 - ❖ Collective Agreement Analysis
- ❖ Linked data
 - ❖ Analyzed individually, considered in concert
- ❖ Ethics obtained through the University of Alberta

Methodology - Surveys

❖ 6 Canadian Universities

- ❖ University of Alberta
- ❖ University of Calgary
- ❖ University of Manitoba
- ❖ University of Regina
- ❖ University of Saskatchewan
- ❖ University of Winnipeg

❖ Non-librarian Faculty:

- ❖ Humanities (Classics)
- ❖ Social Sciences (Anthropology)
- ❖ Sciences (Biology)

❖ Librarians:

- ❖ Affiliated libraries

❖ Contacted via email

❖ Two similar, but distinct surveys

- ❖ Adapted to each group
- ❖ Tested by a librarian and a non-librarian faculty not included in the study
- ❖ Administered via *FluidSurveys*

❖ Analysis

- ❖ Descriptive statistics
- ❖ Thematic analysis of open-ended questions

Methodology - Interviews

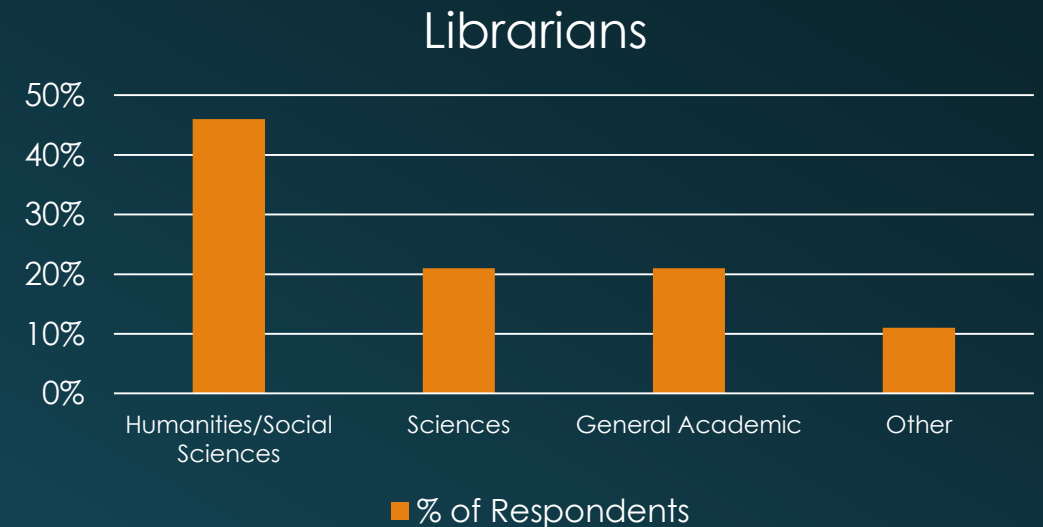
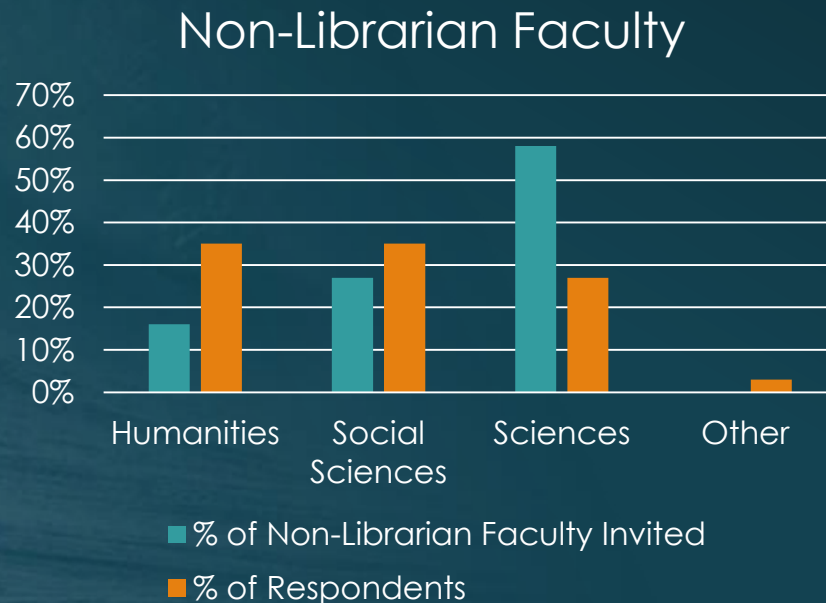
- ❖ Questions based off survey findings
- ❖ Pilot interviews conducted
 - ❖ Participants from survey respondents
 - ❖ Interview questions modified based on findings
 - ❖ Distinct data set
- ❖ Semi-structured questions
- ❖ 8 Canadian Universities
 - ❖ Expanded to include McMaster and McGill
- ❖ Contacted via email
- ❖ In-person or via phone
 - ❖ Recorded
 - ❖ Transcribed verbatim
- ❖ Coded
 - ❖ Open-coded
 - ❖ Coding framework
- ❖ Identification of Themes

Methodology – Collective Agreements

- ❖ Collective agreements were obtained from 12 Canadian Universities
 - ❖ 6 U15 universities: McGill, McMaster, University of Alberta, University of Calgary, University of Manitoba, University of Saskatchewan
 - ❖ 6 non-U15 universities: Brandon University, Brock University, Concordia University, MacEwan University, University of Regina, University of Winnipeg
 - ❖ Related documents were obtained in certain cases as well
 - ❖ E.g.; requirements for promotion and tenure
 - ❖ All materials retrieved from relevant university or union websites
- ❖ Collective agreements and related documents were examined for:
 - ❖ References to research as related to librarian duties
 - ❖ Expectations for research
 - ❖ Provisions for research
 - ❖ Promotion and/or tenure requirements
 - ❖ Unclear language with relation to research
 - ❖ Barriers to research and/or academic freedom

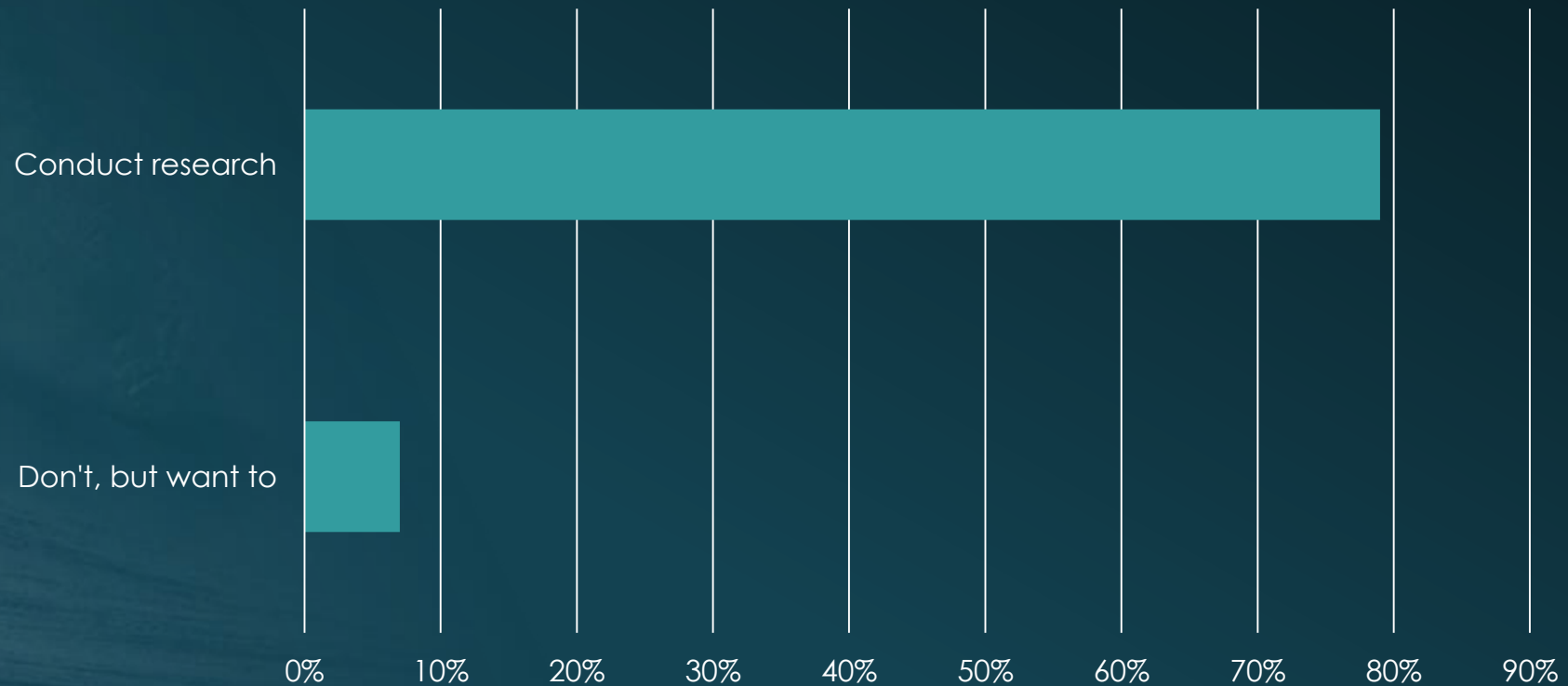
Surveys – Demographics

- ❖ 30 responses to each survey
 - ❖ 22% response rate for librarians
 - ❖ 6% response rate for non-librarian faculty



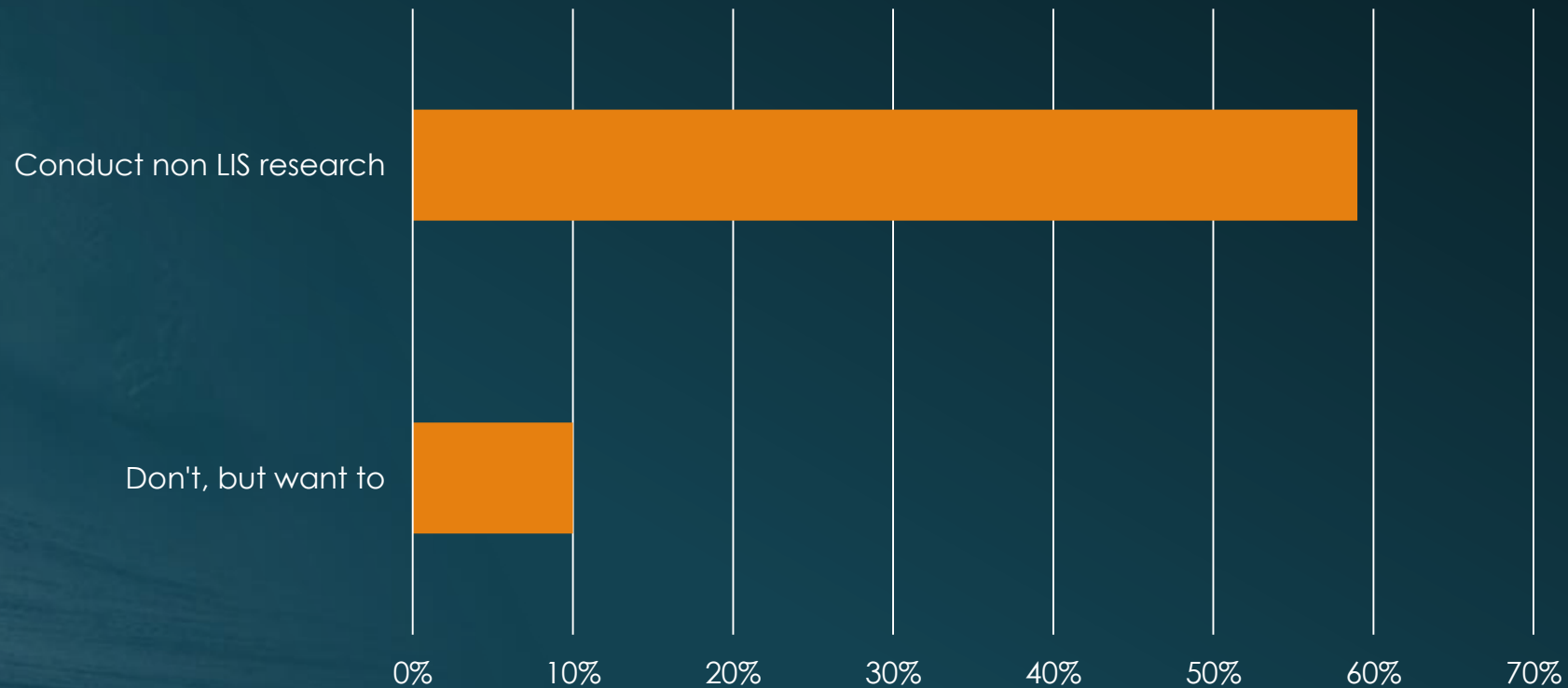
Findings – Librarian Surveys

❖ Librarians regularly conduct research



Findings – Librarian Surveys

❖ Librarians conduct research in non-LIS areas



Findings – Librarian Surveys

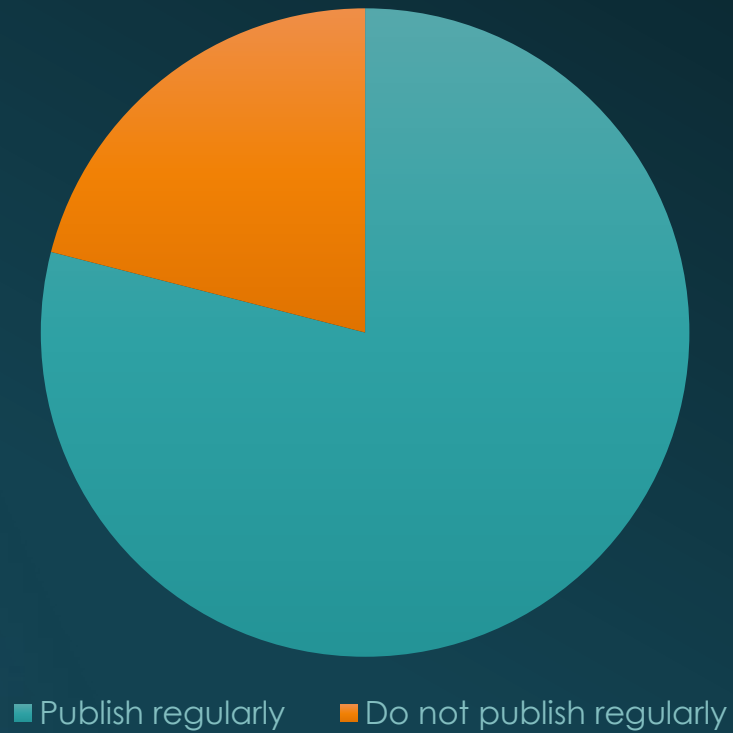
❖ Research is required or expected



■ Research required ■ Research expected

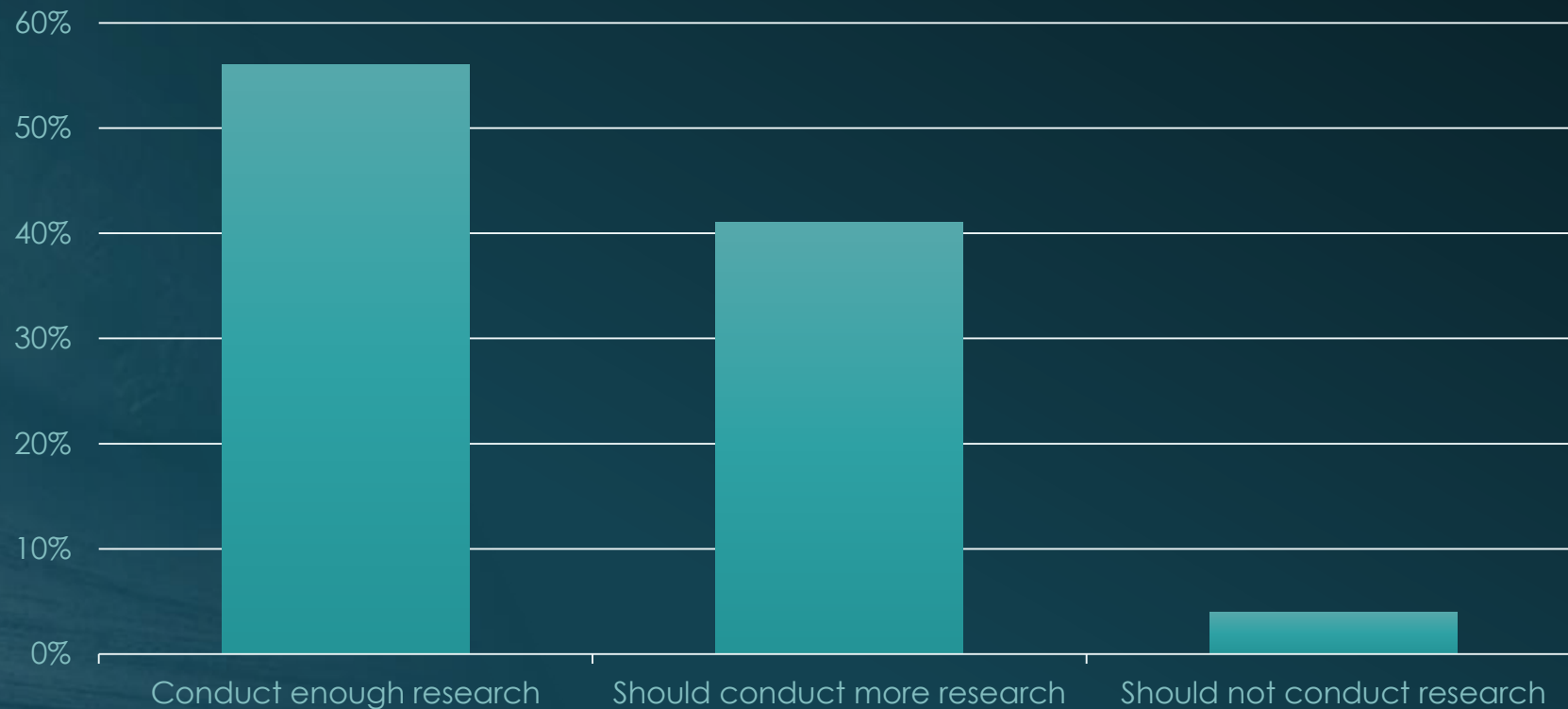
Findings – Librarian Surveys

❖ Librarians publish regularly



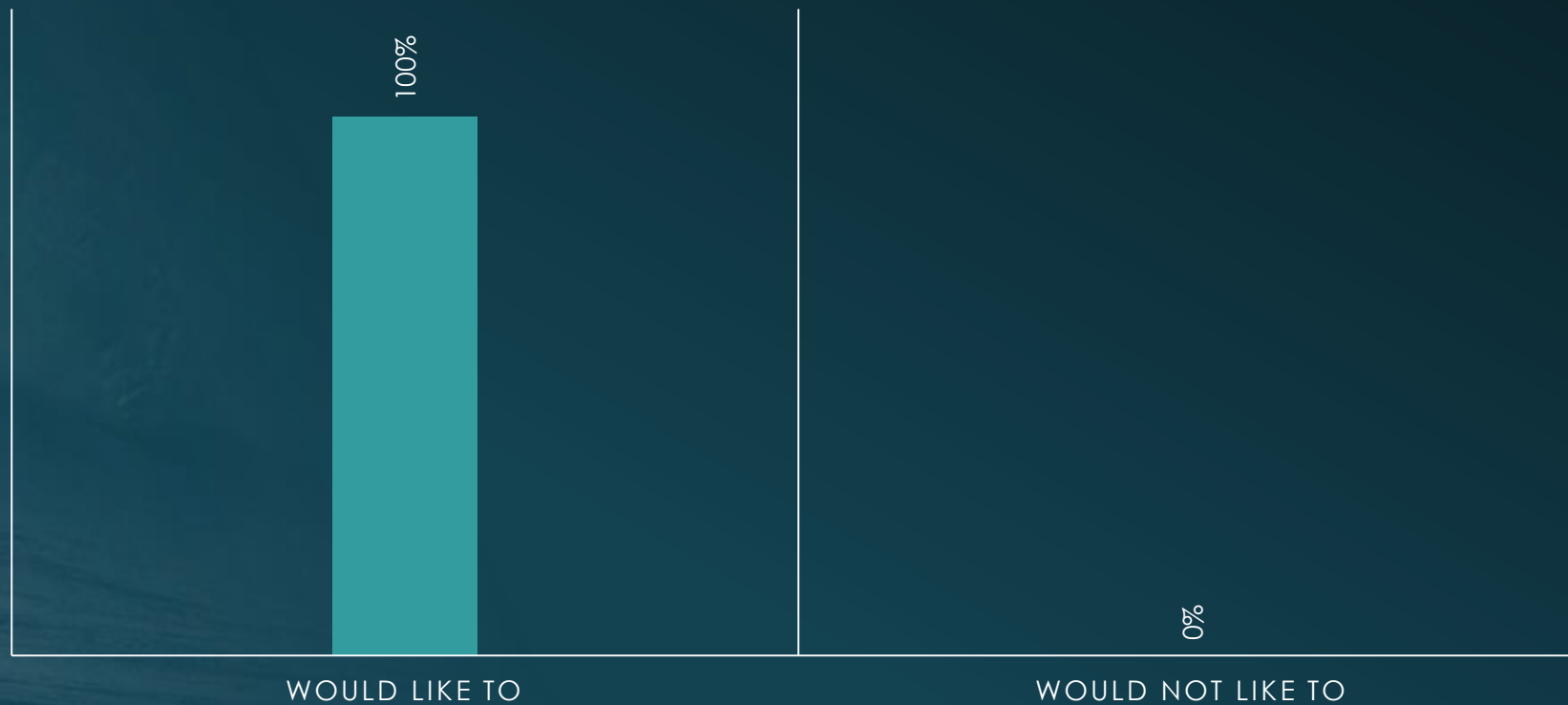
Findings – Librarian Surveys

❖ Do librarians conduct enough research?



Findings – Librarian Surveys

❖ Collaborative research



Findings – Librarian Surveys

❖ Top 3 duties of a librarian

Teaching & Teaching Support

Research

Collection Management

Findings – Librarian Surveys

❖ Research should not supersede service

I think it would be a bad idea to advocate for academic librarians to aspire to the same research roles as faculty.

Librarianship is a service profession, so research should be secondary

We are a service profession first and foremost

Unfortunately, research will be the first thing to go when librarians have to pick up more duties when colleagues leave and are not replaced.

It is already difficult to find the time to do research, and I fear it will get worse.



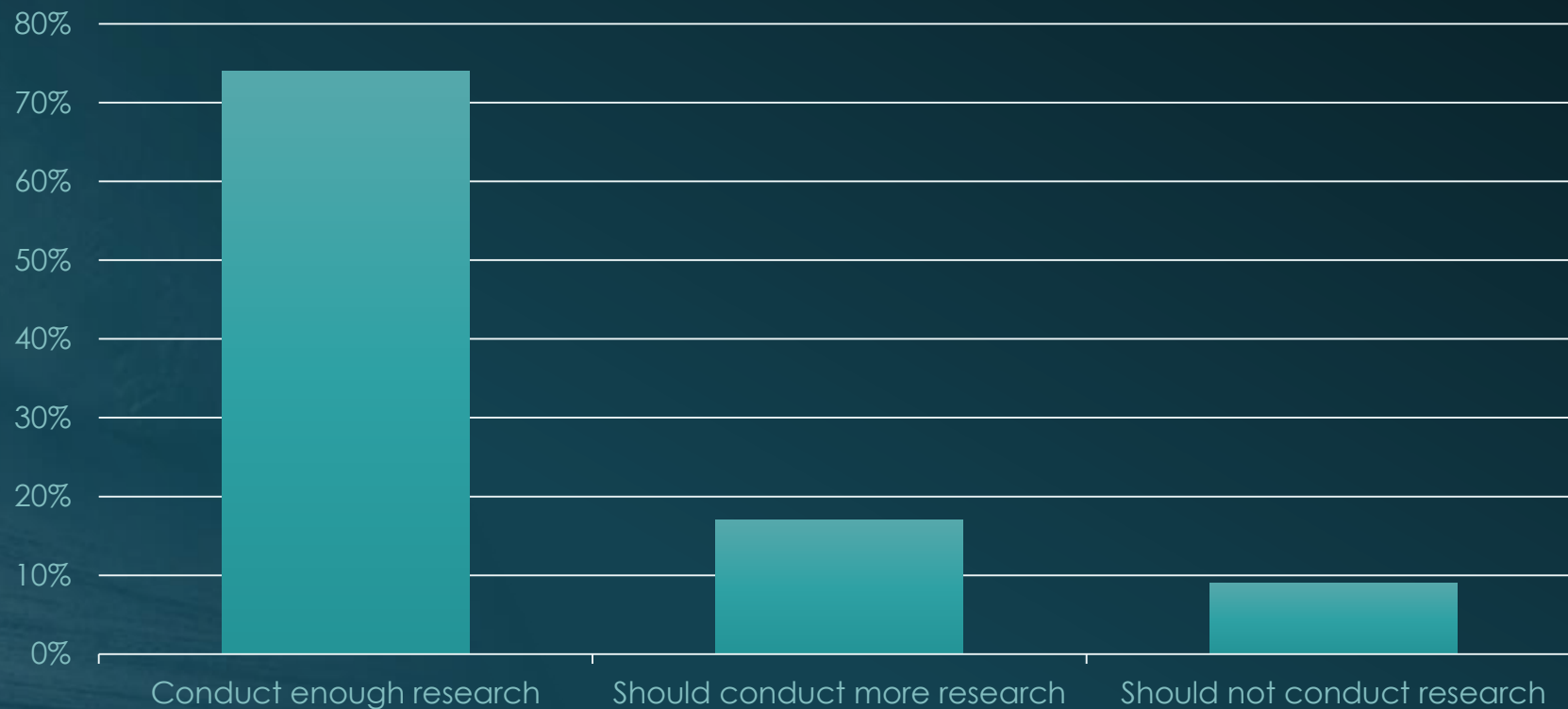
Findings – Non-Librarian Faculty Surveys

- ❖ General lack of awareness about librarian research

“I don’t know”

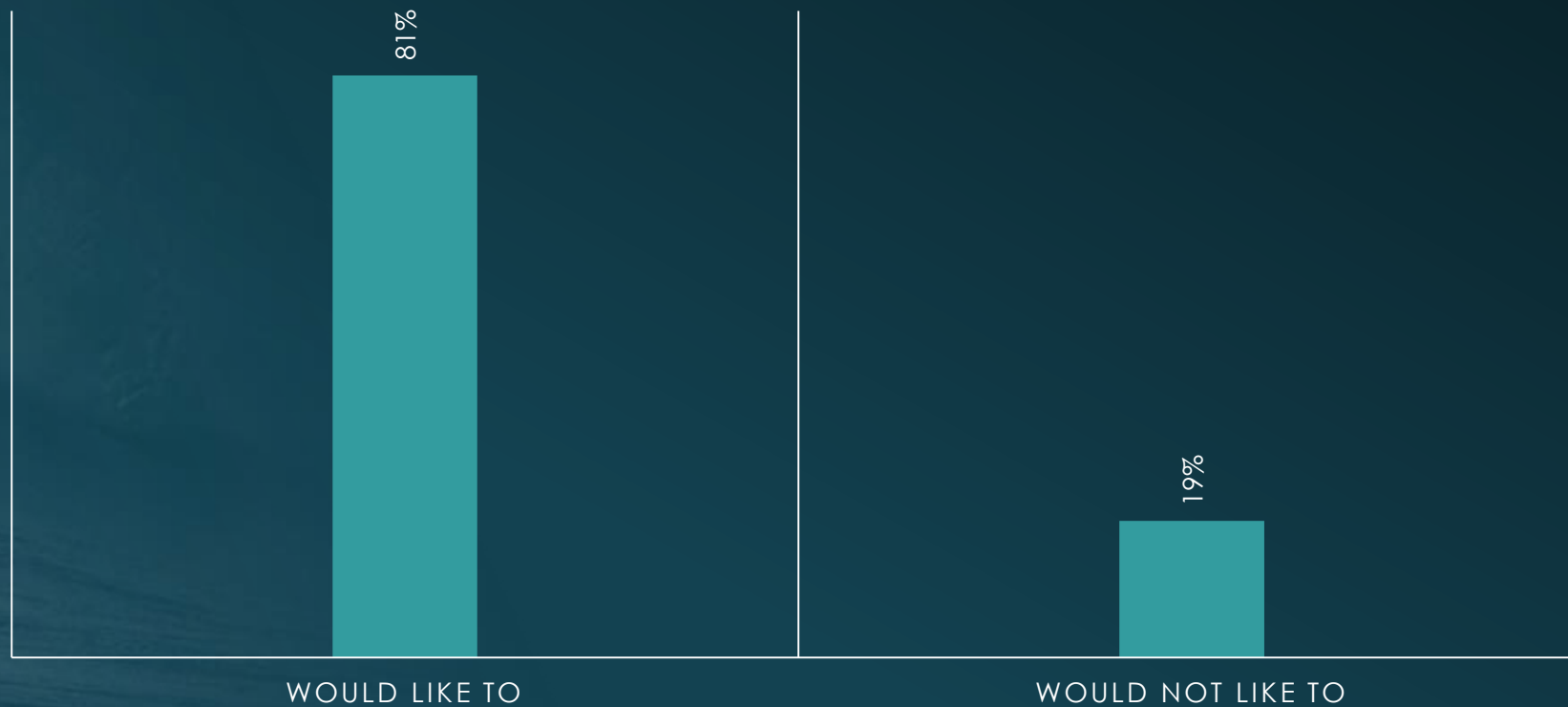
Findings – Non-Librarian Faculty Surveys

❖ Do librarians conduct enough research?



Findings – Non-Librarian Faculty Surveys

❖ Collaborative research



Findings – Non-Librarian Faculty Surveys

❖ Top 3 duties of a librarian

Research Support

Access to Information

Research

Findings – Non-Librarian Faculty Surveys

- ❖ Research should not supersede service

I think there is a concern amongst faculty and librarians alike that demands that they function more like standard academics and channel more of their energies into research and publishing, there will be less time for them to perform their traditional service and educational functions, especially in a time of cutbacks when there are fewer faculty to do more work

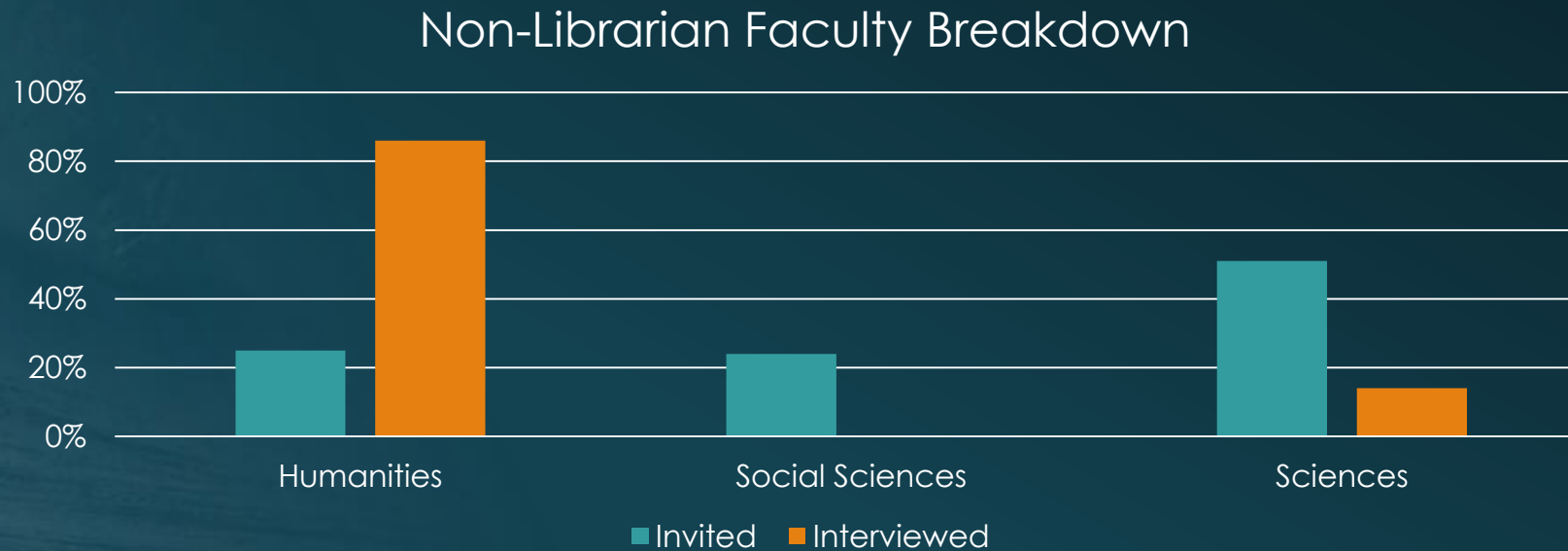


Findings – Pilot Interviews

- ❖ Seven major themes identified
 - ❖ Service First
 - ❖ Research is Essential to Good Service
 - ❖ Librarians as Researchers, Not Academics
 - ❖ Librarians Bring a Skillset to Collaborative Research
 - ❖ Librarians as Bridges
 - ❖ Conducting Research Raises Faculty's Opinions of Librarians
 - ❖ Lack of Research Support for Librarians at a System Level
- ❖ Concepts identified in the pilot interviews were incorporated into subsequent interviews

Interviews - Demographics

- ❖ 22 Interviews completed
 - ❖ 15 Librarians (Response rate 8%)
 - ❖ 7 Non-Librarian Faculty (Response rate 1%)





Findings – Librarian Interviews

- ❖ Seven major themes identified
 - ❖ Doing Research and the Desire to do Research
 - ❖ Research as a Duty and a Responsibility
 - ❖ Research as Extra
 - ❖ Support and Challenges
 - ❖ Freedom to Research
 - ❖ Beneficial on Multiple Axes
 - ❖ Faculty Relations

Findings – Librarian Interviews

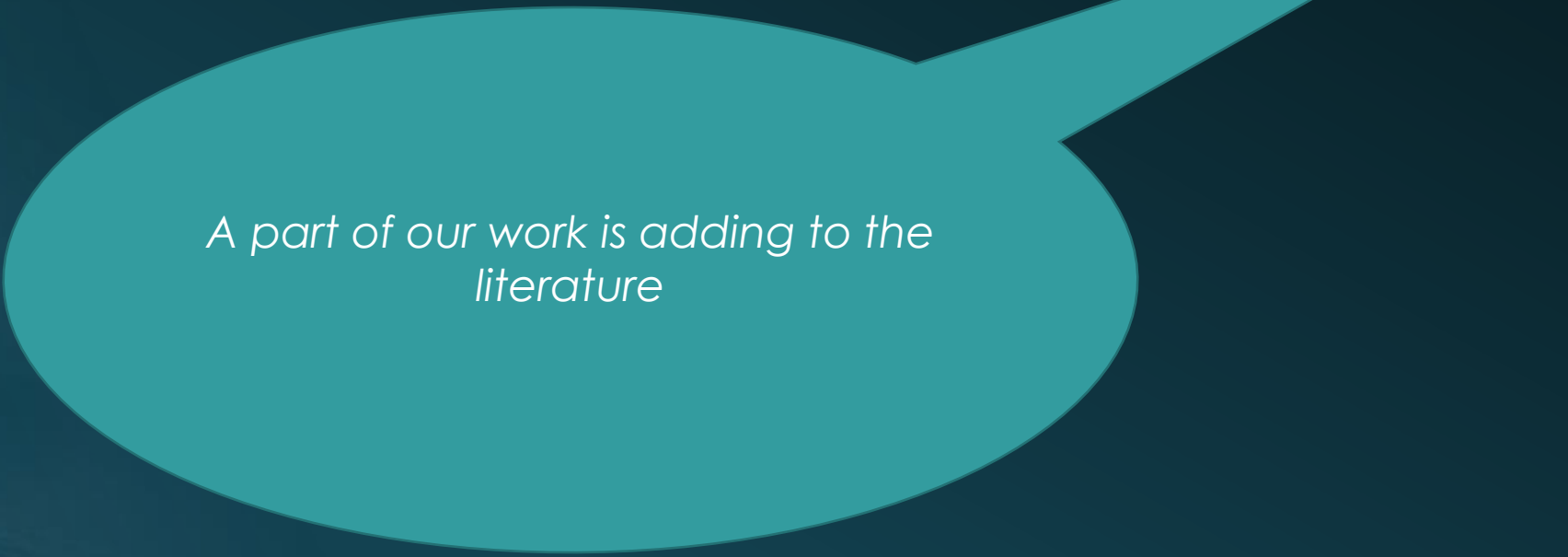
Doing Research and the Desire to do Research

It's more efficient and effective for librarians to focus their research on their professional practice solving problems that you're encountering in your day-to-day job as a librarian through your research seems to be the most efficient thing

I'd love to be doing research full time because I love it.

Findings – Librarian Interviews

Research as a Duty and a Responsibility



*A part of our work is adding to the
literature*

Findings – Librarian Interviews

Research as Extra

if we give academic librarians more time for research, it means that there's less time for the performance of their functions, and these days, with tough budget situations, I think we'd be hard-pressed to do what we need to do if more people were away doing research

I consider research to be an important part of what I do, but I do not consider research part of my position in a technical sense

Findings – Librarian Interviews

Support and Challenges

15% of time is set aside for research on paper but in reality often you get interrupted and if you're a conscientious librarian it's hard to ignore the emails from our users, from our faculty and students who need help and need it right away.

There's not necessarily a lot of actual support and guidance from the library as a whole

I find that there isn't really a culture of research here, when I apply for funding, I end up having to go to the history department and get them to sign off on my proposals, because we don't have a research committee.

Findings – Librarian Interviews

Freedom to Research

I've had to change research. In some ways it looks like I have academic freedom, but it has been challenged

Findings – Librarian Interviews

Beneficial on Multiple Axes

Well, I just think that as librarians, we need to be doing research to improve our practice, and so, through doing research, we're learning more about what we do, and we're able to contribute back to the knowledge base for other librarians, professionals in our field, in order to make our practice and our profession better

in the social sciences there's, in these different silos the theorists have come up with a lot of different language for essentially describing the same thing, so you can say "well you know, in environmental psychology, they talk about it this way, but in sociology, they talk about it this way

There's the credibility issue as well; how can they see me as a support in this area if I am not a researcher and don't understand their issues?

Findings – Librarian Interviews

Faculty Relations

Most faculty I talk to tend to be surprised at first that we're academic staff. They're surprised that we publish our own papers in most cases.

We haven't done a good job of informing faculty about the research that we can do, and because not every librarian does research

I would like to see a lot more collaborative research.

Where librarians have developed very good relationships with certain faculty members, those faculty members come to know what the librarian does, and know them a little bit more than the service that the librarian does for them on their research.



Findings – Faculty Interviews

- ❖ Eight major themes identified
 - ❖ Awareness of Librarian Roles
 - ❖ Collaboration
 - ❖ Research Facilitation
 - ❖ Applications of Librarian Research
 - ❖ Value of Librarian Research
 - ❖ Librarians Outside the Academic Community
 - ❖ Librarians as Part of the Academic Community
 - ❖ Suggestion that Librarians Should be Researchers (But it's Hard)

Findings – Faculty Interviews

Awareness of Librarian Roles

It's just an accident I know what [name of librarian] does, because he's a personal friend and we used to talk about his work.

Findings – Faculty Interviews

Collaboration

I would say to date I haven't engaged in collaborative research with a librarian, but it's not out of the question that I would in the future and that I have had these conversations about trying to do something

Findings – Faculty Interviews

Research Facilitation

But, so yes, I collaborate with librarians in the sense that I work with them to facilitate my own research.

I think it's important that librarians are also granted academic freedom so that they can also help build the collection and work with us in providing as much information as possible, not subject to censorship or whatever.

I find that librarians are really really REALLY good with graduate students, with Master's students, with young PhD students who are still getting the research process down.

Findings – Faculty Interviews

Applications of Librarian Research

I think research on libraries, therefore, and how libraries function, and the role of libraries in the 21st century, I think that's extremely important, and I think that's something that librarians are in a unique position to undertake

I mean this is why we make discoveries in libraries now, because the libraries may have preserved material, but if that material's not being made accessible and interacted with by a researching public, an intellectual public, then it simply lies dormant for generations.

Findings – Faculty Interviews

Value of Librarian Research

If librarians don't conduct research they will simply become civil servants and the library itself, it would not be a place of research, it would just be a holding ground.

If librarians are working on research themselves, they'd be more sympathetic to understanding the needs and concerns of other researchers so, if someone is actually an active researcher, I feel like I can talk to them more easily and they'll understand some of my concerns or issues.

Findings – Faculty Interviews

Librarians Outside the Academic Community

I have the impression sometimes that my colleagues often think of librarians as just assistants to them, and not as independent researchers on their own, or as independent colleagues.

Or the elimination of tenure for librarians given that tenure signifies the protection of academic freedom, which I don't think they require if they're not required to do original research.

Findings – Faculty Interviews

Librarians as Part of the Academic Community

I think research librarians are an invaluable resource. I think they're a major part of the functioning of any university, particularly in the humanities.

I believe librarians should be considered the equivalent of faculty, they should be on the faculty pay scale, they should have tenure, absolutely, they should have complete freedom in what they research and what they do because they are academics and they—simply because they're not in the classroom and perhaps some of them do not regularly publish as much as regular academics, does not mean that they are not fulfilling a very very important academic role

Findings – Faculty Interviews

Suggestion that Librarians Should be Researchers (But it's Hard)

I think it's a little self-evident that librarians should be researchers.

It's hard to say "you have to undertake research in order to hold down this job." I think — well, put it this way: In theory I like it, in practice it might be hard to implement.

The person who's a liaison librarian with the institute has just been upset recently, the last couple of years, about how she's not able to do much of anything of her own because of increased responsibilities because of budget cuts and retirements and things.

I think university administrations would rather see librarian research go away actually, as a question. So you [the interviewer] might find yourself facing a little adversity if you proceed with or pursue this line of inquiry

Findings – Collective Agreements

❖ Attention to Librarians

Academic librarians shall be responsible for and have the right and opportunity to pursue research in library and information science and/or other relevant academic disciplines and to make scholarly contributions. Academic librarians shall endeavour to publish the results of their scholarship. (17.A.2.3)

❖ University of Manitoba Faculty Collective Agreement, 2013-2016

The criteria respecting librarians shall be established by the Vice Provost (Libraries and Cultural Resources) in consultation with and with the approval of a majority of the Libraries and Cultural Resources Academic Council subject to the subsequent approval of the Provost & Vice-President (Academic). (3.14.2)

❖ University of Calgary Faculty Collective Agreement, 2013-2015

Findings – Collective Agreements

- ❖ Research is required
 - ❖ Concordia University, University of Manitoba, University of Saskatchewan
 - ❖ Research or equivalent is required
 - ❖ Brandon University
 - ❖ Broader category under which research is included (e.g.; professional activity) is required
 - ❖ McMaster
 - ❖ Research is possible/research may be conducted/research is encouraged
 - ❖ Brock University, MacEwan University, McGill, University of Alberta, University of Regina, University of Winnipeg
- ❖ Research is required for promotion is to certain ranks*
 - ❖ Brandon University, Brock University, University of Manitoba
 - ❖ Research is a right of librarians
 - ❖ University of Manitoba, University of Winnipeg
 - ❖ Unclear
 - ❖ University of Calgary

Findings – Collective Agreements

- ❖ Librarians are to have a sustained program of research

- ❖ University of Saskatchewan

- ❖ Research leave/sabbatical available

- ❖ Brandon University, Brock University, Concordia University, McMaster, University of Alberta, University of Calgary, University of Manitoba, University of Regina, University of Saskatchewan, University of Winnipeg

- ❖ Duties must be arranged such that they may engage in research

- ❖ Concordia University, University of Manitoba

- ❖ Supervisory approval required

- ❖ MacEwan, McMaster

- ❖ No explicit provisions

- ❖ McGill

Findings – Collective Agreements

❖ Brock University

- ❖ 10-20% of time may be devoted to scholarly activity

❖ MacEwan

- ❖ Up to 15% of time may be devoted to research when “appropriate and necessary”

❖ McMaster

- ❖ 25% of time devoted to professional service/activity (including research)

❖ University of Manitoba

- ❖ Duties to be assigned “fairly and reasonably”

❖ University of Winnipeg

- ❖ 12 research days/year and a “reasonable” amount of time may be devoted to research



Findings – Collective Agreements

- ❖ Research included as part of a broader category (e.g.; professional activity)
 - ❖ What gets prioritized?
- ❖ Research “or equivalent”
 - ❖ Undefined
- ❖ “May”
 - ❖ May also not
- ❖ “Fairly and reasonably”/“a reasonable amount of time”
 - ❖ What is reasonable?
- ❖ “Appropriate and necessary”
 - ❖ Who decides?

Conclusions

- ❖ How do academic librarians perceive their own status as researchers and the status of their own research?
 - ❖ Research is essential to librarianship
 - ❖ Lack ability to conduct research
 - ❖ Discrepancy between what is asked and what is facilitated
- ❖ Do academic librarians perceive themselves as researchers and/or academics?
 - ❖ Researchers, but not academics
 - ❖ Want to conduct research
 - ❖ Service comes first
- ❖ What is the perceived value of librarian research?
 - ❖ Collegiality, bridging of disciplines
 - ❖ Improved service
 - ❖ Enhanced understanding of research when providing research support
 - ❖ Contributes to field in which research conducted
 - ❖ A duty of librarians/to the field

Conclusions

- ❖ How are academic librarians perceived in a university setting by non-librarian faculty?
 - ❖ Neither researchers nor academics (by most) – lack of awareness
 - ❖ Believe librarians should conduct research
 - ❖ A key part of an academic community
- ❖ Do non-librarian faculty members perceive academic librarians as researchers/academics?
 - ❖ Overall no, as there is a lack of awareness
 - ❖ May be made aware
- ❖ To what degree are non-librarian faculty aware of the research capabilities of librarians?
 - ❖ Generally unaware
 - ❖ Confidence in librarians improved with awareness
 - ❖ Awareness typically arose from personal connections
- ❖ To what extent do non-librarian faculty employ the services of librarians in their own research?
 - ❖ A support resource for their own research
 - ❖ Interest in, but little active collaboration



Future Work

- ❖ Publication
- ❖ Update and expansion of the collective agreements component of this study
- ❖ Exploration of librarian research in the context of precarious employment
- ❖ Addressing some of the themes discovered here

Images

- ❖ Scroll from: <https://pixabay.com/en/certificate-diploma-degree-ribbon-576788/>
- ❖ Scales from: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/e/e6/Scale_of_injustice.svg/1004px-Scale_of_injustice.svg.png
- ❖ Clipboard from: <https://pixabay.com/en/draft-clipboard-sketch-board-brown-150369/>

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