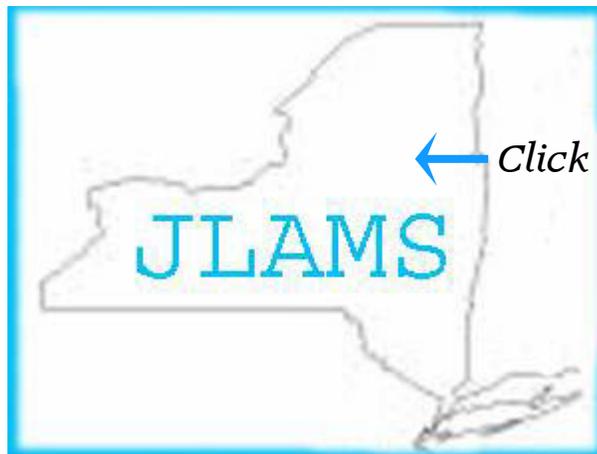




**Journal of the  
Library and Management  
Section of the**

**New York Library Association**



**2007 - 2008  
Vol. 4, No. 1**



# JLAMS

2007 - 2008

VOL. 4, NO. 1

## CONTENTS

**3** [President's Message](#)

**4** [Editor's Column](#)

**5** [Human-to-Human Still Alive: The State of Mediated Search Services SUNY Institutions](#) *By Elaine M. Lasda Bergman & Carol Anne Germain.*

**20** [Public Library Systems in New York State: A History and Survey](#) *BY Xiaoi Ren & Deborah Lines Andersen*

**46** [A Library for New Yorkers: Extending State Library Borrowing Privileges to New York State Residents](#) *By Mary Redmond*

## Library Administration and Management Section of the New York Library Association

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### President's Message



JLAMS, the electronic Journal of the Library Administration and Management Section of the New York Library Association, celebrates its fourth anniversary this year, and as LAMS President, I'm privileged to introduce the Fall 2007 JLAMS.

JLAMS provides a valuable outlet for the dissemination of articles, academic papers, and essays of interest to administrators and managers of all types of libraries: academic, public, school and special libraries. As administrators and managers, we have a lot in common, but we have few places to share what we know. JLAMS was the first peer-reviewed journal in NYLA, and the goal was to set a high standard for future publications. Readers of JLAMS are well-served by the fine work done by Editor Richard Naylor and his team of referees, as are those whose contributions are published here. Submissions are always welcome. For information on article submissions, editorial policy, a submission form and more, visit the JLAMS website page at [http://www.nyla.org/index.php?page\\_id=922](http://www.nyla.org/index.php?page_id=922).

JLAMS is made possible by NYLA membership. LAMS receives funding based upon the number of people who select LAMS as their primary NYLA section, as well as by those who pay an additional \$5.00 to add LAMS as a secondary section. Please keep this in mind when renewing your NYLA membership. And thanks for your support!

Phyllis Keaton  
LAMS President

## Editor's Column



Welcome to the sixth issue of JLAMS. This fall we are happy to announce a special publishing event. In addition to the regular JLAMS we will be co-publishing a special issue with Indiana Libraries. That issue will be appearing in the next couple months and is dedicated to the process of continual improvement -- a project started in Indiana and then extended in a major way by new York Librarians. But more about that later ...

In this issue we pleased to lead off with a peer reviewed article by Elaine M. Lasda Bergman and Carol Anne Germain on mediated searching. It is based on a survey of 65 academic libraries in the state university system and provides a current picture of trends in searching.

In this issue we are also pleased to present another peer reviewed article by Xiaoi Ren and Deborah Lines Anderson's entitled "*Public Library Systems in new York State: a History and Survey*". The study is based on the 2005 survey conducted by PLS and provides numerous tables of information showing both the current state of systems and librarian perceptions of them.

Finally we are happy to present an Editor's Choice article by Mary Redmond from the new York State Library entitled, "*A Library for new Yorkers*". It provides a history of the evolution of state library services from a service to legislators to a resource for all New Yorkers.

Once again we must thank our authors for their hard work and creative writing without which we would have nothing to publish. We are all very busy and they have responded to a request for even more effort, not only submitting articles by being willing to make the changes requested by reviewers.

We must also thank our referees who reviewed the articles and made suggestions for improvement. We have had the help of excellent people from throughout the state. The peer review process is an important part of the writing, as it enriches and improves the ideas put forth, and as it suggests areas for further research.

We invite all librarians and information science professionals in our state to submit articles and ideas for articles and we again ask for your help by volunteering to be a referee.

## Peer Reviewed Article

# Human-to-Human Still Alive: The State of Mediated Search Services at SUNY Institutions

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By Elaine M. Lasda Bergman &  
Carol Anne Germain

**A**bstract: Mediated searches were popular in the 1970s because they were often the only means for users to access needed research and/or information. Research and instructional consultations emerged shortly afterwards and provided instruction on using hard to use databases. Many library professionals anticipated the demise of mediated searching with the advent of online resources designed specifically for end-users. However, they failed to see that mediated searching services could merge with research and instructional consultations to provide a more enhanced service model. This study reviewed the status of extended librarian/patron searches via mediated search and consultation services to determine the status of these resources. Sixty-five libraries of the sixty-four State University of New York campuses were surveyed. Results of the forty-seven returned surveys indicate that this is still a viable service of which users continue to take advantage, with over 75% of the libraries supporting extended search services; close to 70% report usage has remained stable or increased; and nearly 80% of the respondents felt this is a value-added service.

## Introduction

Before the introduction of computers, scholars, researchers and students used print resources, such as indexes, card catalogs, and other finding aids to locate relevant information on specific topics. After the introduction of this technology, most finding aids were then accessible via online resources and stand-alone CD-ROM workstations. Early on-line and CD-ROM searches were conducted by librarians because

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## Human to Human

search queries and syntax were often complex, requiring specialized training to efficiently make use of the technology. From the 1960s and throughout the 1980s, these one-on-one, mediated searching services were popular in academic, special, and public libraries. Mediated searches provided access to costly research indexes through database services, such as Dialog; they helped users locate hard to find research materials and enabled users to feel confident with having conducted a thorough search. Information professionals helped users with selecting appropriate electronic resources, with developing search strategies with proper syntax and terminology, and to set up special database features such as current awareness alerts. In addition to mediated searching services, librarians also began offering research and instructional consultations. These sessions were conducted by librarians to teach and empower users to navigate electronic resources, utilize traditional print resources and help users assess the quality of information.

In the 1990s, many of the hard-to-access databases of yesteryear became readily available to library constituents through subscription stand alone CD-ROM technology and later, web connections. Users soon were able to utilize the online resources in the privacy of their dorm rooms, offices, and homes. With these advancements, it seemed that the need for one-on-one extended search services would decrease. Yet today, many libraries still continue to offer this service. To identify current trends in one-on-one extended searching services, the authors created a survey instrument to be distributed to reference department administrators of the libraries in the State University of New York (SUNY) system.

In this study, the authors define mediated searches as one-on-one extended time appointments which provide access to costly database services, such as Dialog, for locating hard to find research materials. These customized search sessions can present instructional opportunities during which time users learn how to select appropriate databases, become skilled with search techniques, and find out about current awareness alert services. Mediated searching on online databases had been a service that was commonly separate from one-on-one research consultation/instructional sessions; however the authors wondered to what extent these two tasks are being performed simultaneously. Often, users set up an appointment after having limited and or no success with finding needed information, in these sessions, they learn about library resources and services as well as key search strategies, terminology choices, and research techniques.

## Review of the Literature

There is much literature discussing one-on-one computer-mediated searches, as well as in-person extended research/instruction consultations. These publications highlight a variety of aspects regarding these services. Topics include the technical aspects of computer searching; the advantages and/or disadvantages of human-to-human searching; the librarian as information retrieval expert; and trends as well as the future of these programs.

A focus of many articles of the 1970s and early 1980s concerned the technical aspects of structuring searches using complex command language systems. The complexity of online searching made these articles vital for information professionals who needed to maintain current searching skills. The high level of training involved meant that most end-users were unable to search for materials without the assistance of a trained information professional. In 1977, David Krentz wrote that it was imperative for an information professional to perform mediated searches for users due to the complex nature of searches. (1) F.W. Lancaster and E.G. Fayen presented a similar construct in their 1973 monograph which focused on the computer's limitation rather than the human's interaction with the interface. (2) Researchers have noted the confusing array of electronic resources from libraries (3) and some have argued that these additional electronic resources add to the users' confusion. (4) Fingerman points to the overwhelming

## Human to Human

amount of information and disorienting navigational structure with resources such as Scopus. (5) So, whether the one-on-one search is a mediated search or an instructional consultation, in the long run the interactive component of the exchange helps the patron understand how databases work, how to choose search terms, and the value of controlled vocabulary such as descriptors and identifiers. One would expect that in-person researching experiences would provide users with a more rewarding outcome – thus leaving the encounter with needed information, whether it is retrieved solely by the librarian or with the librarian’s instructional guidance. In the early 1980’s, researchers tested a preliminary computer intermediary system and predicted that computers would act to instruct users in searching; however even with this system “experts had a slight advantage over the users” for certain effectiveness measurements. (6) In the late 1970s, librarians at Drexel University tested a computer-based search intermediary and sought to determine if such a program that would enable inexperienced users to operate Dialog was feasible. (7) Articles detailing this computer mediated searching system looked to the feasibility of eliminating a human mediator and affirmed that the system at Drexel made paved the way for the creation of commercially viable systems. (8) Dialog continues to offer a command language interface, known as Dialog Classic. While Dialog offers interfaces that are ostensibly more user friendly, the command language search interface remains an option for and used by experienced searchers in both academic and business settings.

Articles in the from other disciplines show that the human element in service interactions is an important characteristic to be preserved, despite increased movements towards using computer interfaces to guide user searches. (9) Likewise, in the health sector, it was found that those representatives who took advantage of personalized interactions became more adept at finding information on their own, and continue to make better use of the online information with this personal service. (10) Johan Aberg and Nahid Shahmeheri found that the option of human contact with online business formats is an essential component for successful e-commerce transactions. (11) Human contact is important in libraries because of the myriad of available information sources, formats, and modes of access. O’Leary points to a “library renaissance” in developing value added content and a multifaceted partnership to meet the information users need. (12)

There has been much research on the particulars within these personalized searches. Eileen Hitchingham conducted a study on the human interaction, analyzed the data, and then developed an essential profile of information exchange at mediated search sessions. (13) These measurements found that a searcher influences the user’s understanding of what the user is seeking, and that “Information-giving is the prime activity for both searchers and users in the online interview,” with the user providing most of the information and the searcher making most of the information requests. (14) Another team of researchers analyzed the human interaction in a mediated search and found that clustering results to find a balance between recall and precision enabled searchers to improve the effectiveness of their information retrieval strategies. (15) In several studies, Amanda Spink researched the effectiveness of the elicitation of information that both the searcher and the patron extract from one another and identified four tasks that can be studied in this process and analyzed successive searching strategy. This series of analyses promotes the success of human-mediated search interactions. (16)

Additionally, Ms. Spink, with a variety of colleagues, has done extensive research on mediated searching. In an in-depth project, these researchers worked to identify tasks and behaviors associated with information retrieval. In their published results, they outlined their research agenda and the theoretical framework which melds aspects of information retrieval and human information behavior. (17) In addition, they reported the results of the study which characterized specific aspects of the search process, in particular, problem solving strategies, varying cognitive styles, progress in successive searching and uncertainty. (18) From their investigation of successive searching they found that multiple searches were

## Human to Human

often required by information seekers, and while the successive searches become more evolved or refined, they do not increase precision. (19) In their exploration of cognitive styles as they relate to the search process, they found that although analytic, field independent researchers are more engaged and glean more information; they do not have less uncertainty concept (different levels of certainty with finding information at different stages of the search process) (20) or more effective personal communication. (21) In the final part of the series, the researchers discussed user-intermediary action and found that the communication prior to the search helps the intermediary to determine the formation of the problem, and assists in creating a positive outcome in the process. (22)

Researchers examining the behaviors at health sciences libraries have focused on patterns of use in mediated searching. Despite the movement towards greater user independence, some articles pointed to the quality of mediated searches. Kathleen Crea admits that health researchers at Yale “consider librarians to be more expert” at mediated searching. (23) Gina Hug has noted use of a business model cycle to increase consistency in providing effective mediated searching. (24)

Over the last quarter century, trends in mediated searching and instructional research consultations have gone up and down. Several studies pointed to the decline in mediated searching. Birmingham University reviewed their statistics and found a marked change in searches between 1991 and 1996; in another report John Evans has noted that mediated searching declined sharply in the 1990s while costs for searching increased. (25) Despite these reports, in the early 1990s, the University of Tennessee revamped its search office and published information on these improvements. (26) In 2001, the Health Sciences Library at Memorial University of Newfoundland determined that it was worthwhile to maintain separate mediated searching and research consultation services. (27) In the mid 1990’s, there were many predictions about the decreased use of mediated searching; O’Leary stated that, “[m]ediated searching will, of course, always be in demand, but will account for a steadily declining proportion of online use...” but does not provide data to back up this assertion (28). Ankeny discussed plans at the Business Library at Ohio State to perform mediated searching on databases designed to be used by users. (29) One researcher compared the direct use of CD-ROM databases by users to their mediated searching service, and 86% of those users found that their own searches were equally satisfactory to librarian run searches. (30) Evans found that CD ROMs contributed to the decrease in use of mediated searching services. (31) Nicholas pointed to the rise of CD-ROMs and looked to the Internet, stating the “minority is now in the majority,” that is, end user searching would no longer be limited to academics and computer enthusiasts. (32)

While mediated searching gained momentum, other types of one-on-one interactions which did not use online resources were also being offered. Instructional research consultations emerged in the mid 1970s; one of the first articles on this topic was published in 1978, and included a review of the program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, as well as details about the institution’s online search service. (33) A news item announced the restoration of a similar consultation service at Northwestern University in the early 1980s, although no data was published on the use of this service. (34) Evidence of such consultations continues to appear in the literature with examples such as Deborah Lee’s in-depth study assessing the efficacy of the program at Mississippi State University Libraries. Ms. Lee positively notes that MSU’s program offers the ability for their reference department to meet its “goal of supporting their research community.” (35) Alison Brettle and others investigated the effectiveness and cost efficiency of librarian-mediated searches and information-skills training for providing information for health care. Their study, which included measuring patron satisfaction, determined users report that both services are worthwhile. (36)

The literature had little information on identifying the value added perspective of extended one-on-one searching. Over the last several years, the authors have been marketing a one-on-one searching service to the community at the University at Albany. In a previous article on marketing this service, they gathered

anecdotal information from users regarding their extended search experiences. The comments were positive and reinforce the value-added component of the service. (37)

### Research Methods

As noted in the literature review, many studies predicted the demise of mediated searching when CD-ROM technology was dominant and online searching was still a fledgling research method. (38) This review also produced no discussion on libraries considering the move towards a hybrid extended search appointment consisting of mediated searching elements along with what was traditionally thought of as a research or instructional consultation.

To determine what the service trends in other libraries, the authors initiated a study to identify the practice at the sixty-four State University of New York (SUNY) campuses. Using contact information from the State University of New York Librarians' Association (SUNYLA), the authors contacted the reference department administrators of the sixty-five libraries (some campuses have more than one person functioning as the head of Reference).

In the summer of 2006, each recipient received, via postal mail, a cover letter describing the survey's intent and function, the survey (See Appendix A), a self-addressed stamped envelope, and a specialty tea bag packet, as an incentive. A seven week deadline was requested. The survey instrument (see Appendix A) was brief, containing ten multiple choice questions with ample room for additional comments. Several questions addressed the logistics of one-on-one extended searching in these libraries such as, are appointments prescheduled and/or on-call, as well as user group served (i.e., faculty, students, and/or the community at large). To explore trends in this service, the survey instrument included questions on the average number of monthly sessions and on the status of patron usage (i.e., increased, decreased, or remained stable). The authors queried the types of resources used in these consultations; these could include Dialog, free databases such as LISTA or PubMed, and subscription databases like Ebsco Academic Search Premier. Respondents were also asked about marketing strategies and reasons for limiting service (i.e., lack of resources, staffing, low demand, and so forth). A final question addressed the attitudes these administrators have about the future/demise of this service.

### Results

Of the sixty five surveys issued, forty-seven completed surveys were returned – a healthy response rate of 72.3%. Because of this strong return, no follow-up was undertaken to generate additional input. The authors analyzed the data and found that, as expected, not all of the libraries provide extended one-on-one services. Of the forty-seven libraries, thirty-six (76.6%) do support some form of extended one-on-one searching and/or instructional assistance. Thirty-three (70.2%) libraries offer prescheduled appointments and thirteen (27.7 %) provide on-call options. Over 70% of the libraries, thirty-four in total, provide instruction by appointment (see Tables #1 and #2).

### Users

While the authors expected most of the libraries to limit this service to faculty, students and staff, the results indicate a very different trend. Seventeen of the libraries, almost 50%, offer these services to those constituents as well as to members of the community at large. There are libraries that do limit service: four (11.1%) only work with faculty; two (5.5%) offer service to faculty and students; and six (16.6%) extend searches to faculty, students and staff. Seven (8.3%) indicated that they do not conduct searches on these types of databases; most likely, they work with the online catalog and other library resources during these sessions (see Table #3).

## Human to Human

**Table #1 Review of libraries that provide one-on-one searching**

	<i>Number of libraries</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Extended one-on-one searching	36	76.6
No one-on-one searching	11	23.4
Total	47	100

**Table #2 Comparison of one-on-one service**

	<i>Number of libraries</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Prescheduled appointments	33	70.2
On-call	13	27.7
Instructional sessions	34	72.3

*Total and percentages do not add up to 47 and 100% respectively, since respondents were able to select more than one.*

**Table #3 Patron type**

	<i>Number of libraries</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Faculty only	4	11.1
Faculty and students	2	5.6
Faculty, students, and staff	6	16.7
Faculty, students, staff and community at large	17	47.2
Do not conduct these searches	7	19.4

## Electronic Resources

There are a wide variety of electronic resources available for research purposes. In the survey, respondents were asked which resources they used in their service. Of the thirty-six libraries, thirty-three answered this question. Two (5.5%) of the thirty-six libraries use the service strictly for Dialog searches; ten (27.7%) libraries in total, conduct Dialog searches. Twenty-nine (80.5%) of the respondents use patron accessible databases within their service; over 70% of the libraries (twenty-six) help their users with free Web databases; and twenty-nine (80.5%) provide assistance with other library resources, such as the online catalog (see Table #4).

## Human to Human

<b>Table #4 Types of electronic resources used during searches</b>		
	<i>Number of Libraries</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Dialog	10	27.8
Subscription databases (patron accessible)	29	80.5
Free web databases	26	72.2
Other library resources (e.g. OPAC)	29	80.5
<i>Total and percentages are more than 36 and 100%, respectfully, since respondents were able to check more than one answer, three responses were blank.</i>		

### Averages

Of the thirty-six libraries that provide extended one-on-one searching, five (13.9%) do not keep track of the hours dedicated to this service. Thirty-one (86.1%) libraries did provide the average number of hours per month. These ranged from a low of one hour per month to a very high of 125 hours. The average number of hours for the thirty-one libraries was 8.31, with a remarkable standard deviation of 21.98, mainly due to the 125 hour outlier. To get a better overall picture of the data, the outlier was removed and the numbers were recalculated. Of the remaining thirty libraries, the average monthly hours of one-on-one extended services were a more realistic 4.42, with a standard deviation of 3.81 per month.

### Trends

Thirty-five of the thirty-six libraries responded to the survey query on trends in the usage of the service. Two noted that they could not respond because their libraries do not keep statistics on this service. Close to 70% of the respondents reported that their service had either remained stable or had increased. Nine (26.5%) of the answers indicated decreases in the number of patron searches; most of those decreases have occurred over the last seven years (see Table #5). One of the respondents, who noted a decline in service over the last year or so, reported in the comments section that an English program that had required students to make these appointments had been terminated; however, the librarians are working on reinitiating that requirement.

<b>Table #5: Trends in the use of this service - Patron usage has ...</b>		
	<i>Number of libraries</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Increased	12	34.3
Remained stable	12	34.3
Decreased in the past 7-10 years	3	8.6
Decreased in the past 4-7 years	2	5.7
Decreased in the past 1-3years	4	11.4
Numbers not available	2	5.7
Totals	35*	100
* One survey was left blank		

## Marketing

There were a wide variety of strategies used to market this service. The survey provided six specific options (see Appendix A) and allowed respondents to add other methods. Of the thirty-six respondents who answered this question, twenty-eight (77.7%) use more than one marketing tool. The most popular method is through bibliographic instruction sessions; twenty-five (69.4%) libraries use this strategy to promote one-on-one searching services. Fifty percent (18) of the respondents use referrals from reference librarians to generate clientele; twenty (55.6%) have a Web presence for these services, either by Web pages, blogs, online appointment forms, or via email; eighteen (50.0%) contact faculty directly as a means of marketing. Traditional marketing tools, such as flyers, pamphlets and signage are used less frequently, with only nine (25.0%) of the libraries utilizing these resources. Of the thirty-six libraries, only one (2.8%) has created and implemented a marketing plan. Three libraries do not market this service (see Table #6).

<b>Table #6: Marketing Strategies</b>		
	<i>Number of Libraries</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Promoted through bibliographic instruction	25	69.4
Contacted faculty directly	18	50
Referrals from reference librarians	20	55.6
Pamphlets, posters, flyers, and library signage	9	25
Web pages, blogs, online appointment forms	18	50
Created and implemented a marketing plan	1	2.8
No marketing	3	8.3
Totals	94*	
<i>Total and percentages are more than 36 and 100%, respectfully, since respondents were able to check more than one answer</i>		

## Reasons for no service

There were fifteen responses to the question asking for reasons why this service is not provided; some libraries that offer this service also answered this question since the services they provide are limited. Of the fifteen responses, over 50% (8) indicated the lack of staff as a deterrent for providing this service; five (33.3%) noted a lack of resources (e.g., computers, office space) as the reason for no service ; and only one (6.7%) reported the lack of marketing resources as the reason for not offering the service. Seven (46.7%) respondents selected the option “patron needs are met through other means” as the reason they do not sponsor extended one-on-one searching.

## Future

Responses to the last question, which queried respondents about the future of one-on-one search services were quite positive. Of the forty who answered the question, thirty-one (77.5%) respondents identified this service as a “value added” component for their academic community; six (15.0%) were neutral (five are libraries that do not provide the service); two (5.0%) noted interest in offering this type of service; and one (2.5%) indicated that this is a bygone service (see Table #7).

## Comments

The survey also afforded individuals with the ability to add comments. Twenty-three respondents posted additional notes. Of these, three noted that the service is widely utilized and appreciated by members of

## Human to Human

<b>Table #7 the future of extended search services</b>		
	<i>Number of libraries</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Value-added	31	77.5
Neutral	6	15
Interest in sponsoring this service	2	5
Going the way of the dinosaurs	1	2.5

the institutional community. Five noted that they do not actively promote the service and that it comes from either bibliographic instruction session in classes, or the appointments are generated from walk-in reference traffic. Two respondents noted that they do not offer the service on a regular basis since they lack resources, such as time and staff. One stated that the research consultation aspect is a growth area while plain Dialog searches are too costly and dying out. Another reported that the online databases are becoming increasingly user friendly, so it will be expected that the mediated searching will continue to decline, though another pointed to a recent increase in citation searching for promotion and tenure cases and another in an increase in demand for this type of service. Several commented on the fact that many of these searches are conducted outside of the service and go undocumented.

### Discussion

From the research results, the authors found that one-on-one searching is provided at over 70% of the responding SUNY libraries through a hybrid research consultation; combining mediated searching research/instructional consultation service. The human element in helping users utilize the library can add an important level of value to library services and can save the patron precious time in undertaking research. Combining elements of a research consultation that provides instruction and reference assistance along with a mediated search can aid users in an efficient and thorough process and the extended amount of time can help users truly improve their strategies, become more familiar with library resources, and learn to filter results for quality information.

After analyzing the survey data, the authors found that the average number of session hours was relatively low, at 4.42 hours per month. Since the survey asked specifically for the program hours, there may be a large number of undocumented one-on-one extended searches. As noted earlier, bibliographers and other librarians may not be keeping track of office drop-in searches. The authors recommend the use of tools, like RefDesk Tracker, which makes it much easier to document unofficial one-on one search appointments to get a better picture of extended searching sessions.

Even though some of the literature, and one survey respondent predicted a large decline in these types of services, this research indicates the reverse. While librarians know that users can readily retrieve research information from easily-accessible subscription databases as well as free Internet sources, there is still a need for expertise with accessing and learning how to use these resources. Responses showed that users at over 80% of the responding SUNY libraries use these services for getting assistance with resources accessible and meant to be utilized directly by end-users.

While this study focused mainly on the status of this type of service, the question on marketing brings to light the fact that the service is important enough for libraries to promote. Since most of the libraries provide more than one mode of outreach, it can be inferred that libraries are actively supporting usage. Although efforts are made to promote the service, coordinated, more structured efforts, such as creating a

marketing plan, are generally not undertaken. These types of strategies could provide benefits to libraries wishing to enhance utilization of this valuable service in their libraries. Future studies should measure marketing strategies and pre/post implementation.

While this study showed that many libraries are offering this service many are still not. Deborah Lee noted that the labor intensiveness of this type of program is an important aspect when considering the allocation of library resources. (39) The value-added component of this service needs to be considered in discussions about allocating library resources. While there is little in the past literature on the “value” aspect of these services, this study’s research results indicate that librarians believe that this is a valuable service and strongly support it – with an almost 80% positive response to that question. One of the returned comments highlighted a collaboration between their institution’s English faculty and librarians. Together they developed an assignment that mandated a one-on-one search with a librarian. The respondent noted that “the librarians enjoyed working with and getting to know students...” though it “was time-consuming, it was worth it, as instructors saw marked improvement in research papers.” Most agree that one-on-one in depth research appointments are a useful service to their users, if not for students, than for faculty; Elizabeth Cookery argues that our role as librarians is often to facilitate serendipity by making utilization of library resources seamless. (40) Surely, extended one-on-one consultations which include mediated searching, research and instruction are an important method by which this facilitating role can be carried out.

## Conclusion

Providing hybrid consultation services with mediated searching enables librarians to serve in the role as information mediator and help the patron sift through the overabundance of data that can be retrieved, identify quality resources, and learn how to synthesize information from a wide variety of sources to arrive at a logical conclusion. More research needs to be done to see if this type of combined in-depth appointment is available at other research libraries across the country and in what capacity. In addition, qualitative measures of the value of human-to-human interaction in this type of setting need to be evaluated.

Another area for further research would be to follow up with the directors of SUNY libraries and learn more about their support for regular consultation service functions in their libraries given competing priorities within academic libraries in an era of increasing fiscal restraint. The last question in this survey asked for feelings about the future of one-on-one searching services. Overwhelmingly, the responses were very affirmative – with over 80% of those who answered the question indicating that they felt the service is of value to their campus communities or that they would like to offer the service. Other areas for further research include both patron satisfaction with and research success of extended one-on-one appointments. This would be highly beneficial to support a discussion on allocating resources for this service.

The authors feel the results would have been more enlightening had we queried institution type (e.g., community college, four year campus, or university center). In addition, we would have liked to have known if the institutions maintained subscriptions to Dialog or other online search systems, in order to better understand the low rate of Dialog/mediated searching. Conversely, it would be interesting to learn to what extent print resources are being utilized in one-on-one research and instruction sessions to identify to what extent extended consultations enable a patron to make full use of library resources and services.

A hybrid model of one-on-one extended session, where users receive mediated search services as well as research consultation and instructional services, can enhance a patron’s use of the library and its resources. With this type of hybrid appointment we do not see extended one-on-one appointments dying out in

academic libraries.

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## Human to Human

### APPENDIX A

#### **One-on-One (librarian/patron) Searching Service Survey**

For this study, the authors define mediated searches as one-on-one extended time (over ½ hour) appointments which provide access to costly database services, such as Dialog, for locating hard to find research materials. These customized search sessions can also present instructional opportunities during which patrons learn how to select appropriate databases, become skilled with search techniques, and find out about current awareness alert services, etc.

Do the librarians at your library:

1. Provide one-on-one extended **searching** assistance by prescheduled appointment?
  - (a) yes
  - (b) no
2. Provide one-on-one extended **instruction** in databases and library services by appointment?
  - (a) Yes
  - (b) No
3. Have “on-call” hours to provide extended one-on-one research and/or instructional services beyond what is provided at the reference desk?
  - (a) Yes
  - (b) No

If you have selected “Yes” on any of the above questions, please continue on with the survey. Otherwise, go to question number 9.

4. Do the librarians at your library perform mediated searches on stand-alone (e.g., CD-ROM) or online computer databases or online services (e.g., Dialog) for patrons?
  - (a) Yes faculty only
  - (b) Yes, faculty and students
  - (c) Yes, faculty, students and staff
  - (d) Yes, faculty, students, staff and members of the community at large.
  - (e) No
5. On what types of databases do librarians perform searches for patrons? (circle all that apply):
  - (a) Only on restricted databases (e.g., Dialog)
  - (b) Patron-accessible subscription databases (e.g., Ebsco Academic Search Premier)
  - (c) Free Web databases (e.g., LISTA, PubMed)
  - (d) Other library resources, (e.g., OPAC)
6. What is the trend in the use of this service? Patron usage has:
  - (a) Increased
  - (b) Remained stable
  - (c) Decreased (choose one):
    1. in the past 7-10 years
    2. in the past 4-7 years
    3. in the past 1-3 years
  - (d) other \_\_\_\_\_
7. What was the average number of appointments per month for the past academic year? \_\_\_\_\_
8. What have you done to market these services (check all that apply)?
  - (a) Promoted through bibliographic instruction sessions

**Human to Human**

- (b) Contacted faculty directly (e.g., phone calls, emails)
- (c) Referrals from reference librarians
- (d) Pamphlets, posters, flyers, and library signage
- (e) Web pages, blogs, online appointment forms
- (f) Created and implemented a marketing plan
- (g) Other efforts (list):

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9. If your library does not offer any of the services described, what are the reasons (check all that apply)?

- (a) Not enough staff
- (b) Not enough resources (computers, office space, etc.)
- (c) Not enough resources to market the service adequately
- (d) Patron needs are met through other means
- (e) Other (list):

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10. What are your feelings about the future of one-on-one research and instruction consultations?

- (a) This type of service is a real “value added” item for my academic community
- (b) No feeling one way or the other
- (c) We'd like to offer this service
- (d) It's going the way of the dinosaurs

Additional Comments

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If you have any questions, please feel free to contact either Elaine or Carol Anne at:

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## Peer Reviewed Article

### Public Library Systems in New York State: A History and Survey

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**Xiaoai Ren &  
Deborah Lines Andersen**

**A**bstract: *New York State has 23 library systems that divide the state into service regions and provide funding and programming for its 753 public libraries. These public libraries vary in size, staffing, budget, collections, and population base, and rely to a greater or lesser extent upon the services provided by their individual systems. In fall 2005 the New York Library Association (NYLA) Public Library Section (PLS) conducted a survey of public libraries to ascertain the services provided by their library systems as well as the extent to which respondents (primarily library directors) felt that their library systems were necessary as well as useful. Findings from the survey, although not generalizable to all libraries in the state, suggest that small and medium size libraries rely heavily upon system services and would be hard pressed to continue without such services as interlibrary loan, centralized technologies and online public access catalogs, and staff training.*

#### **Purpose and Research Questions**

In 2004 members of the Public Library Section of the New York Library Association posed a series of questions about the place of public library systems in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Were these systems still the best approach to providing library service? What critical services did library systems provide to member libraries? Would voluntary collaboration work as well to serve the information needs of the citizens of New York? Would all libraries have the same policy stance, or might that stance vary by size and/or location? The Public Library Section of NYLA believed that it was time to re-examine system service in New York State and discuss ways services could be provided in the most cost effective and efficient way

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that benefits all library users. The group felt that there were feelings being expressed but no hard data or survey analysis of what member libraries really thought about library systems.

### Library Systems in the United States

Public library systems were the outgrowth of the “larger units of service” doctrine that the American Library Association (ALA) promoted throughout the nation in 1948. ALA’s “A National Plan for Public Library Services” called for larger units of public library service as well as systematic coordination of existing library resources and functions. [1] The initial rationale behind the assumption of “larger units of service” calls for cooperation among libraries, creating economies of scale since technology and technology expertise are too expensive for any single library unit. These systems extended services to vast regions of the nation that were either underserved or unserved by public libraries. [2] In 1956 the passage of the federally funded Library Service Act and its successor, the Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA), made federal funds available for rural library services (and later for urban libraries as well), thus making it possible for independent libraries to act cooperatively for specific purposes. [3] In the 1996 Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) new library legislation enacted by the 104<sup>th</sup> Congress replaced LSCA. Compared to its predecessor, LSTA stressed information access through technology such as establishing electronic linkages among libraries and library consortia. [4]

The timing of forming public library systems and the structures of public library systems vary widely according to different political and economic environments in each state. [5] Overall the organizational scheme of public library systems can be divided into three categories. The loosest organizational scheme and the one that allows individual libraries the greatest autonomy is the cooperative system. The most centralized structure is the consolidated system. Between them is the federated system. [6]

### From Single-type to Multi-type Library Systems

Faced by technology advancement and financial constraints, some systems merged and consolidated over time, while some closed down. Others adapted to provide new services for members. A trend of library systems development in the 1980s was that of single library systems changing into multi-type library consortia. The capacity for automated technologies served as a foundation for this cooperation. [7] Multi-type or regional library systems included not only public libraries, but also school libraries, special libraries and academic libraries. These new regional library systems differed in each state depending upon perceived needs. Multi-type library systems displayed more area characteristics and provide services to a broader audience than single-type library systems. [8] Multi-type regional library systems focused mainly on the geographic area as they connect libraries with different missions, ideologies and target patrons.

Similar to the changing form of public library systems discussed above, some of the multi-type regional library systems disappeared and went back to their original single-type systems. Reasons for keeping or dissolving systems related not only to technological and financial factors, but also to the differences between library types. The multi-type library systems in the State of Illinois in the early 1980s were an example of these system realignments. The state formed multi-type library consortia, but dissolved consortial sharing among all types of libraries in the mid-1990s. This shift came about because of the re-alignment of some of the major academic library members of the consortia with other academic libraries outside of the original consortia, and especially with the 1995 withdrawal of the University of Illinois of Urbana-Champaign. [9]

### Public Library Systems in New York State

New York State's system formation is another example of shifting consortial alignments. The public library system in New York State has served as the stimulus for the creation of regional and school library system library service networks. In 1956, there were eight library systems in the state involving 13 counties plus the Watertown regional service center. In the 1980s, there were 22 systems which included 60 counties and served over 99 percent of the state's area and people. Only three of 727 chartered New York State public libraries were not members of public library systems. [10] Currently there are 23 public library systems in New York State serving 753 public libraries across the state. [11]

Between 1963 and 1966, the Research Unit of the New York State Education Department evaluated public library systems and for the first time expressed the need for coordinated library service of all types at all levels, seeking geographical as well as functional cooperation. In 1981, the Commissioner's Committee on Statewide Library Development made many far-reaching recommendations for the future of libraries, library systems and networks in New York State. One of recommendations made (although not implemented) in the 1981 report was the creation of nine regional multi-type library organizations from existing systems.

"Library Systems in New York State, 1989" was the first external study of systems in New York State in more than 20 years. The report concluded that it would cost member libraries at least 3.5 times more to individually provide the services offered by the library system at the time. It mentioned a governance problem within the system and suggested greater involvement of trustees and directors of member libraries in the management of systems, and increased state aid for all three types of library systems (i.e., cooperative, consolidated, and federated). [12]

### Information Technology for Public Library Systems

In the 1980s the proliferation of public library systems was accompanied by challenges from quickly changing information technologies. Emerging technology is a double-edged sword for the development of library systems. On one hand it provides opportunities for multi-library collaboration, while on the other hand it makes some of system services less critical than in the past. For example, when libraries find more materials available electronically they might feel less need for cooperation and sharing of resources under public library systems. [13] Many of the early public library system services have been phased out or superseded by alternative services as technology developed. Widespread PC and network technologies and their declining prices, together with vendors who developed library-related turnkey systems, have made access to computer and network resources possible for individual libraries. Today libraries need to make decisions about where to get services—through the system; through a local, regional, or national network; or through vendors. Under this changing environment, public library systems have to redefine their unique roles and services to best serve their constituent libraries. [14]

Hand in hand with a rapid increase in potential information technologies, public libraries continue to find mounting pressure to continue present services while also acquiring technology and expert staff for new functions. [15] Library systems in New York State, funded at the state rather than local level, have budgets that can be used to create cooperative technology systems as well as training venues for their libraries. Finding the best way to evaluate both what is being offered and what could or should be offered to meet citizen needs is a challenge for individual libraries and systems. [16]

### Evaluating Libraries

To evaluate or reevaluate the work of public library systems, it is first necessary to review the evaluation of individual public libraries. The nature of accountability in public libraries had been changing dramatically from measuring library inputs or resources to measuring library output, or performance. [17] Input includes the financial resources to pay for staff, materials and support services. Output is measured in counts of circulation and patron visits. Today libraries measure those “visits” to both the actual building and to the library’s website. Thus, cost-benefit analysis of public libraries is shifting from measuring outputs (what the library does) to measuring outcomes (the benefits to library constituents). [18]

Part of the reason for this shift can be attributed to the increasing pressure on public libraries that are competing with other organizations for federal, state or local aid, and on increasing taxpayer requirements for accountability and transparency. Some methods which focused on economic effects in evaluating public library services are Cost-benefit Analysis (CBA) and Taxpayer Return of Investment (ROI). Both methods estimate direct benefits to patrons from using library services. Measures include the degree of willingness of library users to pay for substitutions if library services were not available (willingness to pay) or by how much patrons are willing to give up something they already have (willingness to accept). By using these two methodologies, the evaluation can assign dollar value to the benefit. [19] The benefits of library systems services can be evaluated by adapting these methods to the systems setting.

In the mid-1990s, research was conducted at the St. Louis Public Library, applying cost-benefit analysis to test the service operations of the St. Louis Public Library and to evaluate the economic benefit of library services. In 2002-2003, the St. Louis researchers set out to apply the same methodology to medium and small sized public libraries. Telephone interviews were used to collect responses and a contingent valuation method was used to ask questions to measure the dollar value of library service benefits. For all the public libraries involved in phase one research, the researchers found that each library returned more than one dollar of benefits for each dollar of annual taxes. With funding from the Public Library Association Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), St. Louis Public Library’s research project was conducted not only to evaluate library services by applying a cost-benefit method, but also to develop a methodology that other libraries could adapt to their own settings. [20]

In a second example, a comprehensive study of economic contribution and return on taxpayer investment in Florida’s public libraries was conducted over the period of December 2003 to September 2004. The research team collected data from public library annual reports, household telephone surveys, and follow-up survey of libraries. The researchers found out that, overall, Florida’s public libraries returned \$6.54 for every one dollar invested from all sources. [21]

Although these two studies focused on evaluating public libraries rather than public library systems, they could easily be adapted to evaluate system service effects on users, and their member libraries.

### Evaluating Library Systems

Evaluation is necessary in order to provide an empirical basis for making policies about library system development. As time goes by, it is possible that some of the services provided by systems may become obsolete. For example, at the beginning of developing public library systems, creating new libraries for underserved areas and populations might have been the primary mission on a system’s agenda. Today librarian development, and continuing education and training are more important than developing new libraries because most people already have access to public library services. [22] By reevaluating library systems, the role of the systems and the effects of services can provide a useful basis for improving system services.

Seavey's study of Wisconsin's library systems is an example of such empirical evaluation. In 1988, Seavey used a case study approach to measure changes in the level of library service with the establishment of library systems in Wisconsin. The study used four ratios (circulation per capita, library expenditure per capita, turnover rate, and Full Time Employee (FTE) rate per 10,000 population served), and a combined index number to serve as indicators of the level of library service in Wisconsin counties. This study found that the level of the library services rose during the research period (1970-1980) and the systems had contributed to this rise. [23]

In the same year Childers (1988) studied the effect of federated systems in Pennsylvania by adopting a multi-dimensional approach which viewed the potential effect of library systems on library services through published statistics, interviews and questionnaires. Overall the findings supported the proposition that federated systems of public libraries do enhance library services. Such effects appear most clearly in the area of user services, but not as much in the area of library resources and library operations. [24]

The purpose of this research was to look at New York State library systems in order to start the process of evaluating both their inputs and outputs, seeking to re-examine system service in New York State and discuss ways services could be provided in the most cost effective and efficient way that benefits all library users.

## Methodology

This survey research was conducted over the Internet through a listserv for New York Library Association (NYLA) Public Library Section (PLS) subscribers. Listserv members received the survey and then a reminder about the approaching due date. See the Appendix for a copy of the survey instrument.

Population and Sampling Technique: There were approximately 800 individuals who were contacted in fall 2005 through the NYLA PLS listserv and thus form the population for this survey. They were part of the 23 public library systems, 9 3R systems, and 42 school library systems in the state. The sampling technique was self-selection and yielded 93 surveys, returned primarily as faxed documents.

Variables: The survey (see Appendix) was originally a one-page document that first asked demographic questions about an individual's name, library system, chartered population, respondent's position in the library, and number of certified librarians on staff. The second set of questions asked about services that a) the individual library provides to the community, b) the system provides to the library, and c) that would be lost if the system no longer existed. The third set of questions (yes/no answers only), asked the respondents about their libraries' participation in and their knowledge about their own library systems. The fourth set of questions was open-ended and dealt with concerns and benefits if a library system merger were to take place. Finally, respondents were asked how they would use additional state aid if it were made available. For ease of analysis the survey has been modified in the appendix to include section and question numbers.

Strengths and Limitations of This Project: Since the sampling technique was self-selection, it is clear that the survey results cannot be generalized to the larger population of New York State library system members. It is usual that respondents of surveys such as this one are individuals at the edges—those who feel very strongly about the research questions. It might be expected that the results here would show very strong feelings for or against public library systems. One might also expect that respondents would be the ones with most to gain or lose from continuing, merging, or dissolving such systems. Additionally, because of the method of return—fax, and the inclusion of the first question that asked for respondent

## Public Library Systems in New York State

self-identification, one might expect that some individuals would want to either hold back or be wary of how their data were to be used. Every effort has been made throughout this report to avoid any identification of individual respondents. Nonetheless, the survey was used to unearth the hopes and fears of individual PLS members about library systems in New York State.

### Analysis

#### **Section I: Demographic Questions**

There are five questions in this section: respondent's name, information about the respondents' system, chartered population, respondent's employment position, and number of certified librarians in the respondent's library.

Question 1. Respondent's Name: Confidential information not included here.

#### Question 2. Name of Library System

Table 1 displays the distribution of respondents by library system. There are 23 public library systems and 753 library members in New York State. The second column in Table 1 shows the number of surveys returned (sample) from that library system, the number in parenthesis equaling the total number of members in each system (population). The third column ("Percentile") gives the percentage calculation for library system respondents divided by total number of responses. (Thus the North Country Library System had 12 respondents, divided by 93 total respondents for 13 percent of all respondents in this study.) There are 3 different types of public library systems in New York State: consolidated (3), federated (4), and cooperative (16). No consolidated systems are represented in the sample. There are three of the four federated systems (see \* in the table) and all 16 cooperative systems. [25]

Of the 93 individual survey respondents, 91 were from 19 public library systems in New York State, one from a 3Rs library, and one from a school library system. Among them, half of the respondents were from the following five public library systems: the North Country Library System, Clinton-Essex-Franklin, the Mid Hudson Library System, the Ramapo Catskill Library System, and the Pioneer Library System. No responses were received from Brooklyn, Buffalo-Erie, New York, or Queens Library systems—all extremely large systems in the state.

Table 1 displays the numbers of the respondents from each of the systems in decreasing order. For purposes of analysis, the researchers divided the public library systems in Table 1 into four system clusters shaded in Table 1. More than half of the responses are from the first five library systems; approximately 27 percent of the total responses are from the second five library systems. Together about 81 percent of the responses were from the first ten systems in Table 1. This is important to remember when analyzing subsequent data. The library systems across the state are not equally represented in this survey. Libraries in the top two clusters will have a much greater impact on the conclusions than those in the last two clusters.

## Public Library Systems in New York State

**Table 1. Distribution of respondents by library system**

	<i>System Members</i>	<i>System Frequencies</i>	<i>Percentile</i>
North Country Library System (64)	64	12	13%
Mid Hudson Library System (66)	66	10	11%
Ramapo Catskill Library System (47)	47	10	11%
*Clinton Essex Franklin (30)	30	9	10%
Pioneer Library System (42)	42	8	9%
Upper Hudson Library System (29)	29	7	8%
Nioga Library System (21)	21	5	5%
Southern Adirondack Library System (34)	34	5	5%
Southern Tier (40)	40	5	5%
Mid York Library System (43)	43	4	4
Four-County Library System (42)	42	3	3%
Suffolk Cooperative Library System (56)	56	3	3%
Westchester Library System (38)	38	3	3%
Chautauqua-Cattaraugus (36)	36	2	2%
Finger Lakes Library System (31)	31	1	1%
Mohawk Valley Library System (14)	14	1	1%
*Monroe County Library System (20)	20	1	1
Nassau (55)	56	1	1%
*Onondaga Library System(19)	19	1	1%
South Central Regional Library Council		1	1%
Ulster BOCES SLS		1	1%
<b>Totals</b>		<b>93</b>	<b>100%</b>

### Question 3. Library Chartered Population

Table 2 displays the numbers of respondent libraries according to their chartered population. Among the 93 respondents, almost 70 percent of them had chartered populations under 20,000. Approximately 82 percent had chartered populations under 50,000. Six respondents (7%) did not answer this question. If one were to argue that small libraries make most use of library system services, and have the most to lose or gain through these services, then these figures are predictable, explaining at least some of the high response rate for “small” libraries. In future analysis one would want to look at the actual size of all library charter populations in New York State to see if these percentages are representative of all libraries, or if, indeed, a greater percentage of “small” library representatives returned their surveys.

### Question 4. Respondent’s Job Category

For this question, more than 83 percent of the respondents were directors of libraries. About 12 percent of the respondents were library staff or trustees. There was one school librarian. Three system staff and directors filled out the survey forms.

## Public Library Systems in New York State

<i>Chartered Population</i>	<i>Frequencies</i>	<i>Percentile</i>
1- 9,999	33	35%
10,000 -19,999	31	33%
20,000 - 49,999	13	14%
> 50,000	10	11%
No response	6	7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

### Question 5. Number of Certified Librarians at Respondent's Library

Table 3 displays the number of certified librarians in the respondents' libraries. Approximately 58 percent of the respondents had fewer than 2 certified librarians at their libraries. Eighty percent of the respondents had six or fewer certified librarians on their staff. About 73 percent of the total respondents had a chartered population of less than 50,000 with six or fewer certified librarians on their staff. Not surprisingly, the number of librarians on staff was directly, positively correlated with the size of the library chartered population. As with other analysis in this report, the total number of respondents to the chartered populations question was 87, not the full respondent pool of 93.

<i>Number of certified librarians</i>	<i>Frequencies</i>	<i>Percentile</i>	<i>Libraries Under 20,000</i>	<i>Libraries 20,000 or more</i>
0-2	54	58%	51	3
3-6	20	22%	11	4
7-10	6	6%	1	4
>10	11	12%	0	11
No response	2	2%	1	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>23</b>

## **Section II: Library Services and Systems Services Description**

This section focuses on the description of services provided by responding libraries to their communities, services provided to libraries by their library systems, and the services most likely to be lost if a system ceased to exist.

### Question 1. The Three Most Important Services the Respondent's Library Provides to the Community

There were 89 item responses to this question. Table 4 lists the most important library services provided by the responding libraries to their communities based on the frequencies of response. This question was one of the open-ended question types in this survey. Respondents could express their answers to this question in different ways, even when talking about the same thing. Due to the commonality of library services, the answers were categorized and coded systematically.

## Public Library Systems in New York State

Table 4 lists the most cited important library services in the responses in their decreasing order of frequency.

<b>Table 4. Important library services provided to the community</b>		
<i>Important library services</i>	<i>Frequencies</i>	<i>Percentile</i>
Library collection and material	80	90
Free computer and Internet access	57	64
Programming	32	36
Children’s program and service	30	34
Reference services	20	22
Community center	14	16
Electronic access to Information	9	10
Education and Literacy	6	7
ILL	6	7
IT training	5	6
Youth services	5	6
Community outreach	4	4
School curriculum support	3	3

The top two items (both dealing with providing materials and indicated by over 50 percent of respondents) were:

1. Providing collection and material for entertainment and education (90% of all respondents); and
2. Providing free computer and Internet access (64%).

The next three items were services (and indicated by at least 20 percent of respondents):

1. Providing free programming (36%);
2. Providing children’s program and service (34%); and
3. Reference services (22%).

Respondents could choose multiple items, so the total adds up of percentage will over 100%.

Table 4.1 compares the most popular library services against the different categories of chartered populations. Basically, the preferences of most popular library services by respondents with different chartered populations are similar to the overall aggregated respondents’ preferences. There are only slightly differences existing among the respondents from different population categories. In Table 4.1, the numbers in the parentheses in the left column are the total number of respondents in each of the chartered population categories. The number under the ranking orders (No. 1, 2, 3) is the number of respondents within that population category who thought that service was the most important library services they provide to their communities.

It is apparent that the first two population categories (“1 to 9,999” and “10,000 to 19,999”) had more respondents than the others; therefore the respondents in those two had a substantial influence on which would be the most important library services for all of the survey respondents (essentially skewing the aggregate data toward their preferences). Although there is no drastically different trend in the preferred important library services to community among the different respondents’ population categories, there are

## Public Library Systems in New York State

**Table 4.1. The three most important library services according to different population categories**

<i>Population Categories</i>	<i>Preference No. 1</i>	<i>Preference No. 2</i>	<i>Preference No. 3</i>
1 - 9,999 (33)	Providing collections and materials (31)	Free computer and Internet access (24)	Programming (5)
10,000 - 19,999	Providing collections and materials (27)	Free computer and Internet access (18)	Children's program and service (14)
20,000 - 49,999	Providing collections and materials (13)	Free computer and Internet access (9)	Programming (4) Children's program and service (4) Reference services (4)
> 50,000 (10)	Providing collections and materials (7)	Programming (5)	Reference services (4) Free computer and Internet access (4)

some slightly different trends. For example, for populations under 20,000, reference services were indicated less often than collections, computing and programming. Only for libraries with a population category of over 20,000 did reference services appear in the top three services. Given that there were only 23 respondents in this category (a combination of the last two), no conclusions can be drawn from these data.

### Question 2: The Three Most Important Library Services that the System Provides to Its Libraries

For this question, there were 93 responses. Table 5 uses the same analysis method as Table 4. It displays

**Table 5. The most important system services that the system provides to its libraries**

<i>Important system services</i>	<i>Frequencies</i>	<i>Percentile</i>
ILL and delivery	77	83%
Providing automation system (circulation, catalog...)	58	62%
Training and continuing education	30	32%
Centralized and cooperative services and activities	29	31%
Technical support	26	28%
Consultation and support	21	23%
Professional support	13	14%
Fundraising	11	12%
Rotating collection	6	6%
Member network	5	5%
Onsite visit	3	3%

## Public Library Systems in New York State

an open-ended question about important system services. The answers were coded and categorized based on their commonalities.

Here the two most important system services that the respondents thought their systems providing to them were:

1. ILL and delivery (85% of all respondents)
2. Providing automation systems (63%)

A second cluster of services with between 23% and 32% of the 93 responses included:

3. Training and continuing education (32%)
4. Centralized and cooperative services and activities (32%)
5. Technical support (28%)
6. Consultation support (23%)

Here the category of “Centralized and cooperative services and activities” included the descriptions of systems providing hosted website services, coordinated e-mail, online database subsidy, bulk purchasing, partial ordering and processing, cooperative cataloging, and cataloging. All the activities needed to be coordinated by a system or done by system were assigned to this category. “Technical support” included the activities of technology purchasing, and fixing computer problems. All descriptions about professional development, onsite training, or work seminars were categorized under the category of “Training and continuing education” for the purposes of this analysis.

Table 5.1 is similar to Table 4.1. It compares the three most important system services perceived by the respondents against their corresponding chartered populations. For all population categories, interlibrary loan and delivery was the most important system service, while providing an automation system was universally the second service indicated. Libraries under 10,000 were unique in their indication of training and technical support for their third-ranked items as opposed to centralized and cooperative services and activities for all other library groups.

<i>Population Categories</i>	<i>No. 1 in importance</i>	<i>No. 2 in importance</i>	<i>No. 3 in importance</i>
1 - 9,999 (33)	ILL and Delivery (26)	Providing automation system (16)	Training(13) Technical support (13)
10,000 - 19,999 (31)	ILL and Delivery (26)	Providing automation system (23)	Centralized and cooperative services and activities (11)
20,000 - 49,999 (13)	ILL and Delivery (13)	Providing automation system (9)	Centralized and cooperative services and activities (6)
> 50,000 (10)	ILL and Delivery (8)	Providing automation system (6)	Centralized and cooperative services and activities (5)

## Public Library Systems in New York State

<b>Table 6: Services the respondent's library would lose if the system ceased to exist</b>		
<i>Lost system services</i>	<i>Frequencies</i>	<i>Percentile</i>
ILL and delivery	63	69%
Providing automation system	44	48%
Centralized ordering and processing	26	29%
Training	22	24%
Consultation	19	21%
Technical support	15	16%
Everything	11	12%
Member network	8	9%
Advocacy	8	9%
Professional support	7	8%
Fundraising and grant	6	7%
Existing relationship with system	6	7%
Rotating collection	4	4%
Onsite visits	3	3%
Understanding of local issue	2	2%

Question 3. What services would your library lose if system ceased to exist?

Understandably, Table 6 tells almost the same story as Table 5, with interlibrary loan and delivery, providing an automation system, and centralized and cooperative services and activities being the most highly rated lost services if systems ceased to exist.

Table 6.1 lists the most likely lost services if a system ceased to exist, disaggregated by population categories. Although interlibrary loan and delivery, and providing an automation system were ranked first and second for all but the largest population categories, there are differences for what would be lost among different population categories in the right-hand, third choice column.

<b>Table 6.1. The three most likely lost services if a system ceased to exist, disaggregated by population categories</b>			
<i>Population Categories</i>	<i>No. 1 lost service</i>	<i>No. 2 lost service</i>	<i>No. 3 lost service</i>
1 - 9,999 (33)	ILL and Delivery (24)	Providing automation system (18)	Centralized and cooperative services and activities (9)
10,000 - 19,999 (31)	ILL and Delivery (19)	Providing automation system (14)	Centralized and cooperative services and activities (11) Training (11)
20,000 - 49,999 (13)	ILL and Delivery (10)	Providing automation system (6)	Members network (3)
> 50,000 (10)	ILL and Delivery (6)	Consultation (3)	Providing automation system (1) Fundraising (2) Technical Support (2)

## Public Library Systems in New York State

### **Section III: System Participation and Governance Description**

Section III included yes/no questions to information about system governance and member participation in it.

#### Question 1. Does your system allow for participation in system governance?

All the respondents with a chartered population more than 20,000 (n = 23) said “yes” to this question. 12 of the 13 “no” answers were from respondents with a chartered populations less than 20,000. (Percentages in this section are column figures.)

<b>Table 7. Participation in system governance</b>			
<b>System governance participation</b>	<b>Frequencies</b>	<b>Libraries under 20,000</b>	<b>Libraries 20,000 or more</b>
Yes	76	49 (79%)	23 (100%)
No	13	12 (19%)	0 (0%)
Don't Know	2	1 (2%)	0 (0%)
Column Totals	91	62 (100%)	23 (100%)

#### Question 2. If yes, does your system have member libraries vote on the budget?

49 respondents with chartered populations less than 20,000 said “no” to this question. There were 10 respondents from libraries with chartered populations more than 20,000 that said “no” and 12 that responded “yes.”

<b>Table 8. Ability to vote on system budgets</b>			
<b>Member votes on budget</b>	<b>Frequencies</b>	<b>Libraries under 20,000</b>	<b>Libraries 20,000 or more</b>
Yes	18	6 (11%)	12 (55%)
No	65	49 (87%)	10 (45%)
Don't Know	1	1 (2%)	0 (0%)
Column Totals	84	56 (100%)	22 (100%)

#### Question 3. Do library directors serve on the system board?

Almost 40 percent of respondents with chartered populations more than 20,000 answered “yes” to this question while only 15 percent of the respondents with chartered populations less than 20,000 said “yes.”

<b>Table 9. Library directors who sit on system’s board</b>			
<b>Director serves on board</b>	<b>Frequencies</b>	<b>Libraries under 20,000</b>	<b>Libraries 20,000 or more</b>
Yes	20	9 (15%)	9 (39%)
No	70	52 (84%)	14 (61%)
Don't Know	1	1 (1%)	0 (0%)
Column Totals	91	62 (100%)	23 (100%)

## Public Library Systems in New York State

Question 4. Do member libraries provide input on the system budget?

For this question, eighty two percent of the respondents with chartered populations 20,000 or more answered “yes” while fifty five percent of the respondents with chartered populations less than 20,000 answered “yes.”

<b>Table 10. Ability to provide input on the system’s budget</b>			
<i>Member Input for system</i>	<i>Frequencies</i>	<i>Libraries under 20,000</i>	<i>Libraries 20,000 or more</i>
Yes	55	32 (55%)	18 (82%)
No	30	25 (43%)	4 (8%)
Don't Know	1	1 (2%)	0 (0%)
Column Totals	86	58 (100%)	22 (100%)

Question 5. Do member libraries participate in the development of the system’s plan of service?

Six of the seven “no” answers were from respondents with chartered populations less than 20,000 and the other one was from a respondent with a chartered population more than 50,000.

<b>Table 11. Participation in the system’s plan of service</b>			
<i>Participation in Plan of Service</i>	<i>Frequencies</i>	<i>Libraries under 20,000</i>	<i>Libraries 20,000 or more</i>
Yes	80	53 (88%)	21 (95%)
No	7	6 (10%)	1 (5%)
Don't Know	1	1 (2%)	0 (0%)
Column Totals	88	60 (100%)	22 (100%)

Question 6. Does your system provide you with its annual budget?

All “no” answers were from respondents with chartered populations less than 20,000.

<b>Table 12. Annual budget figures provided to library by the system</b>			
<i>Annual budget figures provided to library by the system</i>	<i>Frequencies</i>	<i>Libraries under 20,000</i>	<i>Libraries 20,000 or more</i>
Yes	75	47 (76%)	23 (100%)
No	15	15 (24%)	0 (0%)
Don't Know	0	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Column Totals	91	62 (100%)	23 (100%)

## Public Library Systems in New York State

Question 7. Has your system helped your library to increase public or private support?

Although the raw figures appear different for the disaggregated data, the percentages indicate a very similar division of responses for libraries under or over 20,000 in their chartered populations.

<i>System help to increase support</i>	<i>Frequencies</i>	<i>Libraries under 20,000</i>	<i>Libraries 20,000 or more</i>
Yes	59	42 (68%)	13 (57%)
No	27	17 (28%)	9 (39%)
Don't Know	3	2 (3%)	1 (4%)
Column Totals	89	61 (100%)	23 (100%)

Question 8. If yes, by how much of a percentage or dollar amount?

For this question, only 39 of the 59 “yes” respondents in Table 13 gave answers. Eight of them reported the percentage ranged from 10% to 400%. Thirteen of them reported a dollar amount from \$1,500 to \$100,000. Eleven of them said that it varies or they were not sure. Five said the system helped them increase the dollar amount per capita from the county or helped them cut costs.

<i>System support is important</i>	<i>Frequencies</i>	<i>Libraries under 20,000</i>	<i>Libraries 20,000 or more</i>
Yes	55	39 (98%)	13 (100%)
No	1	1 (2%)	0 (0%)
Don't Know	0	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Column Totals	56	40 (100%)	13 (100%)

Question 9. If yes, do you consider the support from the system important?

Of the 56 (of the 59 respondents in Table 13) who answered this question, the only respondent saying “no” was from a library with a chartered population between 10,000 and 20,000.

Table 15 summarizes the data for eight of the previous nine questions, providing the percentage of “yes”

<i>Questions</i>	<i>Frequency of Yes Answers</i>	<i>Percentile</i>
1. Does public library system allow for participation in system governance?	76	84%
2. Does system have member libraries vote on the budget?	18	20%
3. Do library directors serve on system board?	20	22%
4. Do member libraries provide input on the system budget?	55	60%
5. Do member libraries participate in development of the system’s plan of services?	80	88%
6. Does your system provide member libraries with its annual budget?	76	84%
7. Has system helped member library to increase public or private support?	59	65%
9. Do you consider the support from the system important?	55	60%

## Public Library Systems in New York State

answers to each question and arranging the questions in percentage order. Question 8 required a dollar amount rather than a yes/no answer.

### **Section 4. Concerns and Benefits for a Potential System Merger**

Section IV asked questions about respondents' concerns or perceived benefits from a potential system merger. It also asked how respondents would spend the additional state aid if it were made available to them directly (rather than through the library system).

#### Question 1: What would concern you most about a potential merger of library systems?

Table 16 is an analysis of the results for the open-ended question about respondents' concerns over a potential merger of library systems. The answers were categorized and coded as in the previous open-ended questions and the frequency distribution is displayed. Among the respondents, 70 percent of them held negative opinions toward system mergers, 4 percent had a positive attitude toward system mergers, and 18 percent indicated a neutral attitude. Individuals with neutral responses expressed concerns about practical issues such as the location of the system office, the efficiency of item delivery and the welfare of the automation system.

<i>Concerns</i>	<i>Frequency of Yes Answers</i>	<i>Percentile</i>
Negative concerns	62	70%
Neutral concerns	16	18%
No concerns at all	7	8%
Will be beneficial	4	4%
Total	89	100%

Table 16.1 shows the major concerns expressed by the respondents in different population categories to see if population made any difference or had any influence on responses. It is apparent that within each of the population categories, negative concerns were held most often. The respondents with less than 20,000 chartered populations had a stronger tendency to have negative concerns (by a factor of approximately 5) than to have neutral, positive, or no concerns at all. The respondents with more than 20,000 tended to have a mildly more negative concerns (negative and no concerns having almost the same number of responses)

<i>Population Categories</i>			
1 - 9,999 (33)	Negative concern (25)	Neutral concern (5)	No concern (0)
10,000 - 19,999 (31)	Negative concern (22)	Neutral concern (5)	
20,000 - 49,999 (13)	Negative concern (7)	Neutral concern (5)	
> 50,000 (10)	Negative concern (5)	No concern (3)	

**Public Library Systems in New York State**

than to have neutral, positive, or no concern at all. (Note that in Tables 16.1, 17.1, 18.1, and 19.1 responses in columns are displayed in descending order of frequency. In each case column headings would read “Greatest frequency,” “Next greatest frequency,” etc. The authors chose to eliminate these redundant headings.)

Since 70 percent of the respondents expressed their negative concerns about potential system mergers, the negative concerns were categorized into sub-categories. Table 17 details information about the sub-categories of negative concerns ranked by order of frequency.

<b>Table 17. Sub-categories for negative concerns toward system mergers</b>		
<i>Concerns</i>	<i>Frequencies</i>	<i>Percentile</i>
Loss or less available help	21	34%
Loss of local identity and local help	18	29%
Travel limitations	11	18%
Bureaucracy and efficiency in larger system	9	15%
No incentives	3	5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 17. Sub-categories for negative concerns toward system mergers**

To see better how these negative concerns distributed across different population and system groups, Table 17.1 displays the negative concerns across population groups. For respondents with chartered populations less than 10,000, distance was their number one concern about system mergers. For respondents with chartered populations more than 10,000, concern was more about loss of or less available system services, or loss of their individual identity in the large system, and that their local issues would not be understood.

<b>Table 17.1 Sub-category of negative concerns about system merger according to population</b>			
<i>Population Categories</i>			
1 - 9,999 (33)	Distance (10)	Less service (7)	Lost incentive (3)
10,000 - 19,999 (31)	Less service (7) Lost identity (7)	Efficiency (4)	No Incentive (1)
20,000 - 49,999 (13)	Lost identity (3)	Efficiency (1) Distance (1) Less service (1)	
> 50,000 (10)	Less service (3)	No incentive (5)	

Question 2. How would your library benefit from a system merger?

Table 18 displays the respondents’ perceived benefits from a potential system merger. Forty four percent of the respondents expressed positive benefits in the form of efficiency and cost effectiveness of a merged system, while the other 44 percent of them did not think there would be any benefit. There were 79 responses to this question. In the following table, the category of “beneficial” included “system merger

**Public Library Systems in New York State**

means more resources available,” “system merger means better fiscal accountability,” “system merger means cost effectiveness,” and “system merger means better services.”

<b>Table 18 How would your library benefit from a system merger?</b>		
<b>Potential benefit form system merger</b>	<b>Frequencies</b>	<b>Percentile</b>
No benefit	35	44%
Beneficial	35	44%
Don't know	9	11%
<b>Total</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 18.1 divides the opinions of the benefits from system mergers by different population groups. The opinions about system merger benefits versus no benefits are equally distributed all four population categories.

<b>Table 18.1 Potential benefits of system mergers according to population categories</b>			
<b>Population Categories</b>			
1 - 9,999 (33)	Beneficial (12)	No benefit (11)	Don't know (3)
10,000 - 19,999 (31)	No benefit (12)	Beneficial (11)	Don't know (4)
20,000 - 49,999 (13)	No benefit (6) Beneficial (6)	Don't know (1)	
> 50,000 (10)	No benefit (5) Beneficial (4)	Don't know (1)	

Question 3. If additional state aid were made available directly to your library, how would you use it? Table 19 lists the items on which the respondents would spend the additional state aid if that aid were made available. The following three were the most popular items: Materials, Technology, and Staffing.

<b>Table 19. Items on which respondents would spend additional state aid</b>		
<b>Items</b>	<b>Frequencies</b>	<b>Percentile</b>
Materials	46	53%
Technology	41	47%
Staffing	27	31%
Building renovation	25	29%
Programming	22	25%
Pay for system provided services	17	20%
Improving services	11	13%
Outreach	7	8%
Operating expenses	6	7%

## Public Library Systems in New York State

**Table 19.1** shows slight differences in items on which respondents would spend additional state aid according to their different chartered population sizes. For the respondents with chartered populations less than 20,000, building renovation was a major item. For the libraries with chartered populations more than 50,000, paying for the current system-provided services was the most noted expense.

<i>Population Categories</i>			
1 - 9,999 (33)	Materials (21)	Technology (16)	Building renovation (13)
10,000 - 19,999 (31)	Materials (15) Staff (15)	Technology (13)	Programming (9) Building renovation (9)
20,000 - 49,999 (13)	Materials (8)	Technology (7)	Staff (3)
> 50,000 (10)	Pay for system-provided services (6)	Technology (3)	Programming (2) Materials (2)

### Discussion of Findings

This section presents the major findings using the organization of the survey and thus following the statistical summaries above. In each case the major findings of the study are followed by a discussion of implications and possible areas for future research or discussion.

#### Demographic Questions

- Respondents came from 19 of the 23 library systems in New York State. None of the respondents were from the large systems of Brooklyn, Buffalo-Erie, New York, or Queens.
- Approximately 68 percent of the 93 survey respondents came from libraries with service populations under 20,000 people. Thirty five percent of the respondents' libraries had service populations under 10,000.
- Library directors accounted for 83 percent of the respondents. Library staff or trustees constituted an additional 12 percent. The rest of the respondents were systems staff and directors.
- Over half (54 percent) of the respondents reported two or fewer certified librarians on their staff. Eighty percent reported six or fewer certified librarians on staff.

#### Discussion on Demographics

It is extremely important to note that this was not a representative sample of public libraries across New York State. In order to be able to generalize from a sample to a population all members must have an equal chance of being selected for the study, and the actual respondents must be more or less representative of the population as a whole. It was pointed out at the November 2006 NYLA-PLS presentation that some librarians from very small libraries do not belong to PLS and as a result do not receive materials on the PLS listserv. Their voices could not be heard on this survey.

#### Services

Based on the frequency of responses in this study:

- The three most important library services provided to communities were:

## Public Library Systems in New York State

1. Providing collections
  2. Providing access to Internet and computers
  3. Providing free programs
- The three most important system services were:
    1. Interlibrary loan and delivery
    2. Providing automation systems
    3. Training
  - The three most likely lost services if systems ceased to exist were:
    1. Interlibrary loan and delivery
    2. Providing automation systems
    3. Providing centralized and cooperative services and activities

### Discussion on Services

The service questions unearthed, not unexpectedly, preferences that are strongly driven by budgets of various libraries. Interlibrary loan keeps libraries from having to purchase all materials for their patrons—just in case they need them. Centralized automation systems also keep the cost of providing computers, networking, online catalogs and the like at a lower level than if each library had to negotiate its own services with vendors. Similarly, there are great savings to individual libraries—economies of scale, when systems provide training programs for staff. These system functions appeared very important to all libraries.

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### Participation in and Knowledge About Library System

- 59 percent indicated that system support was important to their library.
- 82 percent of respondents said their library participated in system governance.
- 22 percent indicated that their library's director was on the library system board.
- 86 percent said they participated in the system's plan of service.
- 63 percent indicated the system helped with public or private support for the library.
- 59 percent responded that their library gave input on the system's budget.
- 21 percent said member libraries vote on their system's budget.
- 82 percent responded that they had access to the system's annual budget.

### Discussion on Participation in and Knowledge About Library Services

Although there needs to be follow-up research on these issues, it would appear that larger libraries with multiple individuals on the staff have a great opportunity for being involved in system governance. As pointed out at the NYLA-PLS presentation, small libraries with one librarian cannot afford to have that librarian go off to meetings. The library would have to close. It would behoove library systems with small library representatives to work on ways to make governance voices heard across a range of library sizes. It would also appear that many of the respondents (82 percent) do not know how to access their system's budget. This is a very simple information problem that systems could solve at almost no cost in an age of email attachments and websites.

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## Public Library Systems in New York State

### Concerns and Benefits Associated with Library System Mergers

- Seventy percent of the survey sample expressed negative opinions or attitudes toward potential system mergers.
- Concerns included but were not limited to: the inefficiency and high cost of larger systems operation, and hesitation over changing or fear of losing current services.

### Discussion about Concerns and Benefits Associated with Library System Mergers

For respondents with chartered populations less than 10,000, distance was the number one negative concern. Respondents feared that they would be lost if systems became large, and that they would have to travel farther to get to systems offices if some were closed.

When asked what they would do if system monies were freed up (if systems ceased to exist and state monies went to individual libraries), respondents with chartered populations of less than 20,000 indicated that building renovation would be the item on which they would want to spend additional aid. For libraries that had chartered populations more than 50,000, respondents stated that they would use additional aid to pay for previous system services. Without a representative sample across all libraries it is hard to say what these findings imply for library systems in New York State. It is apparent that most of the respondents, and especially respondents from small libraries, were unhappy with the idea that this survey was questioning the existence of library systems.

## **Overarching Issues and Questions**

The main respondents represented in this survey are public libraries with less than 20,000 people in their chartered populations. Five library systems dominated the survey in that over half of the respondents came from these five. As a result the findings here are primarily based upon a sample that was self-selected, and, one would hypothesize, selected with a purpose since these respondents might have the most to lose from loss of their library system. The non-response of individuals from the largest four library systems is an additional indicator that size made a difference in who filled out the survey. We cannot know this for sure.

Of the individuals who did return the survey, there are many areas where the responses are quite similar (e.g., ranking of services, ranking of lost services, use of additional monies). One reason for this result might be that most of the respondents are from a cooperative public library system type. No consolidated public library system members participated in this survey. Unless the respondent pool is truly representative, which this was not, it is impossible to tell if one is looking at the opinions and perceptions of all New York State public librarians, or just those who were concerned enough to participate in the study. We cannot know the answer to this based upon the current survey.

This report started with a list of questions that explored the need for library systems in New York State. There were:

- Were these systems still the best approach to providing library service?
- What critical services did library systems provide to member libraries?
- Would voluntary collaboration work as well to serve the information needs of the citizens of New York?
- Would libraries all have the same policy stance, or might that stance vary by size and/or location?

It is apparent that without hard data from a representative sample (or all libraries) it is not advisable that any changes be made in the way that library systems work in New York State. The survey did bring out potentially critical library services and suggest that for the respondents voluntary collaboration would not be sufficient to meet the needs of libraries—especially small and medium sized libraries.

### Future Planning and Future Research

The Public Library Section of NYLA believed that it was time to re-examine system service in New York and discuss ways service could be provided in the most cost effective and efficient ways that benefits all library users. The group felt that there were feelings being expressed but no hard data or survey analysis of what member libraries really thought about library systems. The survey reported here will serve as a pilot study for a much larger survey that will systematically capture the thoughts and preferences of libraries across New York State. It would also be appropriate to survey systems offices to ascertain what services and functions they believe they are providing. Comparing what systems officers perceive they are doing with what library directors believe is happening would be an excellent way to unearth misperceptions, holes in service delivery, or places where monies might be spent more effectively elsewhere.

A survey sent to the director of every public library in New York State would capture information about general needs and perceptions about public library systems, and would represent the entire range of small to medium and extremely large library systems in the state. A stratified assessment of libraries which takes into account number of certified librarians, number of staff, library size according to budget, technology, and demographics could also shed light on differences among various systems and libraries in New York State. Furthermore, each library system in New York State maintains a website describing member libraries, policies and services—an untapped resource for collecting important information. There is a wealth of research that could be done to understand library systems. That research could help to improve services to citizens of New York State. This research is a start.

**Note:** Websites of all New York State public library systems were used as additional information resources for this report

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## Public Library Systems in New York State

### Appendix: NYLA-PLS-SURVEY ON LIBRARY SYSTEMS

#### I. Demographic Questions

1. Name: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Name of your Library System: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Your chartered population: \_\_\_\_\_
4. What is your position at the Library?  
\_\_\_ Director      \_\_\_ Trustee      \_\_\_ Staff
5. Number of certified librarians on your staff: \_\_\_\_\_

#### II. Library Services and System Services Description

1. What are the three most important services that your library provides to your community?
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. \_\_\_\_\_
2. What are the three most important services that your system provides to your library?
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. \_\_\_\_\_
3. What services would your library lose if your system ceased to exist?
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. \_\_\_\_\_

#### III: System Participation and Governance Description

1. Does your public library system allow for participation in system governance?  
Yes  
 No
2. If yes, does your system have member libraries vote on the budget?  
 Yes  
 No
3. Do library directors serve on the system board?  
 Yes  
 No
4. Do member libraries provide input on the system budget?  
 Yes  
 No
5. Do member libraries participate in the development of the system's Plan of Service?  
 Yes  
 No
6. Does your system provide you with its annual budget?  
 Yes  
 No
7. Has your system helped your library to increase public or private support?  
 Yes  
No

**Public Library Systems in New York State**

- 8. If yes, by how much of a percentage or dollar amount? \_\_\_\_\_
- 9. If yes, do you consider the support from the system important?
  - Yes
  - No

**IV: Concerns and Benefits for a Potential System Merger**

- 1. What would concern you most about a potential merger of library systems?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 2. How would your library benefit from a system merger?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 3. If additional state aid were made available directly to your library, how would you use it?
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. \_\_\_\_\_

## Editor's Choice Article

### A Library for New Yorkers: Extending State Library Borrowing Privileges to New York State Residents

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By Mary Redmond

**A** *bstract: The New York State Library is the largest state library in the nation and the only state library member of the Association of Research Libraries. It has grown from its modest beginnings of 669 books in a single room of the original State Capitol to a collection of over 20 million items housed in the Cultural Education Center on the Empire State Plaza in Albany, New York. Throughout most of its nearly 190 year history, the State Library loaned materials to only a very small group of individuals. Under a pilot project begun in 2004, the Library has extended borrowing privileges to New York State residents age 18 and above. This paper discusses the reasons for the change, the process by which it came about, results to date, and potential future developments.*

**“...a public library for the use of the government and people of this state”**

It was with these words that the Legislature created the nation's third state library in 1818. The enabling act also provided for a board of trustees (governor, lieutenant governor, chancellor and chief justice of the supreme court) who were charged to prescribe rules and regulations, “...provided, however, that the said trustees shall by their bylaws to be established for the regulation of the said library, provide among other things, that no book, map or other publication shall be at any time taken out of the library for any purpose whatever.” (1)

Much of the focus of the Library's first years was on service to state government. Library rules published in the Library's 1831 annual report stipulated that the Library was to be open during “sessions of the Legislature or the Senate only, during sitting of the Court of Errors, of the Court of Chancery, and of the Supreme Court, the Library shall be open from the hour of nine in the morning until the hour of nine in the evening” as well as “at such other times as any one trustee may request, for the benefit of visitors.” Those same rules stated: “Any member of the Senate or Assembly, during the session of the Senate only, or during the sitting of the Court of Errors, is permitted to take to his boarding-house or

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## A Library for New Yorkers

private room, any book belonging to the Library, under the following rules, restrictions, forfeitures and penalties (no more than 2 volumes at once, no longer than two weeks.)” (2)

By 1845, the trustees recommended “that the privilege of taking books out should be extended to the heads of the different administrative departments located in this city, at least during the recess of the Legislature; and they also respectfully represent that possibly no injury could result from allowing them to relax or modify the rules, in reference particularly to individuals engaged in historical or scientific investigations.” (3)

The Library struggled to balance service to its twin constituencies of the government and the people. The 1865 annual report complained of the “large number of young men engaged in reading law, who evidently make the library their school for study. The trustees have, from time to time, endeavored to regulate this matter, so as to remove complaints made by members of the Legislature, the Judges of the Courts and members of the bar, but with little effect.” (4) And “the crowd of readers during several successive winters made so much disturbance that it was necessary to employ a policeman daily to preserve order.” (5)

**“...no one will contend that it [the State Library] can be used as a circulating library.” (6)**

Faced with these and similar issues, a committee presented a report on the “Future Development of the New York State Library” at the annual meeting of trustees in January 1878. The report denounced “anything in the nature of a popular use of the library for general and indiscriminate reading” as “quite inconsistent with the ends and purposes of the library...” (7)

The trustees duly adopted ordinances on January 10, 1879 prohibiting the “occupation of the room of that [law] department as a study and reading room, and the use of its volumes as text-books by law students.” The rules went on to specify that “...the librarian of the general library is instructed not to deliver to visitors, for general and continuous reading in the library, works of fiction, light literature, travels, literary periodicals and publications of like character.” (8)

But the restrictions on lending were gradually loosening. Rule 4, cited in the 1890 annual report, provided that “Members of the legislature, judges of the court of appeals, justices of the supreme court, heads of the several state department, their deputies and clerks officially resident in Albany, donors to the library to the amount of \$100, all institutions of the University, such other libraries as may be approved by the library commission, and, by written permission of a regent, others having special claim on its facilities, may borrow books, subject to recall if specifically needed.” (9) Fifty-five persons registered as special borrowers by 1891 (10); that figure had grown to 411 (“a large proportion of whom live in Albany or vicinity”) by 1894 (11).

The popularity of this service led some officers to criticize “citizens who ought to contribute to the support of that [Albany YMCA library] by paying the annual fee and borrowing their books from it on some flimsy excuse get from a regent a permit to borrow from the state library and so make that serve their local needs”, as well as the circulation of current literature and fiction for “ordinary reading” (12). In 1895 the State Library recalled “...borrowers’ outstanding permits July 1 with a reissuance only to those who had some special claim on the library or who could give conclusive reasons why they should have privileges not accorded to the general public”, noting that “a limited circulation makes the library more useful to a greater number than a closer restriction of the books to reference use, but as the library is primarily for reference, it requires constant care to keep a just balance between the rights of the two classes of readers.” (13)

The Library continued to struggle with this “just balance.” A revision of rules in the 1907 annual report noted that except for State employees “...cards are issued only for special study in some department of knowledge when the facilities offered by the reference room can not suffice for such study ...Increase of 185 over previous year in the number of registered borrowers, although a greater number of applicants have been rejected as not having valid claims on the library.” (14)

The 1908 annual report counted 715 “special borrowers” (512 in Albany and 203 elsewhere) from a total of 1,085 registered borrowers and a circulation of 34,175. (15)

### **The 1911 fire and its aftermath**

The cataclysmic Capitol fire of March 29-30, 1911 affected every aspect of the State Library’s operations. The “greatest library disaster of modern times” consumed 450,000 books, 270,000 manuscripts, the entire administrative system (catalog, orders, mailing/exchange lists), as well as the physical infrastructure. (16) But building on the collection of undamaged books in remote storage as well as those in circulation to “taxpayers, public libraries, public schools, study clubs, house libraries, charitable organizations, institutions, and other organizations” (17) the Library set to work to reinvent itself. Thankfully, there was also a flood of donations of books offered by other libraries which helped rebuild the collection. The 1914 annual report counted 24,327 books lent to 1894 registered borrowers, including 1081 State employees, 493 special borrowers, and 320 institutions (18).

### **“Professional classes of the state”**

Changes in Regents policy in 1922 included the approval of a “more liberal code of rules governing use of the Library... All great professions may now view the State Library as part of their professional equipment, a contribution from the State which it is hoped will be returned in increased performance of their public services. Albany borrowers are no longer required to obtain a guarantor, and restriction of loans in certain subjects has been abandoned. As a result of this liberalizing of rules, many new borrowers have been registered.” (19)

With this new policy as a foundation, rules on borrowing from the State Library remained virtually unchanged for fifty years. The 1974 rules identified the following categories of individual borrowers:

- (1) *Official*. Regents of the University, judges of the Court of Appeals, justices of the Supreme Court, members of the Legislature, heads of the several State departments, commissions and institutions, and (upon certificate from the head of his department or bureau and provided he observes the Library’s rules) any State employee.
- (2) *Professional*. Any licensed physician, or attorney at law registered with the Appellate Division as admitted to the bar of the Supreme Court, or certified teacher, or registered nurse, or registered engineer, or architect, or minister whose name appears in the clergy list for his denomination.
- (3) *Institutional*. All institutions in the University; such other schools, libraries, museums and institutions as may be registered.
- (4) *Individuals*. Through the institutions noted above, individuals in any part of the State. In addition, any adult resident of Albany or its suburban area not included in the above categories, who has a serious purpose in using the Library and who can not be satisfactorily served through local libraries, upon furnishing personal guaranty satisfactory to the director. A satisfactory guarantor will be a person whose

## A Library for New Yorkers

name is found in the city directory, who owns property and is of known responsibility. He may not be a member of the applicant's family. **(20)**

Outside Albany, loans were governed by:

(1) *Borrowing through libraries, schools and clubs.* Individuals wishing to borrow books from the State Library should apply through the nearest public library, the borrowing institutions to be responsible to the State Library for the value of the books borrowed.

(2) *Individual borrowers.* Registered teachers in active service in any public school in the State may borrow directly, educational books for professional reading not available in local libraries. Supplementary reading material for students should be requested through the school library if there is one; otherwise directly by the principal. Licensed physicians, registered nurses, engineers, architects, clergymen and practicing attorneys may like wise borrow from the medical, law and general sections.

(3) Other adult individuals not resident in Albany will be registered personally as borrowers when they can not be served through a local library or other institution in the University. In such a case it is suggested that one of the following be given as reference: the postmaster, a minister in the community, the principal or superintendent of schools, or member of the State Legislature. **(21)**

Beginning in the late nineteenth and throughout the twentieth centuries, loans from the State Library became more "institutional" rather than "individual" in character. The advent of "traveling libraries," study clubs, and loans through libraries, schools, and similar organizations were the norm for borrowing by other than State employees. In early 1975, 2058 of the Library's 2607 registered borrowers were State employees. **(22)**

At the same time, the extraordinary growth of New York State government employment from 1959 to 1973 (from 90 to 185 thousand employees), coupled with plans for the move to the new Empire State Plaza complex in Albany, led the State Library to focus even more on its services for State government. "Recognizing the improved access to resources made possible by the growth of systems and networks, and the cumulative impact of state aid programs, [these] regulations (which had not been revised since 1922) were changed to limit direct borrowing to state employees, lawyers and physicians (as required by law), and to require all interloan access through designated systems or networks." **(23)**

In 1994, the regulations expanded the list of direct borrowers to include local government historians ("in connection with their official duties"). The current regulations also include individuals "granted permission to borrow from the State Library, for a limited period, at the discretion of the assistant commissioner for libraries"; this completes the list of currently eligible borrowers. **(24)**

The possibility of expanding borrowing privileges arose from time to time over the years, but a number of factors prevented action, including:

- ❖ Concern about potential loss of Library materials
- ❖ Potential confusion among borrowers about the difference between circulating and non-circulating items
- ❖ Fear that expanding the borrowing population would dilute service to state government, perceived as the Library's primary clientele

## A Library for New Yorkers

- ❖ Importance of encouraging customers to use their own libraries first and to rely on the hierarchical system to supply materials unavailable locally
- ❖ Concern for treating all New York State resident customers equally without unfair advantage to Albany area residents because of their geographic location

### **“Every New Yorker...should have equitable access to quality library service” (25)**

Following the appointment of State Librarian/Assistant Commissioner for Library Services Janet M. Welch in 1997, a Regents Commission on Library Services was created to develop and recommend to the New York State Board of Regents a vision for library services in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and a plan for ensuring the greatest access to information for all New Yorkers. Established in June 1998, the Commission distributed a draft report early in 2000, followed by a series of public forums held around the State to discuss the draft report, and presented its final report to the Board of Regents in July 2000. (26)

Although the Commission did not specifically address the issue of direct borrowing from the New York State Library, its report noted that the State Library’s “mission includes providing access for all New Yorkers—on-site and through interlibrary loan—to one of the largest public research collections in the nation...Strengthening the Research Library’s collections, information services, and preservation efforts...are essential in providing convenient, no-charge access to research materials for all residents.” (27)

In a subsequent paper outlining development of a strategic plan, State Librarian Janet Welch identified a number of factors to be considered in the process of defining objectives of the Research Library, including:

...1. Access: Convenient no-charge access for all New Yorkers to research materials and information that offers the following:

- ❖ Direct borrowing for more New Yorkers; electronic interlibrary loan access for all state residents... (28)

In late 2003, I, as Interim Research Library Director, appointed a Direct Borrowers Task Force to consider expanding direct borrowing privileges to a wider audience. The Task Force was asked to: identify group(s), specifying any limitations on materials to be borrowed (in addition to those already in place for current borrowers), make recommendations on what, if any, online databases would be accessible, and address any related issues (such as photocopying, interlibrary loan, etc.). (29)

### **“A surprising number of State Libraries give residents...direct borrowing privileges” (30)**

Among the findings of the Task Force:

- ❖ ...The total number of individual registered borrowers...(11,570 as of January 2004)... is low when compared to other libraries;

## A Library for New Yorkers

- ❖ State Library staff receive many requests for borrowing privileges and/or online database access. While customers seemed to accept direct borrowing for New York State government employees, they felt that similar privileges for attorneys and physicians were unfair;
- ❖ It was becoming very difficult for Circulation Unit staff to determine State employee status because of the growth of State and academic or business joint ventures;
- ❖ State Libraries in Connecticut, Virginia, Illinois, Indiana, New Hampshire, Ohio, and Texas already extended borrowing privileges to their state residents. And The New York Public Library and the Boston Public Library, two of the other non-academic members of the Association of Research Libraries, gave direct borrowing privileges to all residents of their respective states;
- ❖ People were no longer satisfied to wait for interlibrary loan service for materials that they had located while visiting the State Library. They wanted to be able to borrow the needed materials immediately without having to return to their local library and ask for that library to borrow the materials for them;
- ❖ The New York State Library was perceived by many to be elitist; extending borrowing privileges to residents would help change this perception;
- ❖ Because the Library's Circulation and Paging desks were always staffed, extension of direct borrowing privileges to a larger constituency was not expected to have a large negative impact on staffing. **(31)**

Based on these and similar findings, the Task Force recommended:

- ❖ Extension of borrowing privileges to New York State residents age 18 and above;
- ❖ Access to the statewide NOVEL electronic databases to holders of New York State Library resident borrowers cards. Access was already available through local libraries; this supplementary means was especially useful for New Yorkers without a local public library or whose libraries were unable to offer remote access to NOVEL databases;
- ❖ Continuation of the current circulation policy revised and approved in December 2002: prohibition of loans of paper format materials published before 1870, fragile materials, journals, etc. Resident borrowers would be able to come onsite and borrow up to ten items at a time;
- ❖ Continuation of existing policies on photoduplication charges and interlibrary loan requests;
- ❖ Institution of fines for overdue materials borrowed by New York State Resident Borrowers;

### **“A sound and forward looking plan”**

After discussion and inclusion of staff recommendations solicited at a February 19, 2004 meeting with library staff, the Task Force met with State Librarian Janet Welch in March. In her forwarding message to Office of Cultural Education Deputy Commissioner Carole Huxley, Ms. Welch wrote: “I have worked personally with the Task Force and am satisfied that this is a sound and forward looking plan which extends access to the people of New York State to one of their hidden treasures, the collections of the New York State Library. It is a significant milestone in the services of the Library, a demonstration

## A Library for New Yorkers

of renewed commitment to serve all the people of the State, and helps to implement the basic tenet of the Regents Commission on Library Services that ‘every New Yorker should have equitable access to quality library service.’” That this proposal is put forward and will be implemented in a time of severe staff reduction and limited resources makes it even more impressive.” (32)

As she forwarded the Task Force report to State Education Commissioner Richard Mills and the Board of Regents, Deputy Commissioner Huxley noted, “I am extremely grateful – as will New Yorkers everywhere – ... for this exponential expansion of services in the Library despite the very difficult circumstances of the current fiscal situation. It is another step in ensuring that people across the state, whatever their circumstances, have access to the information they need and the knowledge they want to gain.” (33) Discussion by the Regents at their April 2004 meeting was favorable.

### Making It Happen: Implementation Details

Meanwhile, State Library staff were working to integrate services to this new clientele into the existing system. The goal was to provide each group with the appropriate suite of services without causing confusion about the differences between the two types of registered borrowers.

- ❖ *Borrowing materials.* The decision was made to permit statewide borrowers to check out anything that was already allowed to be circulated to existing borrowers. Prohibitions on borrowing as laid out in the Commissioner’s Regulations continued for both groups; “restricted materials” included reference books or books in great demand at the State Library, bound and unbound periodicals and newspapers, manuscripts and books of exceptional rarity or value, genealogies and local histories (unless there were duplicate copies), and materials “of such fragility, rarity, size or other consideration as to be unsuitable for use outside of the building.” (34)

Materials are not mailed to statewide borrowers; they must check out materials onsite from the State Library.

- ❖ *Online database access.* Perhaps the biggest challenge was to create a system that differentiated between access to the two types of online databases. All New Yorkers are eligible to use the statewide NOVEL databases, a collection of electronic resources providing access to thousands of full-text national and international newspapers and magazines, health and medical resources, business collections, Spanish language materials, and age-appropriate materials for youngsters. Access to this information was available through local libraries, either onsite or (for those whose libraries offered it) remotely from home, office, school or anywhere with an Internet connection.

In addition, the State Library also subscribed to an additional suite of databases with special focus on subjects of interest to its primary clientele: state government, attorneys, physicians, and official local historians. Because contractual agreements prohibited access to this group of database beyond those groups, the new system would have to be able to distinguish borrowers with access to the NOVEL databases from those with access to NOVEL as well as the other databases.

The first decision was to create a new statewide borrowers card beginning with “R” to distinguish it from the “P” cards already in use. Users coming through the “Electronic Databases...” box on the State Library’s website were directed to images of “R” and “P” cards and asked to click on the picture that looked like their card, i.e., “R” or “P.” Once they selected the appropriate icon, they were directed either

## A Library for New Yorkers

to the listing of NOVEL databases or to the list of combined NOVEL/other databases. When they tried to get into a particular database, they were asked to supply their “R” or “P” number plus a Personal Identification Number (PIN) in order to verify their access to the information.

The system was later simplified and streamlined. A separate page for “R” level borrowers contains instructions for resident borrowers to get access to NOVEL online databases. (35)

Since the inauguration of Resident Borrowing, the State Library has also initiated access to NOVEL databases to New Yorkers through entry of their New York State Driver License or New York State Department of Motor Vehicles Non-Driver Identification number. This method is especially useful for those without local libraries, those whose local libraries do not offer remote access, or those who might have forgotten or misplaced their local library authentication numbers.

- ❖ *Verifying New York State Residency.* Because New York State Library borrowing and database access privileges were restricted to New York State residents, State Library staff had to be able to verify residency. Documents that can be used to verify residency include New York State driver licenses, NYS Department of Motor Vehicles non-driver ID cards, etc. Staff verify the existence of current documents but do not record driver license numbers. Information must include full mailing addresses (in addition to post office box numbers). Out of state students enrolled in New York State higher education institutions must have a permanent New York State address and not just a dormitory address.
- ❖ *Fines for Overdue Materials.* The State Library decided to institute a system of fines for overdue books since this new larger base of borrowers did not have the controls for the smaller groups like state employees and professional groups. After investigating the practices of other libraries, the New York State Library developed the following policy for overdue books and materials loaned to resident borrowers:

Borrowers assume the responsibility of keeping track of due dates and returning materials on time. If materials are out on loan longer than the due date and have not been renewed, individuals who borrowed those materials will be assessed an overdue fine of twenty-five cents per day for each overdue item. The maximum overdue fine will be \$10.00 for each overdue item.

Overdue notices are sent as a courtesy to remind borrowers that items should be renewed or returned; failure to receive a notice does not absolve the borrower of the responsibility to renew or return items in a timely manner.

Borrowers will receive three (3) overdue notices. The first overdue notice will be sent two (2) weeks after the due date of the material, the second overdue notice will be sent four (4) weeks after the due date of the material and the third overdue notice will be sent six (6) weeks after the due date of the material. If the material has not been returned after the Library has sent the borrower three (3) overdue notices, the borrower will be sent a bill for those materials. The bill includes the replacement cost of the item and a processing fee of \$ 25.00. (If the borrower returns the materials after he/she receives a bill, the borrower will only be charged for the overdue fines.)

A borrower’s privileges will be temporarily suspended until the materials have been returned or renewed and the overdue fines or replacement charges and processing fees are paid.

## A Library for New Yorkers

Overdue fines can be paid with cash or a check onsite at the Circulation Desk. Overdue fines can also be mailed to: NYSL, 7<sup>th</sup> floor Circulation Desk, CEC, Empire State Plaza, Albany, NY 12230. (Please don't send cash through the mail.) Checks should be made payable to the New York State Library. (36)

### The Grand Unveiling

Since the new borrowing policy was a major improvement in services, the State Library wanted to publicize it widely. The Library's Public Information Officer worked closely with the State Education Department Office of Communications on press releases. And because this new system had major impacts on service to legislators' constituents all over the state, the Library prepared packets of press releases for legislators to customize and send to their local media. On July 29, 2004 the State Education Department released the announcement "State Library Extends Borrowing to all New Yorkers." Quoting Commissioner Richard Mills, the release stressed especially the importance of this development for teachers to find materials they need to support student learning and achievement." (37)

### "State Library Puts History in Circulation" (38)

Media coverage exceeded the Library's fondest expectations. For the first time in recent history, the New York State Library was the subject of a front page, "above the fold" story in the *Albany Times Union*, illustrated by a dramatic photo of a reader silhouetted against the State Capitol (a view from the Library's 7<sup>th</sup> floor Reference Room). In addition to the borrowing, the story also featured information on the Library's \$1.2 million renovation of its public space. Quotes from enthusiastic customers--"I'm looking forward to being able to check out materials", "For anybody doing research, it will be good for people to be able to borrow materials from this great collection," (39) added a human dimension to the story.

The Associated Press picked up the State Education Department press release (40); newspapers in Amsterdam, Ithaca, Binghamton, Plattsburgh, and Westchester County ran items about the new service. Albany area radio stations WTRY and WGY broadcast announcements. Nationally, *American Libraries Online* (the online journal of the American Library Association) (41) and *Library Journal* (42) ran brief items about the new service. This publicity was accompanied by an upsurge in statewide borrower registrations as New Yorkers eagerly signed up.

Less than a month after the general announcement, there were 242 registered resident borrowers. (43) While 90% of them were located within the greater Capital District, other resident addresses included Appalachin, Bay Shore, Cooperstown, Endicott, Endwell, Gasport, Ithaca, Jamaica, Kingston, New City, New Rochelle, New York City, Ontario, Owego, Plattsburgh, Poughkeepsie, Rochester, Rosendale, Rye Brook, Schroon, Spring Valley, and Stony Point. These borrowers worked for associations, colleges, local and federal government, hospital/health care agencies, libraries, the media, non-profit organizations; some were self employed as consultants or genealogists. (44)

### Sustaining and Growing the Resident Borrower Program

In addition to processing requests from people who come onsite to register, the Library has instituted an aggressive outreach program to recruit even more borrowers. Library staff bring copies of application forms at statewide meetings and/or other programs. Every New York State Library exhibit features information about this service; the average event generates from five to ten new resident borrowers. The Library's website includes information on how to apply; applications (along with required

## A Library for New Yorkers

documentation of residency) are accepted by fax. All of these tactics resulted in a 30% increase in resident borrowers (from 1,917 to 2,540) during calendar year 2006. (45)

Statistics demonstrate that the program is becoming more truly statewide: by April of 2005, 50% (down from 90% in September 2004) of the borrowers were located within the greater Capital District. Resident borrowers include accountants, city government employees, college faculty and students, consultants, county government employees, engineers, federal government employees, genealogists, historians, hospital/health care workers, human resource managers, law firm employees, library employees, the media, ministers, museum employees, non-profit organizations, retirees, scientists, self-employed individuals, teachers, etc. (46)

The Library continues to receive positive feedback from registrants. A number of borrowers reported that they need State Library resources for their jobs and it is faster for them to come to the Library to borrow materials instead of placing an interlibrary loan request through their local library. There is continuing communication from people who did not realize that the public could use the resources of the New York State Library. (47) There has been minimal loss of State Library borrowed materials and no complaints about the overdue fines.

Some comments include: “Thank you for your service. Look forward to using the resources of the New York State Library”; “I greatly appreciate the opportunity to have access to the NYS Library”; “I must say, it’s the smoothest transaction I’ve had in trying to accomplish anything in recent memory. You have no idea how refreshing that is!” (48)

### Potential Future Developments

With the success of the pilot resident borrowers project, the State Library is now working to amend *the New York Code of Rules and Regulations (NYCRR)*, Title 8 (Education), section 92.1 (b) to include New York State resident borrowers as a permanent category. Additionally, the Library is reviewing its collection development policy in light of the needs of the expanded borrowing community. Resident borrowers, like other New York State Library customers, would like the Library to be open more hours (currently 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday); the Library is working to create a pilot program for expanded public service hours. As the State Library moves forward on these fronts, and continues its work to back up and collaborate with libraries and library systems throughout the state, it strengthens its services as a library for all New Yorkers.

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