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Authors

Metzger, Rebecca
Jackson, John M.

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Developing Competencies for Outreach Work in Academic Libraries

Rebecca Metzger
UC Santa Barbara

John M. Jackson
Loyola Marymount University

Abstract: This research study investigates the behaviors, knowledge, and skills necessary for academic library outreach work. Through a review of published literature, job advertisements, and a survey of library practitioners conducted in the fall of 2020, the authors define and prioritize 18 competencies for outreach. Hiring managers, LIS instructors, and practitioners can utilize the results of this study to structure and lay out the essential areas of outreach work in academic libraries.

Abstract

This research study investigates the behaviors, knowledge, and skills necessary for academic library outreach work. Through a review of published literature, job advertisements, and a survey of library practitioners conducted in the fall of 2020, the authors define and prioritize 18 competencies for outreach. Hiring managers, LIS instructors, and practitioners can utilize the results of this study to structure and lay out the essential areas of outreach work in academic libraries.

Introduction

Academic libraries increasingly recognize the need to position themselves as outward-facing organizations that can demonstrate their contributions to the academic success of their faculty, students, and staff. Accordingly, outreach positions in academic libraries have been on the rise in recent decades.[1,2] However, job postings for these positions fluctuate in how they describe the role. Some libraries devote a full-time position to outreach, while others combine outreach duties with other primary roles. Few jobs require the incumbent to have previously held a similar title. To say the least, the nature of academic library outreach work varies widely.

Despite the proliferation of outreach jobs, as well as articles about outreach librarianship, over the past few years, competencies for the outreach librarian remain undeveloped in the literature and profession. This is an unfortunate deficiency given the needs of the contemporary academic library. Managers can utilize professional competencies to write job descriptions, define organizational best practices, and assess individual and program performance. Individuals can employ competencies to track personal progress toward proficiency in a field and identify gaps for further training. Library schools and continuing education programs can use competencies to develop courses that educate the next generation of practitioners that libraries need.

This research study attempts to contribute to the literature through an investigation of the competencies necessary for academic library outreach work. *Competencies* are defined as a set of knowledge, skills, and behaviors that are teachable, measurable, and/or objective, and that are consistently and effectively demonstrated by excellent performers. In particular, the research questions for this study are as follows:

- R1: Based on published literature in LIS and job descriptions, what are the competencies necessary for academic library outreach work?

● R2: How does feedback from outreach practitioners impact the interpretation and organization of the competencies developed in R1?

The authors of this study define "outreach practitioners" as library employees who develop creative programs and communications that promote library collections, services, and staff to target audiences as their primary job duty. Job titles in this role may include words such as "engagement," "outreach," "communications," "marketing," "first year experience," "liaison," and "student success." This work is often paired closely with, but is distinct from, instruction and reference work. Outreach practitioners in academic libraries can be librarians (MLIS degree holders) or paraprofessional staff, although these positions are most often assigned to librarians.

It is worth noting that any set of professional competencies is aspirational in nature; it is unlikely that any individual or job would encompass the entire list. The authors of this study take a descriptive approach in order to identify the knowledge, skills, and behaviors necessary for outreach work. Drawing on published literature in the field of library and information science, as well as posted job descriptions, the authors suggest a set of common competencies for academic library outreach, and then gather feedback from outreach practitioners to further inform and contextualize those competencies.

Literature Review

When reviewing competencies research in LIS, it is useful to note methodologies. The majority of the library literature the authors reviewed utilized either mixed methods or at least two data sources in order to formulate a list of competencies. However, some studies relied on a single source or single method. For example, Hartnett[3] and Xia & Wang[4] relied exclusively on job descriptions in order to formulate their respective competencies. Hartnett reviewed job advertisements for positions at academic libraries with the words "electronic" or "e-resources" in the title and analyzed those ads using ATLAS.ti and a codebook developed by a previous study.[5] Xia & Wang examined job advertisements for social science data librarians posted from 2005-2012 and analyzed the frequencies of term occurrence and co-occurrence in job qualifications and responsibilities.[6]

However, a mixed methods approach or the use of a variety of data sources was more common. Fisher analyzed position announcements for acquisitions-related jobs across three decades to develop a set of competencies that were then reflected upon by participants at the Acquisitions Institute at Timberline Lodge, and further compared with published literature.[7] Similarly, Jordan created an initial list of competencies for library leadership using content analysis of professional literature, and then utilized the Delphi method with library directors from a wide geographic

area to refine the competencies.[8] Jordan returned to this competencies list three years later to survey public library managers about their most frequent weekly activities, as well as the qualities needed, for public library leadership.[9] Both Saunders[10] and Bishop, Cadle, & Grubesic[11] used surveys to assess the validity of competencies derived from, respectively, RUSA's guidelines related to reference and the ALA's Map and Geospatial Information Round Table Core Competencies. Federer distributed a survey via listservs and Twitter that asked respondents to rate the importance of various pre-identified skills and expertise related to data librarianship.[12] The author additionally performed cluster analyses on the final dataset to discover subgroups of similar respondents. Bronstein and Nebenzahl examined job advertisements, course syllabi, and interviews with library directors to develop 46 competencies for LIS professionals.[13] They conducted an additional survey in order to test the viability of the derived competencies as items in multi-items scales.

Understandably, the formation and distribution of competencies also happens through the channels of professional organizations. Evans et al. described their method of working through the Association for Library Collections and Technical Services (ALCTS) to develop competencies for cataloging and metadata librarians.[14] Through the formation of a task force, the Cataloging and Metadata Management Section (ALCTS CaMMS) reviewed job descriptions and professional literature, solicited feedback from members at the American Library Association's annual conference, and successfully passed a core competencies document through continuous community involvement. For a list of examples of notable competencies adopted by library professional organizations, see Appendix A.

Perhaps the lack of competencies for library outreach in both the literature and via professional associations is due to the myriad and hard-to-define nature of the work itself. Fontenot claimed, "there is no such thing as a typical year in outreach."[15] Five years later, Fontenot reiterated that message, stating, "it is always advisable to keep rethinking how and why we do outreach."[16] The need to clearly define the scope and character of academic library outreach, even while it is a moving target, is a common theme within the published literature. As Carter and Seaman point out, the activities that libraries utilize for outreach "run the gamut."[17] The authors go on to say, "while libraries ascribe to professional standards and have many commonalities, they express their outreach activities, goals, and philosophies in a range of ways."[18] Polger and Okamoto reinforce the variety of responsibilities an outreach librarian might encounter in the course of their work based on responses to a questionnaire of 215 academic library workers.[19] As they note: "Some of these librarians specifically promote information literacy instruction or new emerging technologies within the library. Others are responsible for devising promotional strategies for the entire library."[20]

Recent research has helped to bring academic library outreach work into focus through rigorous analysis of outreach assessment strategies, outreach and engagement programs, and definitions. Writing for *In the Library with the Lead Pipe*, Farrell & Mastel reviewed library literature and academic and public library websites, and surveyed colleagues to develop six broad categories of outreach work defined by its intention (e.g. collections-based, instruction & service-based, "whole person" outreach, etc.).[21] LeMire, Graves, Farrell, & Mastel published a 2018 SPEC Kit that provided a contemporary snapshot of how ARL libraries define, assess, structure, plan, and measure their outreach and engagement programs.[22] Blummer & Kenton reviewed published literature from 2008-2019 in order to identify common themes in academic library programming work, not only related to the types of events produced (e.g. instruction, cooperation, special programing), but skill-based elements as well, such as the need for flexibility and the importance of collaboration.[23] Diaz further clarified the use of the term "outreach" using concept analysis to create a nuanced and multifaceted definition within the context of academic librarianship.[24]

Methodology

The authors of this study employed a mixed methods sequential exploratory design comprised of two phases: (1) a content analysis of professional literature published by academic library outreach practitioners and job advertisements for outreach-related positions in academic libraries, and (2) a survey of practitioners about the results of Phase 1.

In Phase 1, the authors reviewed and inductively coded two bodies of content, professional literature and job advertisements, to identify emerging themes that delineate the type of work expected of academic outreach librarians. They discussed and resolved any discrepancies, redundancies, and outliers to create the competencies.

The authors limited the published literature under review to scholarly works of the last 10 years published by library outreach practitioners and containing "outreach" in either the subject heading or abstract. Using the database "Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts," they used the following query:

> "((AF outreach OR AF liaison OR AF engagement OR AF marketing OR AF communications OR AF first year experience OR AF student success)) AND AB ((AB outreach OR SU outreach))."

The authors limited results from this query to (1) the years 2010-2020 and (2) scholarly publications. They excluded articles published in the area of health/medical librarianship. Additionally, they only included articles published in the area of scholarly communication if (1) one of the author's job titles indicated

their primary role was outreach and/or (2) the article primarily dealt with outreach as a topic of research/discussion. This resulted in 32 articles for review.

The authors collected job advertisements via the ALA and ARL job list search engines. They used the following keywords to locate relevant job titles: outreach, student success, engagement, marketing, communications, liaison, and first year experience. They limited results to positions posted in February - March 2020. This resulted in 25 advertisements for review.

In Phase 2, after the authors reviewed the literature and job advertisements and developed a draft list of competencies, the authors developed a survey for practitioners in order to assess the efficacy of the proposed competencies. They designed and pre-tested the survey in Qualtrics in September 2020. After the authors incorporated feedback from the pre-testing group, both UCSB and LMU's institutional review boards reviewed and approved the final survey instrument.

Using a five-point Likert scale, the survey asked respondents to rank the level of importance for each of the 18 competencies relative to their academic library work. Additionally, the survey asked respondents to identify any competencies they felt were missing or needed further clarification. Finally, the survey asked respondents to provide demographic data, including their employer/institution, job title, years working in academic library outreach, race/ethnicity, and whether their current position requires an MLIS or equivalent degree.

Library outreach work is conducted by a wide range of individuals within any given institution,[25] and thus the authors determined the best way to survey practitioners was to solicit feedback via the online communities where academic library outreach work is frequently discussed. The survey was available between November 5-20, 2020 and distributed to the following listservs: University Libraries Section List (uls-l@lists.ala.org), College Libraries Section List (collib-l@lists.ala.org), Information Literacy Instruction List (ili-l@lists.ala.org), and ACRL Library Marketing and Outreach Interest Group List (acr-iglmo@lists.ala.org). Additionally, the authors shared the survey on Facebook with the ACRL Library Marketing and Outreach Interest Group, the Library Marketing and Communications Conference (LMCC) Discussion Group, and the Programming Librarian Interest Group.

Results of Phase 1

The initial literature search query discovered 79 potential articles for review. Of these, the authors identified 32 articles as meeting the criteria of being published in the last 10 years by library outreach practitioners and primarily focused on outreach activities. As noted above, the majority of articles selected for exclusion were focused on medical librarianship work, an area of experience which the authors

decided was beyond the scope of this research study. Other excluded articles were those focused on outreach needs for specialized work, e.g., data librarianship, and those published by outreach practitioners focused on non-academic contexts, e.g., public library programs. The authors reviewed an additional 22 articles that were not discovered through the initial search but that met the criteria for inclusion. Appendix B lists the publication titles included in this review.

The authors examined the selected articles for statements that indicated the assumption, need, or presence of professional competencies. For example, the following three quotes illustrate the need for assessment and research, networking and intentionality, and understanding stakeholders, respectively, in outreach practitioner work.

> "Assessment strategies are needed to demonstrate a return on investment for our constituents, and to improve our marketing, public relations, advocacy and ultimately library patronship."[26]

> "Generally, an outreach librarian is responsible for "reaching out" to a library's clientele to actively educate them as to the services a library may offer, as opposed to passively waiting for them to come to the library."[27]

> "A more significant level of user engagement will not only help enhance collections but enable librarians to collaborate more deeply with their liaison departments in different ways."[28]

By reviewing the selected published literature and noting statements that presumed or suggested the need for particular skills, behaviors, or knowledge, the authors produced 16 draft competencies: assessment and research, communication, cultivating external connections, cultural competence, developing programming, flexibility, higher education contexts, internal marketing, library values, maintain online identities, networking and intentionality, orientation, professional growth, promotion, understanding stakeholders, and values diversity.

The review of job advertisements posted between February - March 2020 revealed 25 positions that included outreach work as a significant duty. While most of the job advertisements were for outreach positions that combined functional duties, instruction was the focus of eight of these positions. Seven of the positions were what the authors describe as student success positions, meaning the positions focused on engagement with specific user populations like first year students or LatinX students, or on developing programming and outreach to student-centered campus units like Campus Life and Engagement, Educational Opportunity Program, University Freshman Center, or Writing Center. Four of the job advertisements were for management or administrative positions. Three of the positions were for specific subject liaison roles (Education, Latin American & Iberian Studies, Public Policy &

Administration). Two of the ads were generalist positions for reference, instruction and outreach librarians, with no particular emphasis in any one area. Only one of the positions focused on marketing and communications. Appendix C lists the job titles included in this review.

The authors analyzed the job advertisements for statements that indicated the assumption, need, or presence of professional competencies. For example, the following three quotes illustrate the need for collaboration, marketing, and programming, respectively, in outreach practitioner work.

> "Ability to work in partnership with other units on campus to promote the library's role in teaching and learning" (University of Southern Maine, Instruction and Outreach Librarian)

> "Coordinates all library communications to the Elon community and external audiences to promote and deliver information about the library and its brand. Manages the library's social media and online presence. Develops print and digital promotional materials that effectively communicate the library's mission, services, and news to a variety of audiences" (Elon University, Outreach and Marketing Librarian)

> "The FYE Librarian will lead outreach initiatives tailored to undergraduates, particularly students in their first two years, and work with library colleagues and stakeholders across campus to provide meaningful, welcoming, and fun activities and services that foster student engagement and a sense of belonging" (San Francisco State University, First-Year Experience and Undergraduate Student Success Librarian)

By reviewing the selected job postings and noting statements that presumed or suggested the need for particular skills, behaviors, or knowledge, the authors produced 13 competencies, including: budget management & grant writing, collaboration & partnerships (relationship management), communication, creativity, cultural competence, emotional intelligence, instructional design, marketing & program development, project management, public speaking, strategic planning & assessment, technology fluency, and user/community engagement.

The authors compared the two sets of themes identified in the reviews of the literature and the job postings, as well as the text selections that contributed to the identification of those themes, to produce a list of 18 combined competencies and definitions. The authors used these competencies, along with their definitions, in Phase 2 of the study; they are as follows:

> **Advocacy:** Understands the unique ecosystem of colleges and universities, especially of their particular institutions, and can leverage this knowledge to

effectively advocate for the role of the library in academic and student success. Also advocates within the library to promote and harness support for outreach activities.

Assessment: Sets programmatic goals aligned with library and institutional goals. Ethically utilizes qualitative and quantitative methods and tools to understand diverse user needs and experiences, measure impact, incorporate feedback toward improving programs and services, and demonstrate the value of the library to the institution.

Collaboration: Collaborates effectively with individuals and teams throughout the library and beyond to define mutually beneficial goals, marshal resources toward those goals, and participate in shared decision-making.

Communication: Has superior, persuasive, clear, and organized verbal and written communication skills. Constantly seeks new and customized ways to connect with diverse audiences through communication channels utilized by those communities.

Creativity: Draws on their own creativity and other creative resources in designing unique programs and marketing materials that can reach target audiences in a competitive information landscape.

Diversity & Inclusion: Is aware of and seeks to continually learn more about the diverse and multicultural communities their libraries serve as well as the intersectional identities of library users. Strives to create inclusive and welcoming spaces, programs, and communications, as well as provide platforms for a diversity of voices in the library's outreach efforts.

Emotional Intelligence: Outreach work can be stressful, involving competing deadlines, high profile activities, and constant social interaction. Practices self-awareness and self-care in order to manage their emotions and bring empathy to their professional interpersonal relationships.

Marketing: Creates ads, print and digital media, and marketing deliverables using specialized design tools and services. Cultivates and maintains the library's online image by utilizing best practices for branding and reputation management.

Networking: Cultivates and maintains trusted relationships outside the library. Actively networks with campus constituents and reaches out to potential ambassadors and partners to identify connections and support for achieving common goals.

Professional Growth: Stays abreast of emerging trends, especially in the areas of student success, library pedagogies, social media, communication, programming, and assessment and integrates this knowledge into their daily work.

Programming: Develops and presents programs and activities that promote library collections and services, and position the library as a vibrant cultural, educational, and civic center within its community.

Project Management: Is able to plan and deliver complex events and projects by breaking them down into discrete tasks with deadlines and assigned responsibilities, effectively using organizational and communication tools to enable teams to achieve desired goals.

Research & Policy: Utilizes market research, industry trends, published literature, and needs assessments to develop relevant organizational policies and plan outreach strategies.

Resource Management: Harnesses, organizes, motivates, and manages staff and/or volunteers from within and without the library to work toward library outreach goals. Manages funds responsibly by projecting, spending, and tracking outreach expenses in accordance with institutional, state, and federal policies, and ensuring fair and timely compensation for vendors and talent.

Service: Utilizes a patron-focused approach to meeting the needs of their students, faculty, and campus community members through both traditional and emerging library service models.

Teaching: Employs pedagogical methods to design, deliver, and assess instructional experiences that promote library services, collections, and staff to distinct groups, especially lower-level undergraduate students.

Technology: Is comfortable learning, utilizing, and teaching new technologies that help connect users to library resources and programs, as well as working with technology specialists to design and implement connected spaces and experiences.

User Engagement: Ventures outside of the doors of the library to reach students, faculty, and other community members where they are.

Results of Phase 2

The authors distributed a survey instrument developed based on the findings in Phase 1 in November 2020 to four listservs, including uls-l@lists.ala.org, collib-l@lists.ala.org, ili-l@lists.ala.org, and acr-iglmo@lists.ala.org, inviting outreach practitioners in academic libraries to participate. The survey asked participants to respond to questions about the 18 competencies identified above.

Of the participants who agreed to complete the questionnaire, 69 percent (n = 123) fully completed it and 31 percent (n = 55) partially completed it. Eleven out of 178 participants (6 percent) started the survey but did not progress past the consent portion of the questionnaire, and therefore were excluded from the analysis.

Demographics

The survey invited participants to share some demographic information. Of the 121 responses (note: there were two missing responses), 86% identified as "White" and 8.3% selected "Prefer not to respond." 5.9% identified as one or more of another race, but because the *n* is so small, the authors chose not to break out the data for publication.

Current Institution

The survey also asked participants to identify their current institution. The authors compared the responses with Carnegie classifications for each institution as reflected in the broad categories of Table 1 (note: there were 28 missing responses):

Table 1
Participants Current Institution (*n* = 95)

Current Institution	*n*	%
Associate's College	10	10.5
Baccalaureate Colleges	11	11.6
Master's Colleges and Universities	23	24.2
Doctoral Universities	51	53.7
Total	95	100

Note: Carnegie classifications do not apply to Canadian institutions. For the two respondents from Canada, the authors categorized those institutions using the criteria outlined by Carnegie.

Years Worked in Outreach-related Position

Of the 123 participants who completed the questionnaire, 119 individuals responded to the question "How many years have you worked (or did you work) in an outreach-related position in academic libraries?" Their experience ranged from one year to twenty-five years. The average number of years was 7.74 years (SD = 6.15).

Job Titles

The job titles of the survey respondents are grouped as follows:
- Thirty-three of the respondents reported titles associated with instruction, such as "Information Literacy Librarian" and "Outreach and Instruction Librarian."
- Twenty of the survey respondents were liaison librarians. Titles in this category include disciplinary liaison roles like "Humanities Librarian," as well as subject-specific roles like "Business Librarian."
- Seventeen respondents were in generalist outreach positions, with titles like "Outreach Librarian" or "Outreach and Reference Librarian."
- Sixteen of the respondents who provided job titles were in management roles, like "Head of Communications and Engagement" and "Manager, Library Academic Services and Outreach."
- Fifteen of the respondents were in positions that could be categorized as student success positions, with titles like "Student Engagement Librarian" and "Undergraduate and Student Success Librarian."
- Marketing and communications were the focus of only four of the respondents' job titles; examples include "Communications & Outreach Librarian" and "Coordinator of Marketing and Engagement."
- The remaining eight job titles were miscellaneous, meaning the authors could not tell from the titles much about the nature of the position (e.g., "Professional Librarian"), or outliers (e.g., "User Experience Librarian").

Competencies

Table 2 illustrates how respondents answered the question "How important is XX to your work in academic library outreach? (1 = Not important, 2 = Rarely important, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Somewhat important, 5 = Very important, and 6 = Absolutely necessary)".

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics of 18 Competencies (*n* = 123)

No.	Competencies	*N*	*M*	*SD*	Min	Max

1	Advocacy	123	5.10	0.78	2	6
2	Assessment	123	4.54	1.03	2	6
3	Collaboration	122	5.48	0.81	2	6
4	Communication	122	5.62	0.58	4	6
5	Creativity	123	4.79	0.75	2	6
6	Diversity and Inclusion	123	5.24	0.81	3	6
7	Emotional Intelligence	123	4.80	1.06	1	6
8	Marketing	123	4.81	1.00	2	6
9	Networking	122	5.25	0.76	3	6
10	Professional Growth	123	4.76	0.78	3	6
11	Programming	123	4.68	1.06	1	6
12	Project Management	123	4.73	1.06	2	6
13	Research and Policy	123	3.70	1.06	1	6
14	Resource Management	123	3.86	1.27	1	6
15	Service	123	5.05	0.96	2	6
16	Teaching	122	4.93	1.05	1	6
17	Technology	123	4.80	0.88	2	6
18	User Engagement	123	5.13	0.82	2	6

The highest mean rated competency reported was Communication (M = 5.62, SD = 0.58), followed by Collaboration (M = 5.48, SD = 0.81), Networking (M = 5.25, SD = 0.76) and Diversity and Inclusion (M = 5.24, SD = 0.81). The lowest mean rated competency reported was Research and Policy (M = 3.70, SD = 1.06), followed by Resource Management (M = 3.86, SD = 1.27).

Reliability and Item Analysis

Guided by the definition of competency, the authors binned the 18 competencies into three constructs – Knowledge, Skills, and Behaviors. There were six items in each construct. The items included in each construct, along with their mean, standard deviation, and Cronbach's alpha are shown in Table 3.

Table 3
Summary Statistics and Reliability Coefficients of the Three Constructs

Constructs	Items	N	M	SD	Cronbach's Alpha (α)
Knowledge	Advocacy Diversity and Inclusion Professional Growth	122	4.75	0.52	.606

	Research and Policy Technology Teaching				
Skills	Assessment Communication Marketing Programming Project Management Resource Management	122	4.71	0.67	.745
Behaviors	Collaboration Creativity Emotional Intelligence Networking Service User Engagement	121	5.08	0.56	.714

George and Mallery revealed the following rule of thumb to interpret reliability coefficients: Excellent ≥ .9, Good ≥ .8, Acceptable ≥ .7, Questionable ≥ .6, Poor ≥ .5, and Unacceptable ≤ .5.[29] Considering this, the Skills and Behaviors constructs had acceptable coefficients, while Knowledge was questionable. In addition, the summary statistics revealed that Behaviors was the top mean rated construct, followed by Knowledge and Skills.

Simple Linear Regression

Three separate simple linear regression models were performed to determine if the number of years working in an outreach-related academic position could effectively predict each construct in each model: Knowledge, Skills, and Behaviors, respectively. The assumptions were checked. The results from the three regression analyses were not statistically significant and reported as $F(1, 117) = 0.926$, $p = .338$, with an R^2 of .008 for Knowledge; $F(1, 117) = 0.109$, $p = .742$, with an R^2 of .001 for Skills; and $F(1, 117) = 0.223$, $p = .638$, with an R^2 of .002 for Behaviors.

One-Way MANOVA

Correlations were performed to examine relationships among the three constructs. The results indicated statistically significant correlations between Knowledge and Skills ($r = .470$, $p < .001$, $N = 123$), Knowledge and Behaviors ($r = .630$, $p < .001$, $N = 123$), and Skills and Behaviors ($r = .584$, $p < .001$, $N = 123$). Based on Cohen's guideline to interpret the strength of relationship, $r = .10$ is considered weak, r

= .30 is considered moderate, and r = .50 is considered strong.[30] These strong relationships among constructs confirmed that a MANOVA would need to be performed in order to determine differences among affiliated institutions and constructs.

A one-way MANOVA was performed to take into account the correlations among the dependent variables, Knowledge, Skills, and Behaviors, and to determine if there were significant differences among institutional profiles: Associate's Colleges (n = 10), Baccalaureate Colleges (n = 11), Master's Colleges and Universities (n = 23), and Doctoral Universities (n = 51). The results indicated no statistically significant difference among the different classifications of institution in Knowledge, Skills, and Behaviors, $F(9, 217) = 1.479$, p = .157; Wilks' $\Lambda = 0.865$, partial η^2 = .047.

Open Text Responses

In responding to the question "Which competencies need additional clarification?," participants had the option to provide an open text response. Forty-eight participants completed this question. In addition to the 119 participants who did not respond to this question, 13 participants answered to the effect of "none" or "everything is clear." The authors noted the competencies mentioned in those responses and the frequencies of each are shown in Table 4.

Table 4
Competencies Mentioned as Needing Clarification

Competency	# Respondents
Creativity	5
Teaching	5
User Engagement	5
Marketing	4
Service	4
Collaboration	3
Research & Policy	3
Emotional Intelligence	2
Project Management	2
Resource Management	2

Advocacy, Assessment, Networking, Programming, and Technology were each mentioned once.

The authors further divided the responses into four broad categories (defined by the authors below): splitters, chunkers, removers, and modifiers. Some respondents commented on more than one competency in their response.

"Splitters" (n=5) are defined as those responses that recommended creating two or more competencies in place of a single competency. For example, one respondent

suggested, "In technology, maybe consider adding or mentioning virtual outreach as virtual outreach needs, methods, and trends can be different from in-person outreach. Virtual outreach could also be [its] own category." Similarly, in responding to the Research & Policy competency, a respondent noted, "When I think research I do not think of research about outreach specifically, I think of it more generally and while the research I do does play into outreach that is because the communities I serve are interested in it not because it is about outreach. Also policy seems like it should be its own thing as library policy does play a role in my outreach."

"Chunkers" (n=7) are defined as those responses that recommended combining two or more competencies into a single competency. For example, one respondent noted "Creativity: the statement is too broad. Marketing and Programming are already both listed, so it feels redundant." Another respondent suggested combining four competencies into two: "Marketing and Communication as well as Project Management and Resource Management seem very closely related. It could be helpful to better highlight the differences between these items, if they are not combined into one competency."

"Removers" (n=3) are defined as those responses that recommend removing one or more competencies altogether. For example, one respondent suggested removing Teaching: "For me, teaching is separate from outreach. I think because it's so core to the university's mission whereas outreach is a core library thing." Another respondent recommended removing Service because "I feel like this is just librarianship."

"Modifiers" (n=21) are defined as those responses that suggested changes to existing titles or definitions of the competencies, but not to the extent of creating or eliminating any in particular. The majority of responses to this question fell into this category. For example, in responding to Service, one respondent noted: "Service might not only be to patrons, but also to other stakeholders on campus and/or library workers." In responding to User Engagement, another respondent said: "When I think of user engagement I think of engaging with library users - but the definition is about non-users, or about going beyond the doors of the library. I spend a lot of time meeting people where they are, talking with faculty in their academic buildings, with students at clubs, things like that - but I wouldn't define that as user engagement because I think of user in a UX sense. Maybe community engagement."

In responding to the question "Based on your experience, what competencies are missing from the list?," participants had the option to provide an open text response. Sixty participants completed this question. In addition to the 107 participants who did not respond to this question, 21 participants answered to the effect of "No competencies missing" or "None." The authors inductively coded and grouped the responses to the question as shown in Table 5:

Table 5
Competencies Proposed or Listed as Missing

Proposed competencies/themes	# Respondents
Subject / Domain Knowledge	6
Time Management	4
Flexibility / Resiliency / Resourcefulness	3
Getting Others on Board / People Management	3
Leadership	3
Administration Support	2
Motivation / Tenacity	2
Responsiveness to Current Events & User Needs	2
Social Media	2
Strategic Planning	2
Virtual Outreach	2
Writing	2

Respondents who identified subject or domain knowledge as a missing competency indicated that the library outreach worker needs to deploy a librarian's trained understanding of information processes or develop knowledge of the communities they serve, whether that is a specific academic discipline or population.

Time management was seen as missing by four respondents. Among these, there were suggestions that time management could be included in the descriptions for Project Management or Resource Management. As one respondent noted, "We often have very little money to spend on outreach, so the main resource in our control is time."

"Resourcefulness," "flexibility," "resiliency," and "adaptability" were words used by respondents to describe skills that library outreach practitioners often need to deploy because of the fast pace of change in libraries and a general lack of budgetary resources. Additional phrases used by these respondents included "doing more with less" and being "quick on [your] feet."

People management was called out as missing by three respondents. In particular, these respondents seemed to refer to people they do not directly manage but whose support they need in some way. As one respondent voiced, "I rarely do projects on my own, and therefore I find I need to build consensus to ensure everyone is on board with an outreach project, even those not directly working on it but those affected by it as well." Another respondent referred to this work as

"outreach/advocacy/marketing within the library" and "getting other librarians on board."

Leadership and management skills were identified as missing by three survey respondents, but these open text responses did not provide any additional elaboration of these skills.

While not a competency, support from administration (presumably, library administration) was raised by two respondents as missing and as being necessary to successful outreach work.

Motivation and tenacity were identified by two respondents as missing competencies. These responses illuminate the daily struggles of some outreach practitioners who work alone. One respondent mused, "Most times I am the only person working on outreach on the library's staff and a lot of time I am creating my own job descriptions and tasks. If you can't stay motivated and self-start, you won't make it as an outreach librarian." Another wrote, "I can think of several occasions where I succeed long after other quit [sic]. You have to keep trying to reach students."

Two respondents mentioned responsiveness as a missing competency, referring to responsiveness to both current events and user needs. As one of these respondents explained, "It's something between advocacy, networking, service, and professional growth. It's the ability to respond to user needs and create programming and services that meet those needs. It includes developing the skills necessary to meet those needs or finding others who have those skills."

Social media was specifically named as missing in the competencies by two respondents. One respondent elaborated that the library outreach worker does not just use and manage social media accounts as a marketing and outreach tool but "develops social networks and communities as a librarian by using either official library accounts or personal professional profiles."

Two respondents believe that strategic planning should be described as part of an existing competency, such as Assessment or Project Management, or added as its own competency. One respondent specified, "while possibly covered under project management, strategic planning covers more how outreach is integrated into the library's/organization's overall mission and vision."

Virtual outreach was called out as missing by two respondents, with one commenting, "virtual outreach needs, methods, and trends can be different from in-person outreach."

Writing was identified by two respondents as missing from the set of competencies.

One respondent specified that outreach writing refers to "the ability to convey ideas in a succinct written form. This includes emails, pamphlet information, etc." The other respondent referred to the type of writing that is required as "technical writing."

In response to this question, there were a number of ideas and themes that were only mentioned once among all respondents as missing. These are: accessibility, budget, collegiality, communicate decisions, evaluate collections/resources, graphic design, listening, political acumen, professionalism, research support, team dynamics, user experience, using data to inform services, and website management.

Discussion

The primary goal of this project was to develop a list of competencies for outreach librarian work, based on the experiences described in professional literature and the requirements outlined in job advertisements. The authors described the most significant results of that initial analysis, the 18 competencies and their definitions, in Phase 1 above.

While not meant to encompass the entirety of academic library outreach work, this list condenses the most common behaviors, knowledge, and skills necessary for a wide range of outreach needs. Interestingly, based on the responses in the survey (Phase 2), there was no correlation between either the Carnegie classification of the institutions that employed the respondents nor the years of experience in outreach and how respondents ranked these competencies. Furthermore, the mean of the three binned constructs did not statistically differ. One possible interpretation of this result is that these 18 competencies are indeed firmly entrenched and widely diffused throughout academic library work, regardless of institution or experience. Responses to the question "Which competencies need additional clarification?" confirm this conclusion, given that only 3 respondents recommended removing a competency from the list, the vast majority preferring to slightly modify, split, combine, or leave unchanged the original 18 competencies.

Prioritizing the Competencies

The secondary goal of this project was to identify how outreach practitioners prioritized those competencies. Communication was the most highly rated competency, followed by Collaboration, Networking, and Diversity & Inclusion. Additionally, Communication had the lowest standard deviation and was the only competency ranked exclusively between "somewhat important" and "absolutely necessary." The lowest mean rated competency reported was Research and Policy,

followed by Resource Management. Additionally, Resource Management had the highest standard deviation, suggesting strong disagreement among respondents.

While it was not surprising to the authors that competencies such as Communication and Collaboration rank so highly among respondents (especially given the prevalence of these themes in the literature and job advertisements), it was surprising to see items such as Research & Policy, Resource Management, and Assessment rank so low. This is especially true given the volume of professional literature on library outreach dedicated to working with limited means and advocating one's value. One possible, albeit unlikely, reason for the first two is survey fatigue since the survey listed the competencies in alphabetical order. Another potential reason is that the majority of the respondents are not in leadership positions (as defined by whether their job titles included words like "director," "head," or "dean"), and thus do not typically engage in these types of activities. Alternatively, it could be argued that the competencies that ranked most highly are also those most necessary for success in any academic library position (e.g., communication is important in any position).

When the 18 competencies were binned together into three constructs (Knowledge, Skills, and Behaviors), Behaviors was the most highly rated category, followed by Knowledge, then Skills. One possible inference from this result is that success in academic outreach is more about how one approaches the job (and the people) and less about the specific knowledge and skills utilized in that job.

Competencies Needing Clarification

The competencies most mentioned as needing additional clarification were Creativity, Teaching, User Engagement, Marketing, and Service. These competencies had neither the highest nor the lowest rated means but fell somewhere in the middle. In other words, the competencies for which respondents sought the most clarification did not correspond to the competencies identified as the most or the least important to them.

One could infer several reasons that respondents requested clarification on the above competencies. Respondents may have been confused by the definitions provided with these competencies and, therefore, alternate wording might result in reducing the need for clarification. A follow-up survey or focus group with library outreach workers about these five competencies could tease out additional information.

The authors did not ask a question about which competencies should be removed, but three respondents suggested the removal of two competencies in this category: Service and Teaching (these were the only requests for removal among all the respondents' comments). It is possible that a request for clarification and even

removal of these competencies is related to the job responsibilities and use of these competencies by specific respondents. Many library outreach workers have other-- usually public service--duties combined with their outreach roles. Some may identify those duties as more-or-less related to their outreach work. For example, some respondents consider teaching skills important to their outreach work, while others consider teaching important but unrelated to their outreach work.

Initially, the authors hesitated on whether to include Emotional Intelligence and Professional Growth in the list of competencies identified in Phase 1. While those concepts were present in both the job advertisements and the professional literature, their frequency of occurrence compared to competencies like Advocacy and Collaboration was noticeably lower and less explicit. The mean rating by respondents for both competencies is notedly low (though, not the lowest). However, respondents who chose to comment directly on Emotional Intelligence recommended expanding the definition to include empathy; and multiple respondents recommended adding competencies that touch on similar ideas (e.g., resilience). No respondents commented directly on Professional Growth, though numerous respondents discussed the need for increased subject expertise. The authors recommend additional studies on how these two competencies support academic outreach work.

The lack of a standardized job description for academic library outreach is one of the motivating reasons for conducting this research. The authors imagine that some level of disagreement about the competencies will arise for this reason and is inevitable. Another research study might look at the use of these competencies by individuals in their work rather than the importance that they ascribe to the competencies. A comparison of the two datasets could be illuminating.

The authors acknowledge that there can be overlap among the competencies in library outreach work. For example, Creativity might be applied in multiple arenas of the library outreach worker's portfolio. The authors highlighted Creativity as its own competency based on the literature review and analysis of job postings, but another set of researchers might come to a different conclusion. It is important to remember that the largest set of responses (13) to the question of "Which competencies need additional clarification?" indicated that no clarification was needed to the competencies.

Identifying Additional Competencies

The knowledge, skills, and behaviors most often mentioned as missing from the original list of 18 competencies included subject/domain knowledge, time management, flexibility / resiliency / resourcefulness, getting others on board / people management, and leadership. Most of the areas identified as missing could be incorporated into the definitions of the existing competencies, as they are

closely related. For example, subject/domain knowledge could be incorporated into the User Engagement competency. Time management could be described within the Resource Management competency. Flexibility / resiliency / resourcefulness could be worked into the definition for Emotional Intelligence. Getting others on board / people management is already implied in Advocacy, Collaboration, and Resource Management, but the definitions could be tweaked to make this more explicit.

The authors chose not to include leadership in their set of competencies because it did not surface from the literature or job postings. Most of the academic library outreach jobs included in the Phase 1 analysis do not include direct management of other people. The authors acknowledge that leadership can be exercised by library employees located anywhere within an organizational hierarchy, and especially if they have sole responsibility for a program or set of duties. However, this study aims to include only those competencies that are specific to library outreach jobs as they are most commonly conceived. A library outreach worker might still want to bring in competencies from other sets of relevant published competencies that apply to their positions, such as ALA's Core Competences of Librarianship, LLAMA's Leadership and Management Competencies, and ACRL's Roles and Strengths of Teaching Librarians.

Organizing the Competencies

For the most part, feedback from outreach practitioners affirmed the authors' choice of competencies as developed from the literature and job advertisements. As suggested, a follow-up survey or focus group could probe some outstanding questions related to the wording of the competencies and their definitions.

In presenting the competencies in the future, the authors recommend listing them in order of importance to respondents and binned by construct, with the strongest (i.e., highest mean rating) constructs listed first.

Behaviors Necessary for Academic Library Outreach Work (M = 5.08)
Collaboration (M = 5.48)
Networking (M = 5.25)
User Engagement (M = 5.13)
Service (M = 5.05)
Emotional Intelligence (M = 4.80)
Creativity (M = 4.79)

Knowledge Necessary for Academic Library Outreach Work (M = 4.75)
Diversity & Inclusion (M = 5.24)
Advocacy (M = 5.10)
Teaching (M = 4.93)

Technology (*M* = 4.80)
Professional Growth (*M* = 4.76)
Research & Policy (*M* = 3.70)

Skills Necessary for Academic Library Outreach Work (*M* = 4.71)
Communication (*M* = 5.62)
Marketing (*M* = 4.81)
Project Management (*M* = 4.73)
Programing (*M* = 4.68)
Assessment (*M* = 4.54)
Resource Management (*M* = 3.86)

Alternative ordering might abstain from using the three broad categories or consider standard deviation as a factor in the ranking.

Limitations & Areas for Future Research

The authors want to acknowledge the limitations of the data and suggest areas for future research. While the number of years of experience and institutional profiles were explored as possible indicator variables, other variables that could have been considered include the subjects' current and recent position descriptions; access to resources (e.g., technology, staffing, budget), including professional growth opportunities; professional identification; and perceived level of support from library administration.

Most academic library outreach workers have other duties in their job descriptions, and individuals may define their outreach work in different ways. For example, one subject librarian may categorize their liaison work to academic departments as outreach work, while another would not. A reference & instruction librarian may identify a portion of their work in these functional areas as outreach work, while another would not. The authors attempted to define outreach practitioners for this study and in the survey as "library employees who develop creative programs and communications that promote library collections, services, and staff to target audiences." However, the overlap between outreach and areas of reference, instruction, collection development, and liaison work is not always clear.

Soliciting information about the frequency to which practitioners perform or actively engage in these competencies in their outreach work could help clarify whether responses were guided by requirements and expectations in comparison to passion for a given competency. An individual may have evaluated a competency as "absolutely necessary" to outreach work, yet they may rarely engage or practice that competency. With this in mind, the authors could have additionally explored

the differences between how important each competency is to an individual and how often they engage in that knowledge, skill, or behavior.

One particular case repeatedly stood out from the rest of the sampling population. This individual had less than five years of experience and rated constructs generally low, whereas in most cases, individuals with few years of experience rated the competencies higher. A future mixed-method study would grant researchers an opportunity to examine these unique cases, and through a qualitative approach, gain in-depth understanding as to why these individuals responded in the way that they did.

Another limitation is related to the time frame of the job advertisements the authors reviewed compared to the literature in Phase 1. The authors examined articles published between 2010 and 2020. However, the authors retrieved the job postings between February and March 2020. The job descriptions represent a more current but also more limited snapshot in time.

The survey was open from November 5-20, 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic when many academic library buildings were partially or fully closed, and the majority of services had moved to virtual spaces. A few respondents suggested including virtual outreach more explicitly in the competencies, presumably because of the rise in expectations during this time for library outreach workers to perform outreach virtually. It remains to be seen whether outreach work has been transformed by this period of virtual interactions. The survey could be conducted again post-pandemic to determine whether the timing influenced the responses and whether virtual outreach is here to stay.

The authors collected demographic data on survey respondents, including asking about their race and ethnicity. While the demographic data reflects the racial make-up of the wider library field, which is overwhelmingly white, future research could focus specifically on the skills and experiences of outreach librarians of color. Competencies by their very nature are an attempt to standardize and elevate professional expertise, and the authors recognize that their research may be unwittingly encoding elements of the whiteness of the LIS field and its professional associations and organizations. Focusing on the experiences of outreach librarians of color could reveal burdens that some of these competencies carry or illuminate new competencies.

Conclusion

This study reviewed the language of published literature and job advertisements in order to identify core competencies for outreach work in academic libraries. The 18

competencies that the authors defined were presented to academic outreach practitioners for assessment through a survey instrument. The authors analyzed the results of that survey in order to provide additional context and identify areas for future research.

As of the publication of this article, there is no set of approved competencies for outreach librarianship in the same way that there are competencies for e-resources, special collections, and reference librarians. The authors of this study encourage future researchers and, most notably, the Association of College & Research Libraries to formulate and codify competencies for academic library outreach work. As outreach work continues to grow and adapt to new needs in higher education, having a set of core competencies will help library deans and directors plan strategically for future positions. Moreover, a standard set of expectations for the behaviors, knowledge, and skills necessary for outreach work will help LIS instructors develop curriculum for LIS students. Above all, it will help current practitioners to benchmark their own work and professional growth against a standard metric.

Acknowledgements

Appendix A: List of Professional Competencies (Selected)

- ALA: Core Competences of Librarianship (2009): http://www.ala.org/educationcareers/careers/corecomp/corecompetences
- FLICC: Competencies for Federal Librarians (2011): http://www.loc.gov/flicc/publications/Lib_Compt/2011/2011Competencies.pdf
- NASIG: Core Competencies for E-Resources Librarians (2013): https://www.nasig.org/Core-Competencies
- ACRL: Competencies for Special Collections Professionals (2017): http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/comp4specollect
- ACRL: Proficiencies for Assessment Librarians and Coordinators (2017): http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/assessment_proficiencies
- ACRL: Roles and Strengths of Teaching Librarians (2017): http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/teachinglibrarians
- ALA RUSA: Professional Competencies for Reference and User Services Librarians (2017):   http://www.ala.org/rusa/resources/guidelines/professional
- ALCTS: Core Competencies for Cataloging and Metadata Professional Librarians (2017): https://alair.ala.org/handle/11213/7853
- LLAMA: Leadership and Management Competencies (2017): http://www.ala.org/llama/leadership-and-management-competencies
- NASIG: Core Competencies for Scholarly Communication Librarians (2017): https://www.nasig.org/Core-Competencies
- ALCTS: Core Competencies for Acquisitions Professionals (2018): https://alair.ala.org/handle/11213/9058
- ALA National Impact of Library Public Programs Assessment: Nine Competencies of Programming Librarians (2019): https://nilppa.org/phase-1-white-paper/what-competencies-and-training-are-required/

Appendix B: List of Publication Titles in Phase 1

- *Reference & User Services Quarterly* (6)
- *Public Services Quarterly* (5)
- *College & Research Libraries* (4)
- *Journal of Library Administration* (4)
- *Journal of Librarianship and Scholarly Communication* (3)
- *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* (3)
- *College & Research Libraries News* (2)
- *Partnership: The Canadian Journal of Library and Information Practice and Research* (2)
- *Pennsylvania Libraries: Research & Practice* (2)
- *Reference Services Review* (2)
- *Advocacy, Outreach, and the Nation's Academic Libraries: A Call for Action (monograph)*
- *Against the Grain*
- *Digital Library Perspectives*
- *Diversity Programming and Outreach for Academic Libraries (monograph)*
- *Education Libraries*
- *Evidence Based Library and Information Practice*
- *In the Library with the Lead Pipe*
- *Journal of Information Literacy*
- *Journal of Interlibrary Loan*
- *Library Leadership & Management*
- *Library Management*
- *Library Philosophy and Practice*
- *Library Trends*
- *Mid-Career Library and Information Professionals: A Leadership Primer (monograph)*
- *Portal: Libraries and the Academy*
- *Public Library Quarterly*
- *Serials Review*
- *SPEK Kit Outreach and Engagement (monograph)*
- *Technical Services Quarterly*
- *The Library Marketing Toolkit (monograph)*
- *The Library Outreach Casebook (monograph)*

Appendix C: List of Job Titles in Phase 1

The following table lists the outreach positions included in Phase 1. The authors grouped the job advertisements into categories, based on the primary focus of the job duties:

Primary Job Category	Job Titles
Generalist (2)	Reference & Outreach Librarian Research, Instruction, & Outreach Librarian
Instruction (8)	First Year Experience Librarian Instruction & Outreach Librarian Instruction & Outreach Librarian Student Success Librarian Student Success Librarian Undergraduate Engagement Librarian Undergraduate Student Success Librarian Undergraduate Teaching & Outreach Librarian
Liaison (3)	Education Liaison Librarian Liaison Librarian Research & Engagement Librarian
Management (4)	Associate Dean for Teaching, Learning & Engagement Associate Library Director for Research, Learning, & Outreach Head of Learning, Research, & Engagement Public Services & Outreach Manager
Marketing & Communications (1)	Outreach & Marketing Librarian
Student Success (7)	First-Year Experience and Undergraduate Success Librarian Inclusion & Outreach Librarian Librarian for Academic Engagement Outreach & User Engagement Librarian Student Success Librarian Student Success Librarian User Engagement Librarian

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