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Reframing Reference Services: Perceptions and futures of the reference desk, findings from a mixed-methods survey of United States academic libraries

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Reframing Reference Services:

Perceptions and futures of the reference desk, findings from a mixed-methods survey of United States academic libraries

ALA Annual June 8, 2020

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Outline

- Background
- Statistics
- Takeaways
- Directions for Future Research

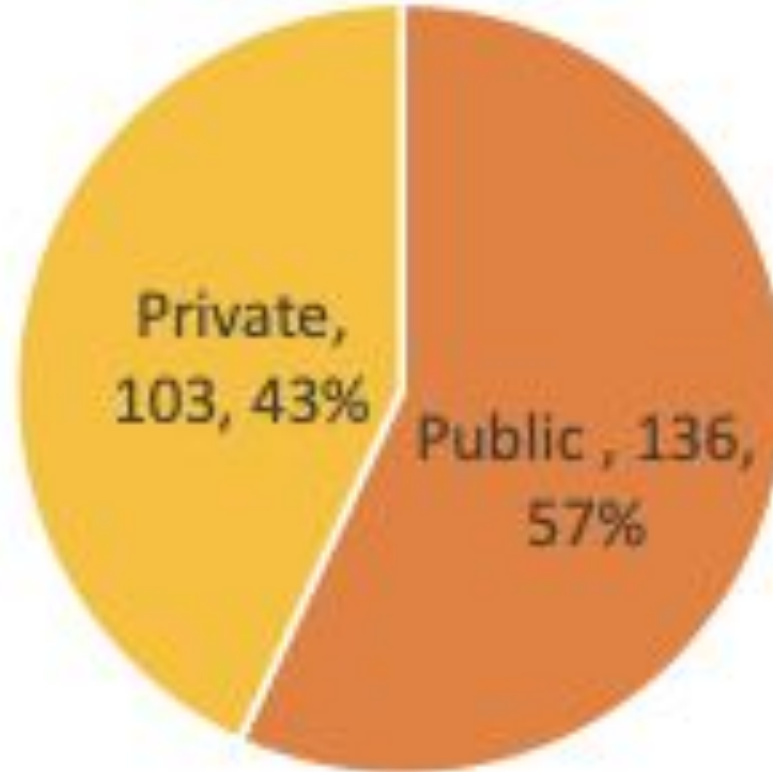


Background

- Purpose:
 - Environmental scan to investigate our reference model
 - Librarian attitudes and perceptions of a physical reference desk
- Initial survey of NJ public university/colleges in Fall of 2018 (10 respondents), presented at VALE January 2019
- National Survey of university/colleges in Spring of 2019 (239 respondents)
- Made slight changes to survey based on initial data collection

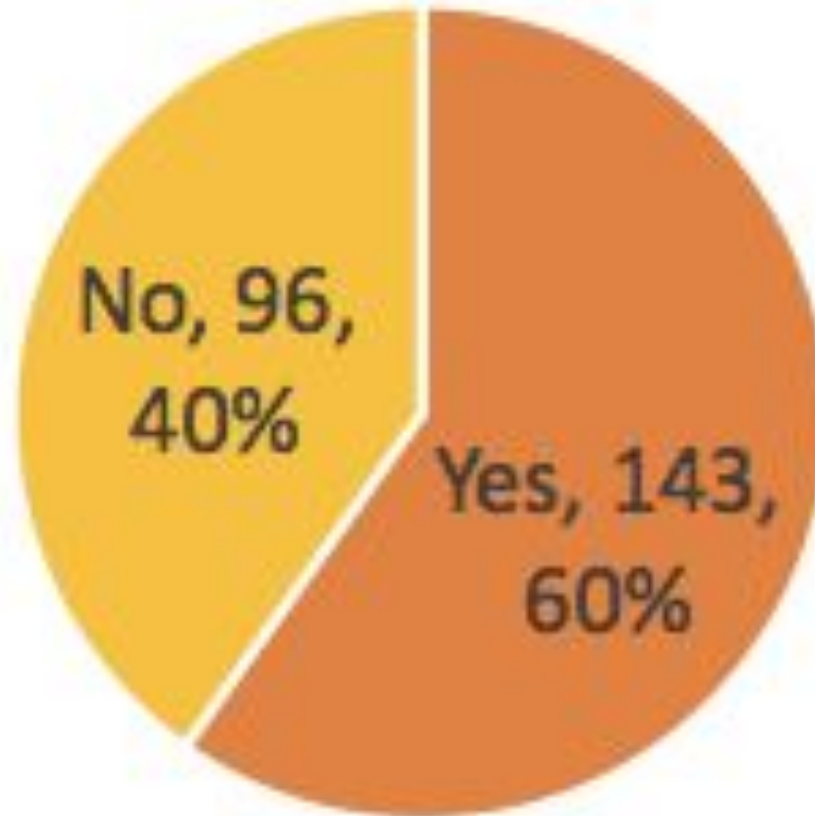


Survey Respondents: Public vs. Private



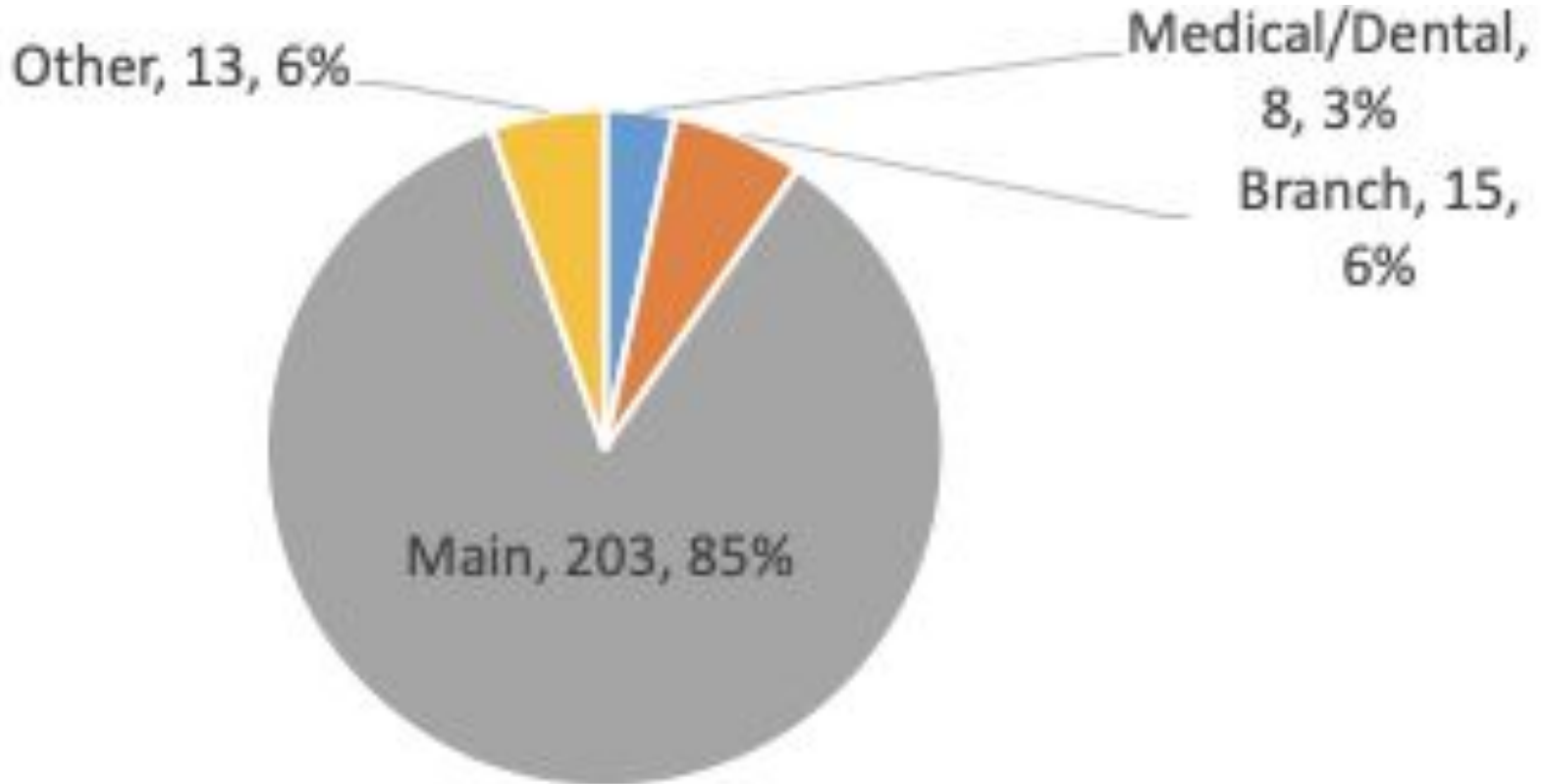


Survey Respondents: Faculty Status



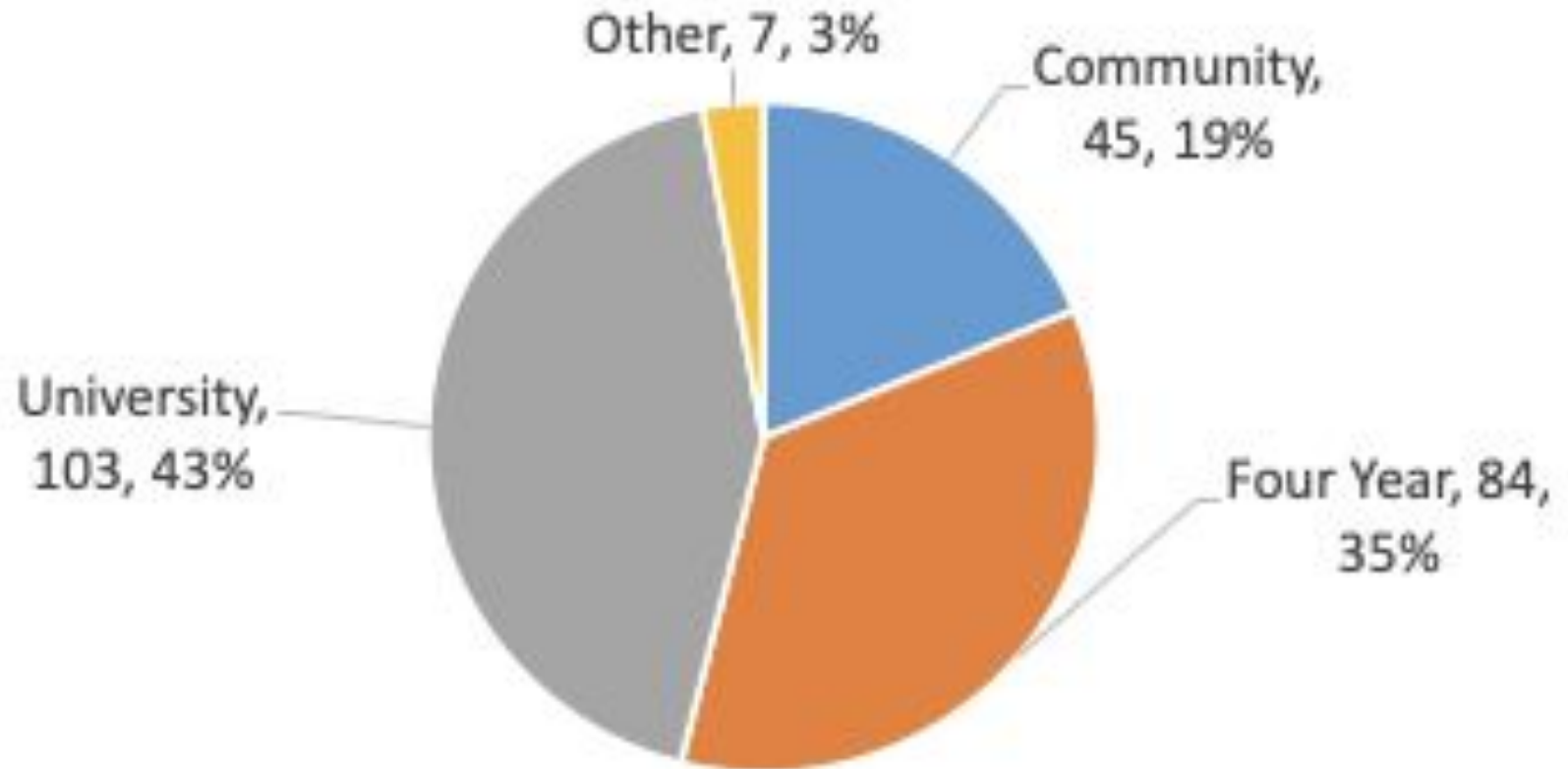


Survey Respondents: Type of Library



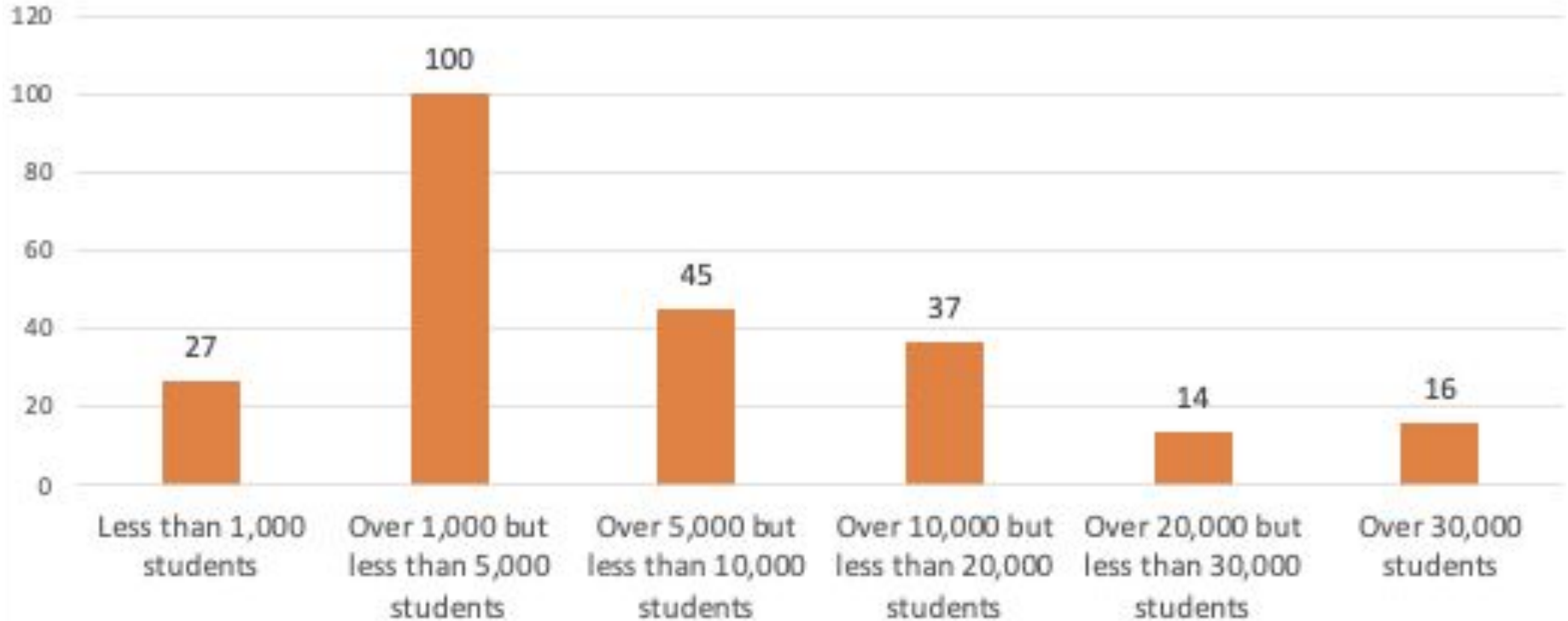


Survey Respondents: Type of Institution



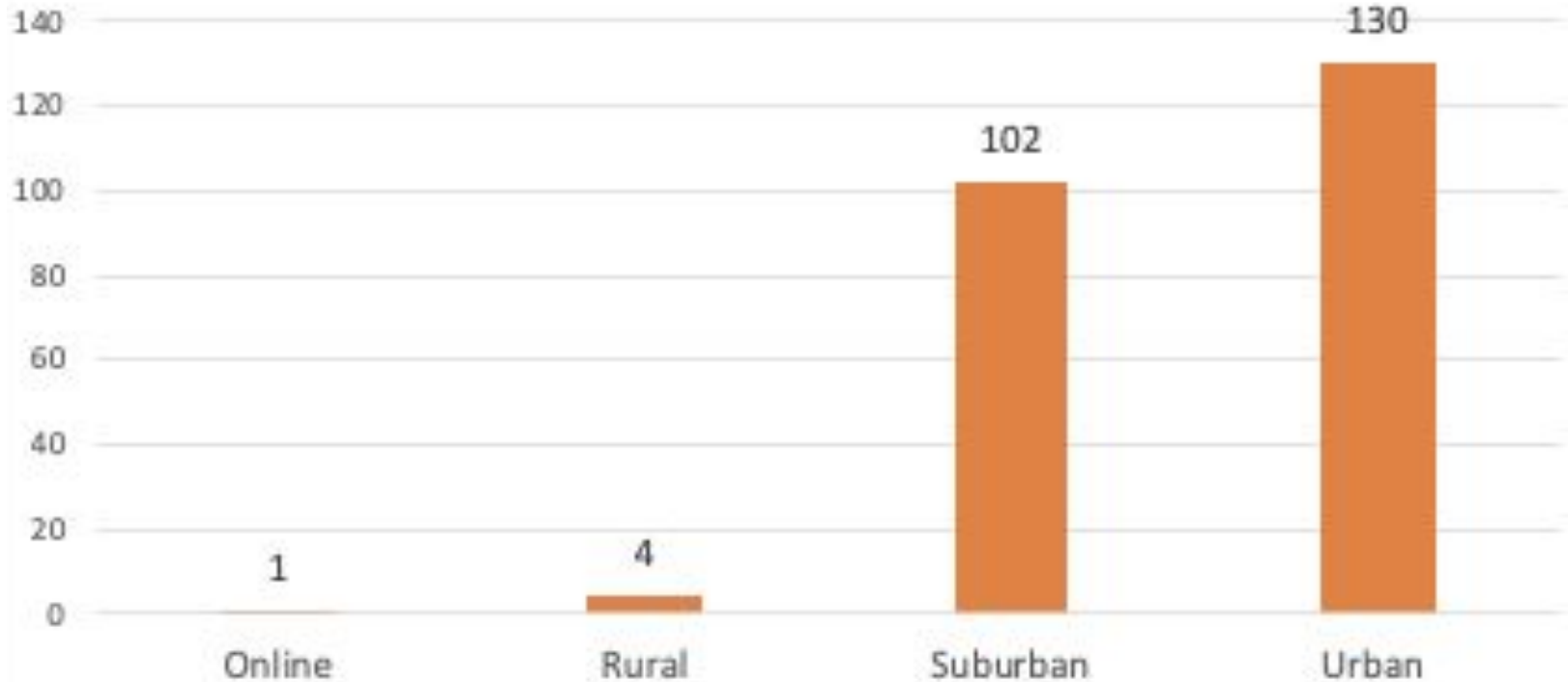


Survey Respondents: Student FTE





Survey Respondents: Urban/Suburban/Rural



Rural: 2,500 or less

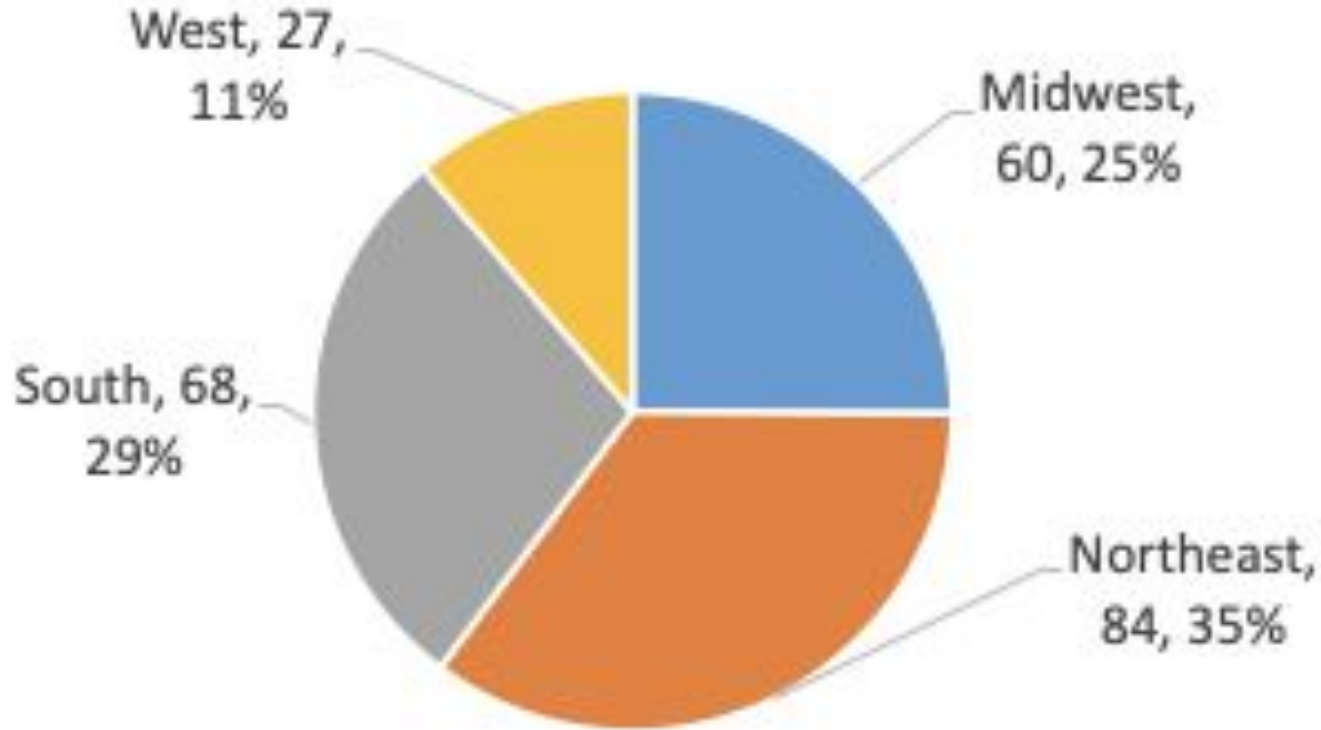
Suburban: 2,501-49,999

Urban: More than 50,000

Source: <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/geography/guidance/geo-areas/urban-rural/2010-urban-rural.html>



Survey Respondents: Regional Breakdown



Source: https://www2.census.gov/geo/pdfs/maps-data/maps/reference/us_regdiv.pdf



Poll Question #1

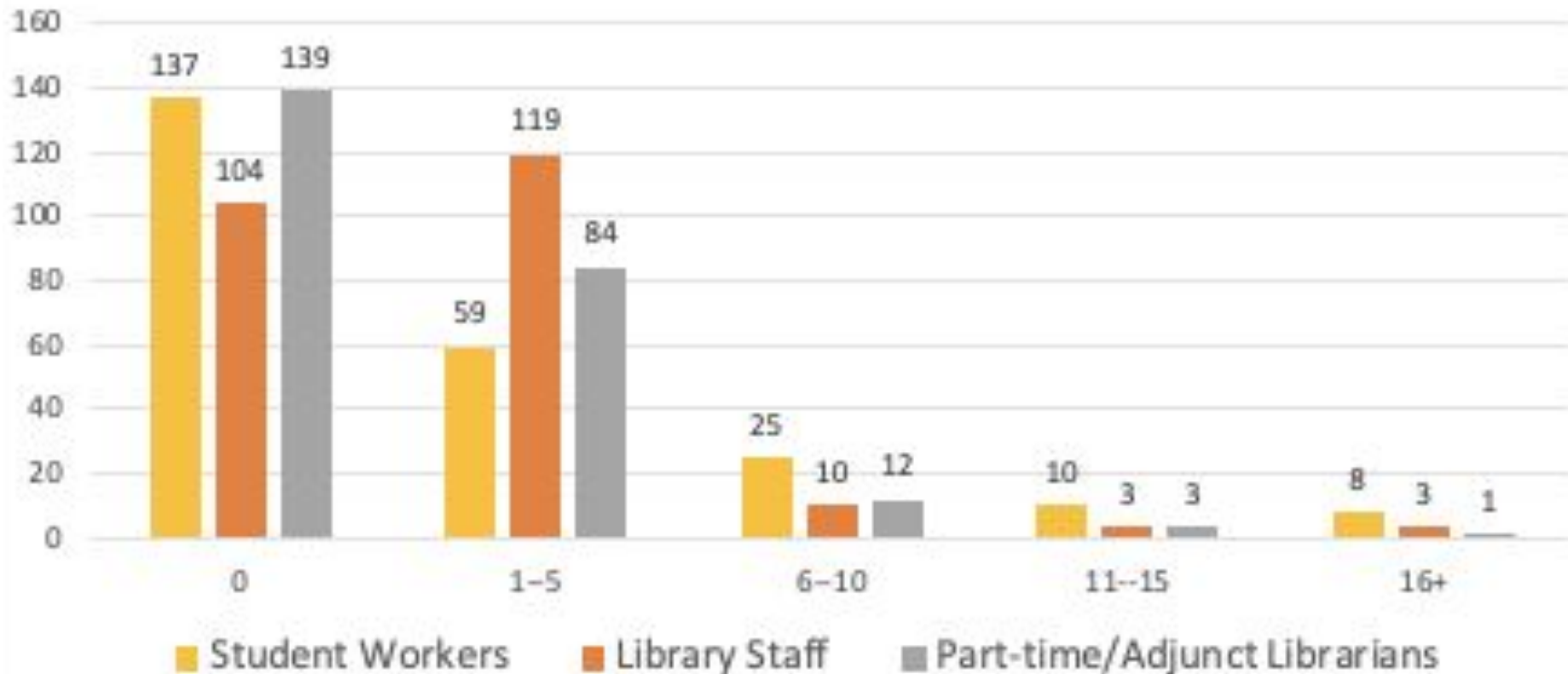
Do you have student workers
(undergraduate or graduate)
answering reference questions?



Poll Question #2

Do you have library staff
(non-librarians) answering
reference questions?

Survey Respondents: # of Non-librarian Staff at the Reference Desk





Open-Ended Question #1

What are pros or cons of using non-librarians to answer reference questions?



Poll Question #3

How many full-time librarians provide reference services? 1-2; 3-4; 5-6; 7-8; 9-10; 11+

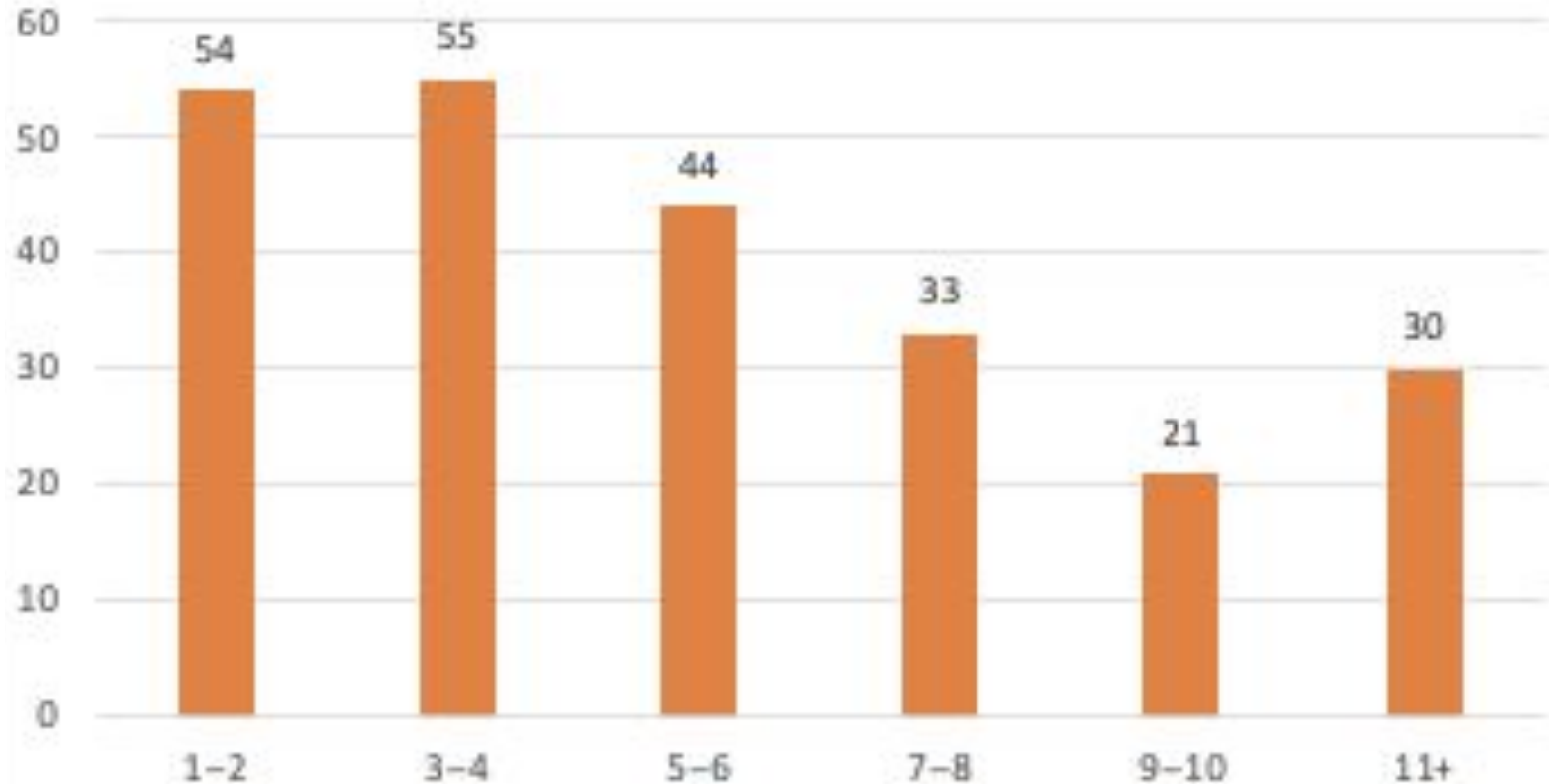


Poll Question #4

How much time do you spend in a typical week on answering reference questions (in person, virtual, email, etc.)? 0-20%; 21-40%; 41-60%; 61-80%; 81-100%



Survey Respondents: # of Librarians providing reference



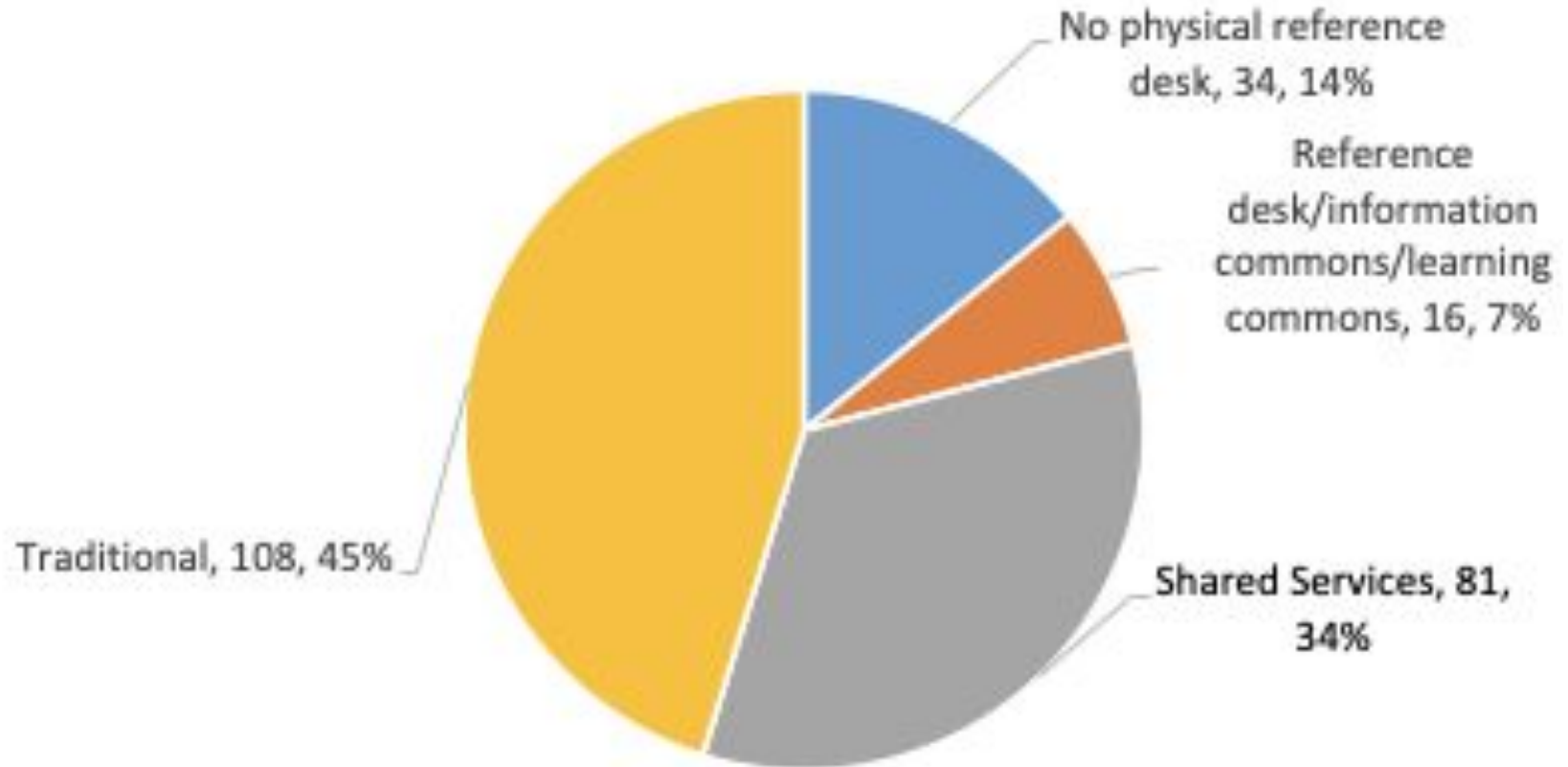


Poll Question #5

What is your current reference desk model? No current physical reference desk; Traditional; Share Services; Information Commons



Survey Respondents: Current Desk Model



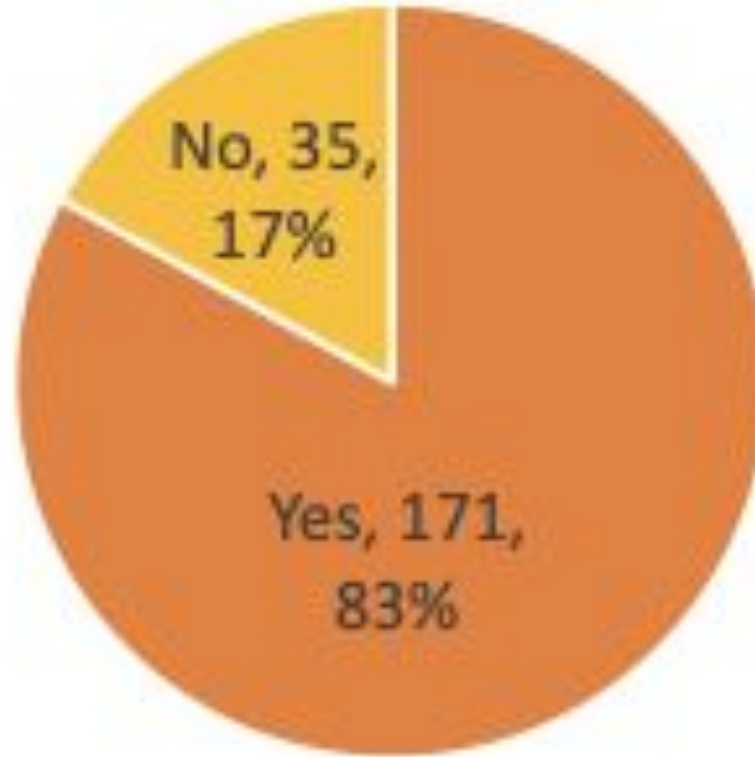


Poll Question #6

Do Librarians staff your reference desk (if applicable)?



Survey Respondents: Do librarians staff the desk?





Open-Ended Question #2

What are the origins of your current desk model?



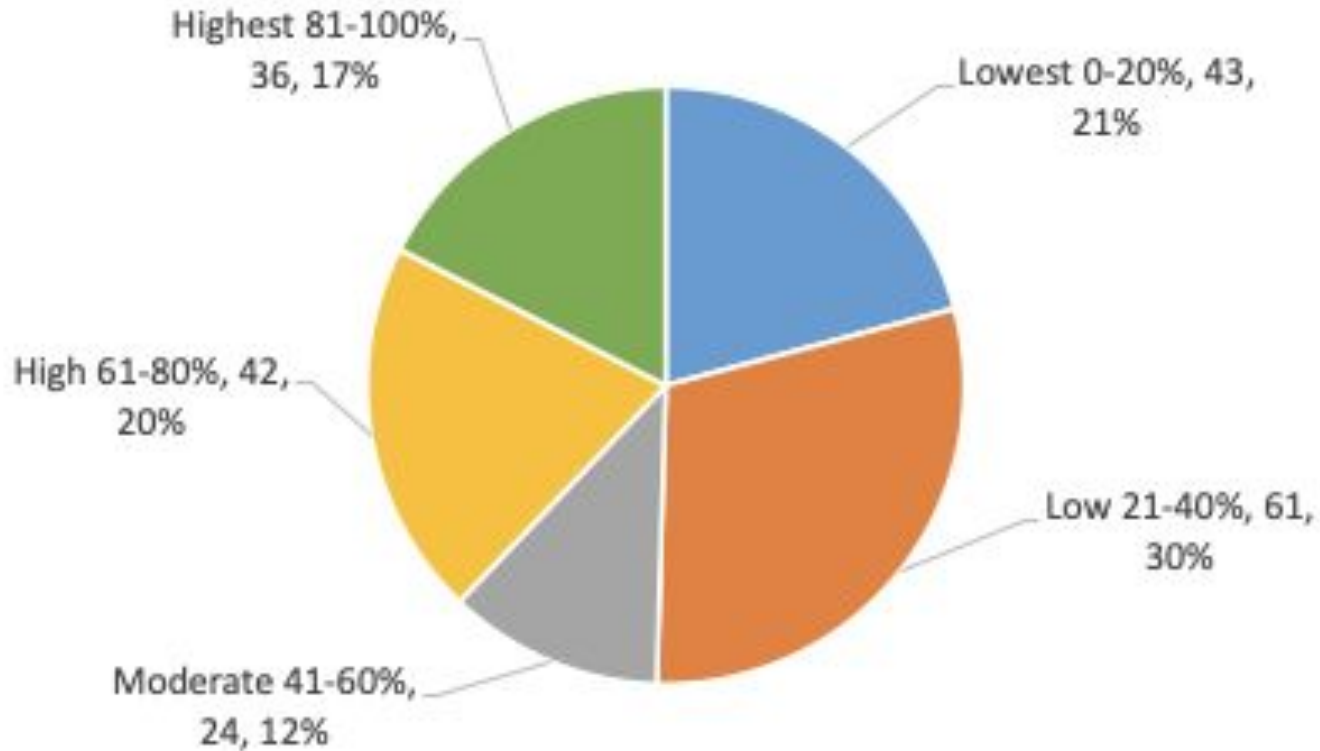
Poll Question #7

What percentage of the questions asked at the reference desk are reference questions (this excludes directional questions, like asking about the printer and where the bathroom is located)?

0-20% 21-40%
41-60% 61-80% 81-100%



Survey Respondents: % of Reference Questions asked



■ Lowest 0-20% ■ Low 21-40% ■ Moderate 41-60% ■ High 61-80% ■ Highest 81-100%



Open-Ended Question #3

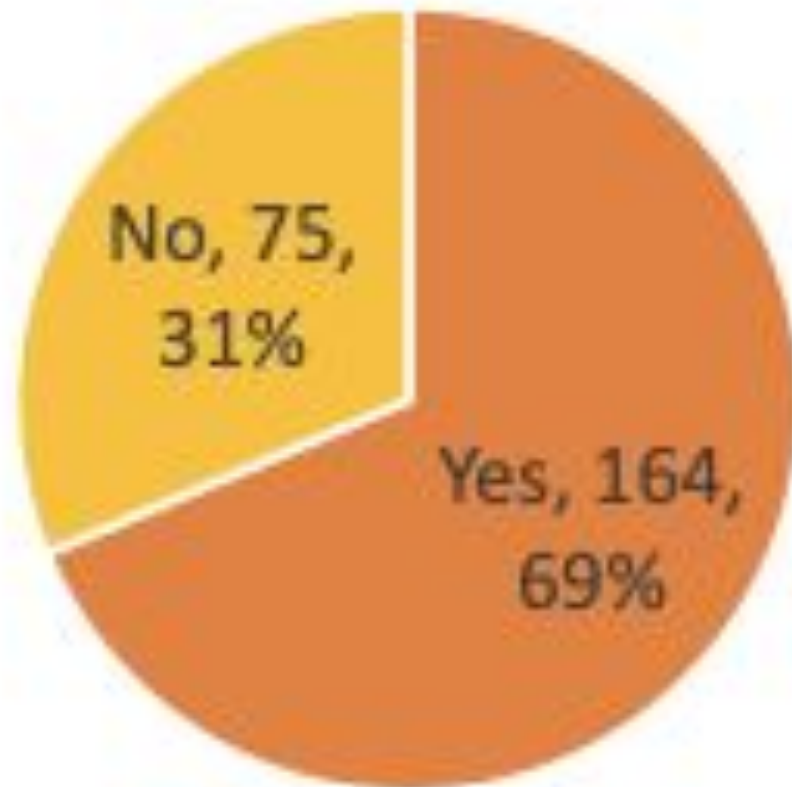
How if at all do you track statistics on your reference questions? Do you make any changes based on the statistics (data-driven decision making). What have you learned?



Poll Question #8

Is a physical reference desk necessary?

Survey Respondents: Is a physical reference desk necessary?



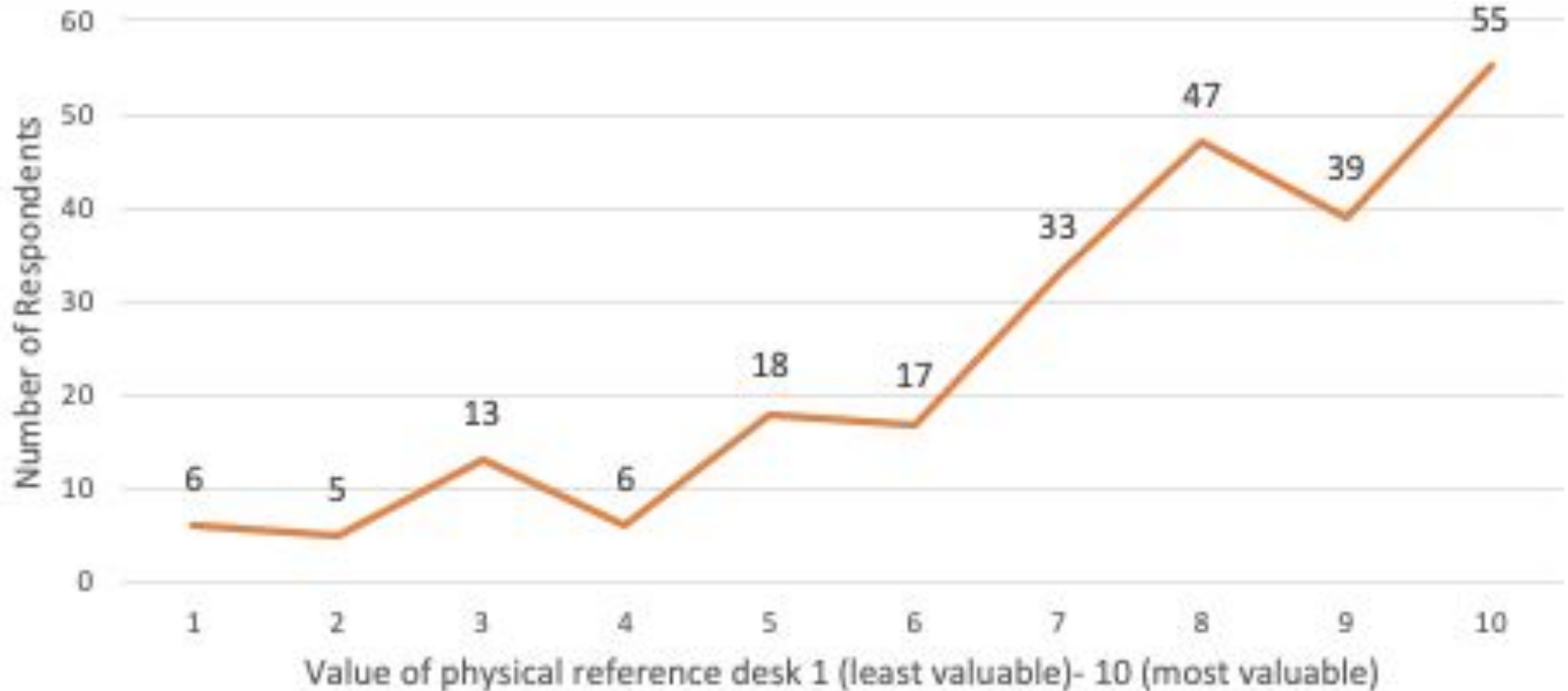


Poll Question #9

From 1 (least valuable) to 10 (most valuable) how much do you value a physical reference desk?



Survey Respondents: Value of a physical reference desk

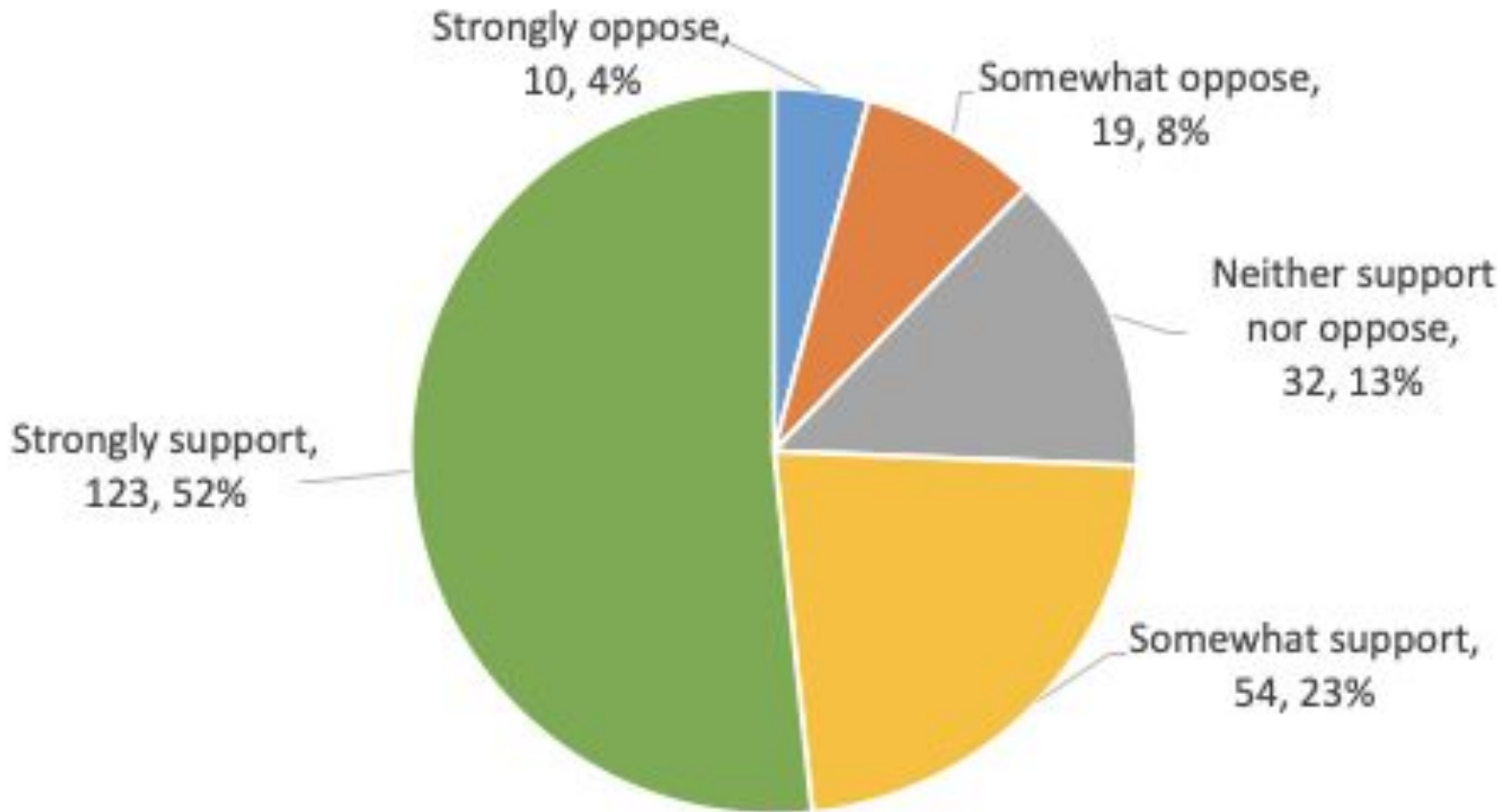




Poll Question #10

Do you support maintaining a physical reference desk? Strongly Support; Somewhat Support; Neither Support nor Oppose; Somewhat Oppose; Strongly Oppose

Survey Respondents: Do you support maintaining a physical reference desk?





Open-Ended Question #4

Since the pandemic has driven services online, what has been your reference experience? Are you getting similar questions? What are the commonly asked questions? Has your pandemic experience changed your perspective on the need for a physical reference desk?

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Takeaways

- Statistics show while some people are using different desk models, the traditional reference desk is still prominent
- 37% of respondents think their reference desk gets mostly reference questions
- 59% of respondents rank the value of a physical reference desk at 8 or above
- 10% of respondents rank the value of a physical reference desk below a 3
- Statistics show approximately 75% of respondents support maintaining a physical reference desk



Directions for Future Research

- International Survey
- Student needs assessment
- Perceptions vs reality
 - Short follow-up survey for detailed reference stats
- Engage staff in conversation



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