

# ASK NOT WHAT YOUR PROFESSION CAN DO FOR YOU?

SURVEYING ART LIBRARIAN CAREERS  
AND ATTITUDES

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# INTRODUCTION

This presentation discusses the results of an international survey of art librarian careers, including:

- Motivation for selecting the profession
- Educational background
- Current employment
- Professional experiences

# RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Was art librarianship a career goal for most professionals currently in the field?
2. Why do individuals choose a career in art librarianship?
3. What factors contributed to current professionals successfully obtaining a position as an art librarian?

# LITERATURE REVIEW

- Little found in the literature as a whole (with the exception of LIS student reasons for selecting LIS)
- Even less found for librarians in art/museum/VR settings

# METHODOLOGY

**Survey:** 33 item instrument developed and distributed to six email discussion groups

[arts-lib]	ACRL Arts Section
[arlis-I]	Art Libraries Society of North America
[carlis-I]	ARLIS/NA Canada
[arlis-norden]	ARLIS Nordic
[arlis-link]	ARLIS/UK & Ireland
[ifla-art]	IFLA Art Library Section

# METHODOLOGY

- Survey conducted in April 2012
- Data collected via Google Forms & analyzed using Excel
- 280 complete responses received from across the world

# RESULTS

## RESULTS: DEMOGRAPHICS

**Gender:** Females represented 84% of the respondents

**Age:** Relatively even distribution among age groups between 27 and 62

**Location:** Majority of responses from the United States (57%) and the United Kingdom (18%)

# RESULTS: RESPONDENTS BY AGE

Age	Frequency	Percentage
18-26	6	2.1
27-35	63	22.5
36-44	61	21.8
45-53	66	23.6
54-62	69	24.6
63+	15	5.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>280</b>	<b>100</b>

## RESULTS: RESPONDENTS' LOCATIONS (TOP 10)

Country	Frequency	Percentage
U.S.A.	159	56.8
U.K.	51	18.2
Canada	25	8.9
Denmark	5	1.8
Iceland	5	1.8
Australia	4	1.4
Mexico	3	1.1
Norway	3	1.1
Sweden	3	1.1
Finland	2	0.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>260</b>	<b>92.9</b>

# RESULTS: CURRENT EMPLOYMENT

Which area best describes your job duties?

Generalist: **34%**

Public Services: **27%**

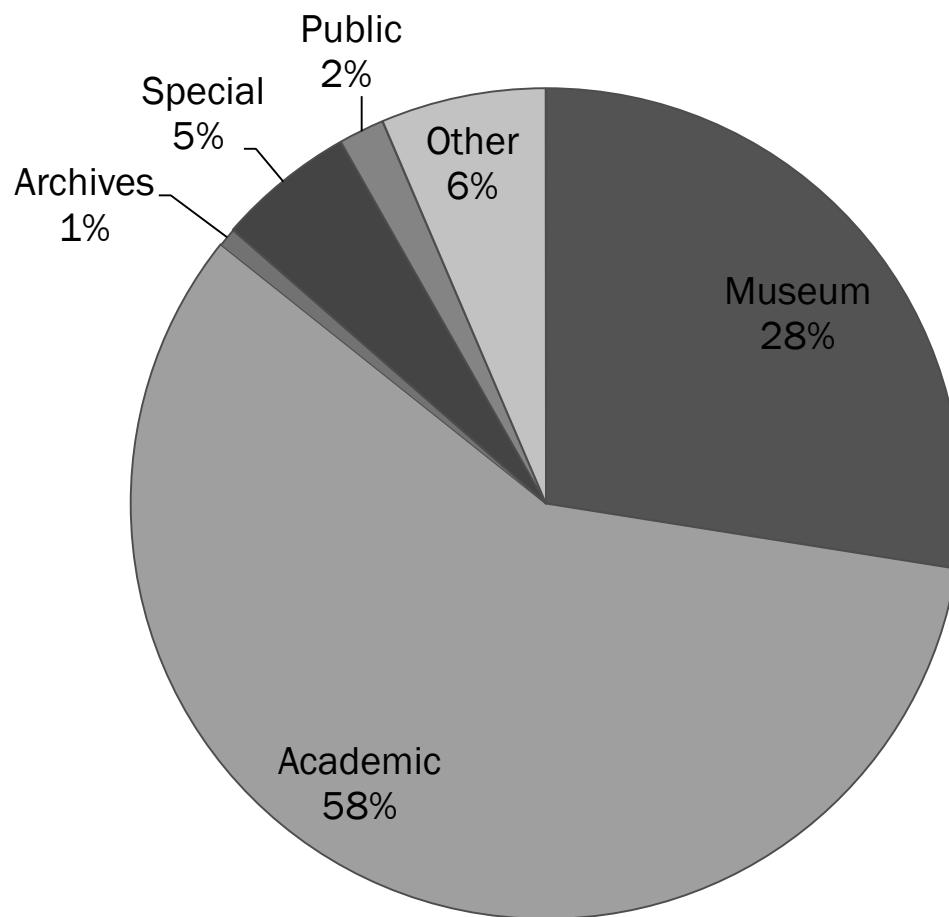
Administrative: **16%**

Other: **13%**

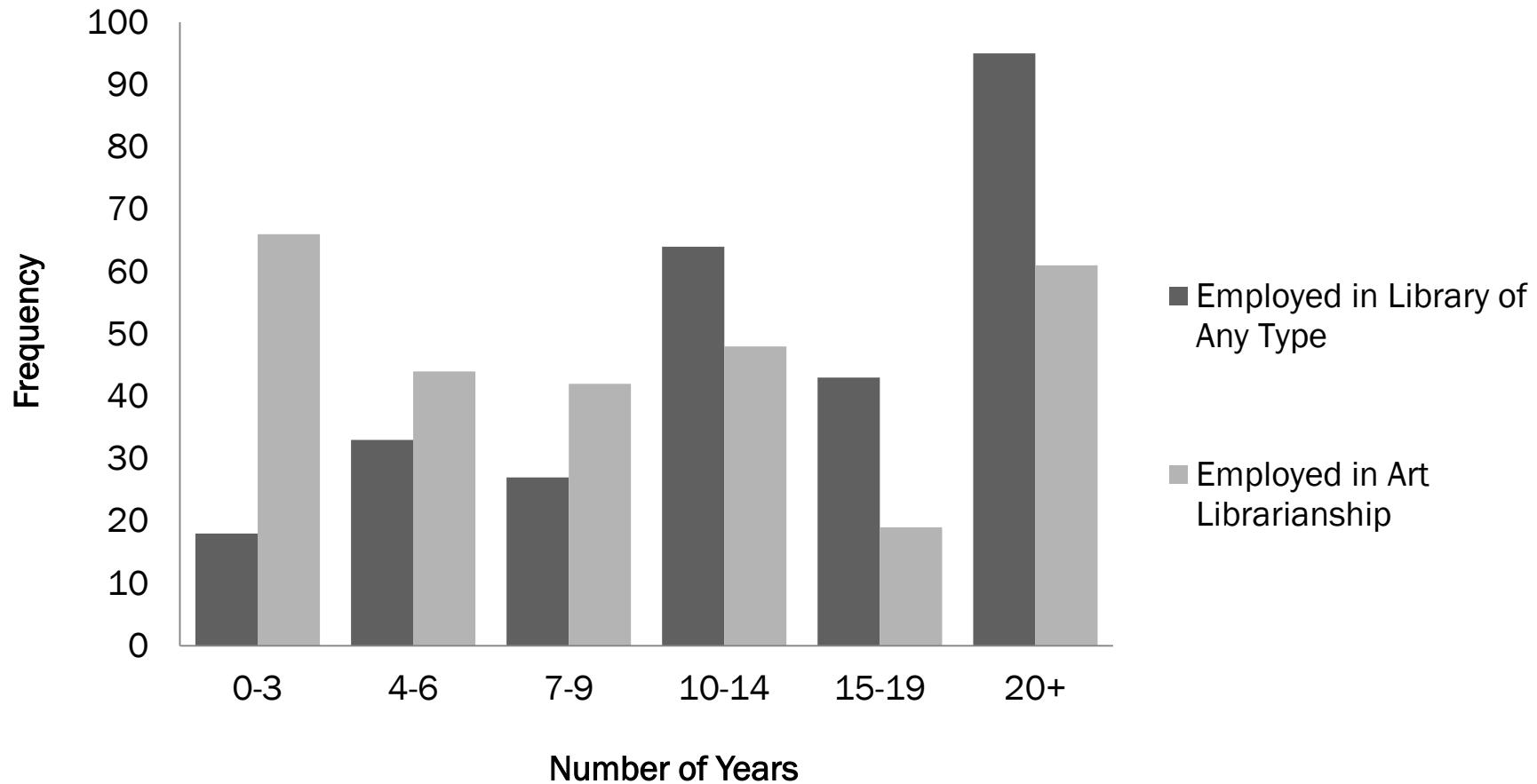
Technical Services: **8%**

Digital Services: **3%**

# RESULTS: CURRENT EMPLOYMENT SETTING



# RESULTS: EMPLOYMENT BY DURATION



# RESULTS: EDUCATION

## Undergraduate Education

Art History (**35%**) and Art/Studio Art (**12%**) most common bachelor's/equivalent

## Graduate Education

**57%** obtained second masters, including:

- Art History (**52%**)
- Art/Studio Art (**16%**)
- Architecture (**11%**)

# RESULTS: CAREER GOALS

## Top reasons for pursuing the profession

- Job Functions (179 respondents)
- Work Setting (146)

# RESULTS: CAREER GOALS

## Not reasons for choosing art librarianship

- “Compensation” (40 respondents)
- “Recommendation from friend or co-worker” (49)

# RESULTS: SELECTING THE PROFESSION

At what point did you decide to pursue    as a career?

	Librarianship	Art Libr.
In High School	15	4
In College	55	26
Grad Program Other Than LIS	27	14
While Working in Library Field	94	145
While Working in Non-Lib Field	69	21
Not Applicable	1	14
In LIS Graduate Program	--	35
Other	19	21

## RESULTS: SELECTING THE PROFESSION

What factors (either positive or negative) have had the strongest influence on your career choice?

- Passion for both art and public service
- Disillusion with a previous career choice
- Stability of the job

## RESULTS: SELECTING THE PROFESSION

“I needed a career change and felt that my love of art should be a part of my next career.”

“The library community...is incredibly supportive and welcoming.”

# RESULTS: CAREER SATISFACTION

Do you plan on continuing your career in art libraries?

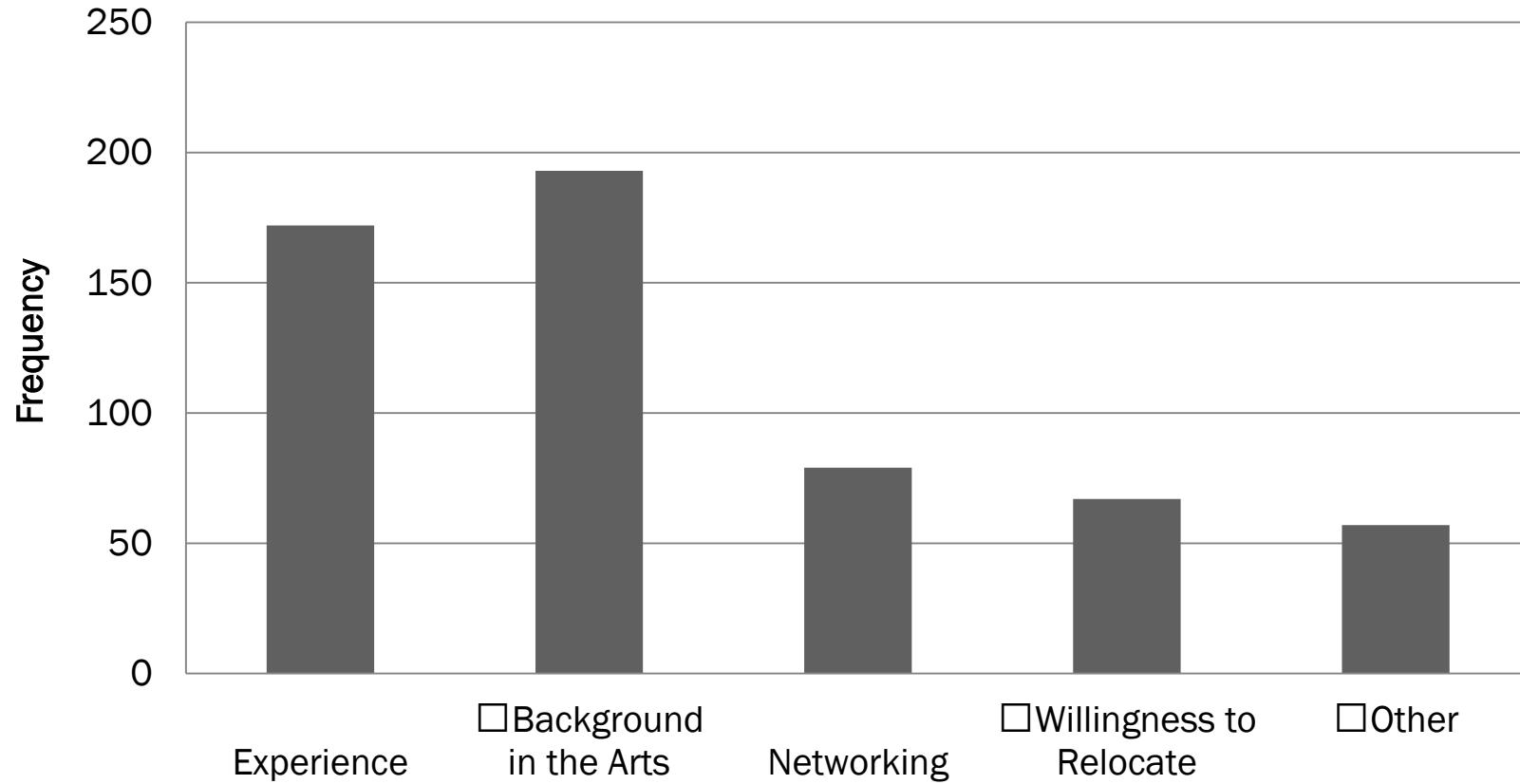
- Yes (79%)
- Undecided (16%)
- No (2%)

## RESULTS: CAREER SATISFACTION

“I think being an art librarian is the best job in the world, we certainly don’t do it for the money.”

“I would like to continue in this career path but due to lack of jobs in this specific area it seems unlikely.”

# RESULTS: CONTRIBUTORS TO EMPLOYMENT



## RESULTS: CONTRIBUTORS TO EMPLOYMENT

“Be prepared to move for your first professional post—once you’ve got that experience you stand a much better chance of getting jobs you really want.”

“Networking might not secure you a job directly, but [it] will increase your confidence in the field.”

# CONCLUSIONS

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## The “typical” art librarian

- Is employed in an academic setting
- Has a background in arts at undergrad or grad level
- Selected librarianship due to job duties/work setting

## In general

- Sincere satisfaction with the profession—only a handful mentioned unappealing aspects such as low compensation and few positions being available

# CONCLUSIONS: FURTHER RESEARCH

## Fairly even distribution of art library professionals' ages

- Generational shift taking place?
- Art libraries only, or all libraries?

## Professionals' thoughts on the future of the field

- Increased specialization vs. broad based knowledge frequently mentioned in responses

# CONCLUSIONS: FURTHER QUESTIONS

## How might the profession change?

- What changes might we see in coming years in relation to professionals' backgrounds and values?
- Will we see core values shift as the political landscape continues to change?

# CONCLUSIONS: FURTHER QUESTIONS

## Recruiting new professionals

- What advice do professionals have to offer those interested in the field?
- What do graduate students wish they could share with those already active in the profession?

## RECOMMENDED SOURCES

Esther Green Bierbaum, “Museum, Arts, and Humanities Librarians: Careers, Professional Development, and Continuing Education,” *Journal of Education for Library & Information Science* 29, no. 2 (Fall 1988): 127-134.

Roberto C. Ferrari, “To PhD, or Not to PhD: A Question for Art Librarians,” *Art Documentation* 26, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 51-55.

Kathrin Dodds and Heather Ball, “ARLIS/NA 2004 Art/Architecture Librarians and Visual Resource Professionals Compensation Survey”  
<http://www.arlisna.org/pubs/onlinepubs/compensation.pdf>

THANK YOU!

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