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## Going the distance: Avoiding mid-career plateaus.

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# Going the distance: Avoiding mid-career plateaus



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Poster available at <http://dspace.nelson.usf.edu:8080/xmlui/handle/10806/16808>

## The study:

In an online survey and semi-structured telephone interviews, senior academic librarians were asked to reflect on the factors that keep them personally fulfilled and on how they remain motivated to make positive contributions to their organization.

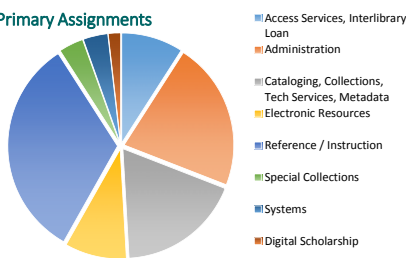
The survey invitation was sent to 230 senior academic librarians in Florida in April 2016. Potential participants were at associate or full professor rank or had at least 10 years of post-MLS work.

55 responses were received (24% response rate). More than 15 semi-structured interviews have been conducted to date.

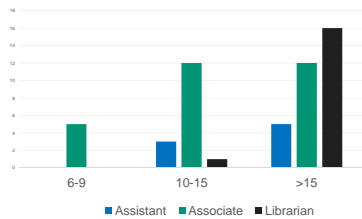
## The respondents:

- Both public and private institutions
- Institutions ranged in size from <1000 to >20,000 FTE
- 22% plan to retire within the next 5 years
- 52% administrators
- 89% have faculty status
- 26% are at tenure-track institutions
- 52% are required to do research

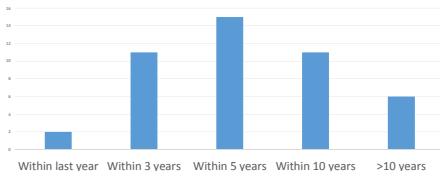
## Primary Assignments



## Years Post-MLS



## Years since last promotion



## Summary:

- Many respondents expressed love for the job and career satisfaction
- Working with students, collaborating with colleagues, and respect are important motivators
- Senior librarians are eager to mentor junior colleagues
- 30% of those interviewed do feel partially or fully plateaued
- Structural plateauing may be voluntary—a conscious choice
- Few opportunities for salary improvements

## Motivations



## Frustrations



## Other motivations:

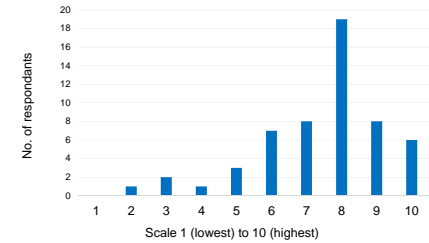
- Working with students
- Value of librarianship for public good
- Ability to make an impact
- Collaboration and teamwork
- Mentoring
- Recognition & respect from faculty & colleagues
- Academic culture / environment

## Other frustrations:

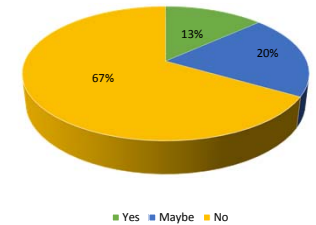
- Lack of influence / consultation
- Changing nature of the job
- Personnel issues
- Inefficiency in organization
- Job creep
- Not using skill set
- Lack of university support



## Job Satisfaction



## Do you feel you are plateaued?



## Bardwick's<sup>1</sup> types of plateauing:

### Structural:

Unable to progress because of organizational restrictions or hierarchies.

### Content:

Most skills have been mastered and few challenges remain.

### Life:

Work dominates life and becomes the primary basis of one's self-worth.

## Kanter<sup>2</sup> on being "stuck"

### "Stuck" employees:

- May have lower ambitions and self-esteem
- Less likely to take risks
- More likely to disengage from work

### "Moving" employees:

- Find constructive ways to resolve difficulties
- Tend to be very engaged and see rewards in working hard

<sup>1</sup>Bardwick, J. M. (1986). *The plateauing trap: How to avoid it in your career—and your life*. New York, NY: American Management Association, pp: 11-12.

<sup>2</sup>Kanter, R. M. (1979). Changing the shape of work: Reform in academe. *Current issues in higher education* (pp. 3-9) American Association for Higher Education, pp: 5-6.