Abstract
More than half the participants in a survey of Canadian research university librarians indicated that scholarship activities were required or encouraged at their universities, yet most university librarians have year-round schedules of assigned duties that present challenges to the engagement in sustained, meaningful scholarship. Full-time librarians reported spending an average of 47 hours per week on all of their responsibilities combined, but most librarians devote less than 5 hours per week to scholarly activities. Ideally librarians would like to spend 15% of their time on scholarship. The increase in time for scholarship would be at the expense of a 10% reduction in time devoted to other professional responsibilities. The implications of these findings for staffing adjustments in university libraries are discussed.

Introduction
There is little information in the library literature concerning the time spent on scholarly activities by university librarians. In 2001, Brown analyzed data on academic librarians’ allocation of time for research contained in four studies conducted during the 1980’s and 1990’s. These studies employed differing methodologies and sample sizes, and varying practices with respect to what activities were counted as “research”. While commenting that the small pool of data and lack of consistent reporting made comparison difficult, Brown offered the tentative conclusion, based on the four sources reviewed, that average research time by academic librarians ranged from 6% to 13.5%. Brown also observed that reporting average percentages was somewhat misleading as time spent on research was extremely variable from individual to individual. All four of Brown’s sources were American. This article will attempt to provide some comparative data from a Canadian research university library perspective.

How much time do Canadian research university librarians spend on scholarship versus professional practice? Most university librarians have significant year-round schedules of assigned duties that present challenges to the engagement in sustained, meaningful scholarship. The requirement for formal scholarship by Canadian research university librarians appears to be an increasing trend, and yet there are no commonly accepted norms for the appropriate balance between scholarship and other professional responsibilities. However, the establishment of such norms clearly has implications for librarians’ workloads and appropriate librarian staffing levels. This paper will provide data on the actual and perceived ideal distribution of time by Canadian research university librarians from a national survey conducted by the author in the spring and fall of 2006. A comparison will be made between the total hours worked per week by librarians participating in the Scholarship Survey and similar data for university professors found in the literature. Finally, the question of balance between scholarship and other professional activities will be examined, and a strategy for increasing time for scholarship will be suggested.
The term “research university librarian” in the context of this paper refers to librarians employed by the 27 university members of the Canadian Association of Research Libraries (CARL). Fifteen of these libraries are located at the group of so-called “Medical/Doctoral” universities, which offer a full range of undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs. The remaining 12 members of CARL belong to the group of “Comprehensive” universities, which are medium-sized institutions with a broad range of undergraduate and masters level programs, and a limited number students at the PhD level. Eleven of the Medical/Doctoral universities and 3 of the Comprehensive universities are members of the Association of Research Libraries. Rounding out the Canadian higher education landscape are 21 “Primarily Undergraduate” universities, plus a host of non-degree granting university colleges, community colleges, and technical institutes which, for reasons of time and resources, were excluded from the Scholarship Survey.

The Scholarship Survey
The Scholarship Survey was distributed to all identifiable CARL librarians during the spring and fall of 2006. The survey consisted of 39 questions and was available in English and French versions. Potential respondents were invited to respond in their language of preference. In 2004/2005 there were 1,284 librarians employed at the 27 CARL universities. The survey population for the Scholarship Study consisted of the 1,052 CARL university librarians for whom email addresses could be retrieved. The survey attracted a total of 520 returns for a response rate of 49.4%. Four hundred and forty-one responses (84.8%) were in English; the remainder (15.2%) were in French. Fifty-three of the survey returns were found to be seriously incomplete, and were removed from the sample. Another 44 respondents completed 26 of the 39 questions. An independent samples t-test of statistical variance found no significant difference between these 44 cases and the fully completed returns when compared with respect to age, gender, years of professional experience, and educational qualifications. Given this result, and the fact that these respondents had completed two-thirds of the survey questions, these cases were retained in the sample.

The adjusted sample, from which the data for this paper was derived, consisted of 467 cases. This represents 44.4% of the survey population of 1,052 and 36.4% of the total population of CARL university librarians. A sample this size is considered to be statistically accurate within plus or minus 3.4 percent 95 percent of the time.

Definition of Scholarship
The definition of scholarship employed by the Survey was developed at Oregon State University and described by Weiser in 1996. Building on the work of Ernest Boyer, OSU defined scholarship in broad terms as any form of creative intellectual or artistic work, validated by peers, and communicated. The communication of scholarly work may take place in a variety of forms, including published books and articles, public lectures and conference presentations, poster sessions, curated exhibits, artistic performances, etc. In order not to limit results, Survey participants were encouraged to report all evidence of scholarly activity, whether or not it had been formally peer-reviewed.
The Requirement for Scholarship
More than half (51.4%) of survey respondents indicated that scholarship is either required or encouraged at their university. Scholarship is naturally expected during sabbatical and study leaves, where available, but for 35% of participants scholarship was also expected as an integral part of their professional responsibilities on an ongoing basis.

![Chart showing the requirement for scholarship](chart.png)

Time for Scholarship
It is clear from many written comments from participants in the Scholarship Survey that time conflict is a major obstacle to greater participation in scholarly activity. The following are a few typical examples:

“I rarely get time for scholarship in the course of my duties. In previous years I have made time for it, but always at the expense of my regular work”

“I have little time for scholarship due to understaffing in my unit. Most of my contributions are in committee work to my professional's provincial and national organizations - that kind of contribution I can better integrate into my day to day schedule. I'd love to take the time off to write an article for a peer reviewed journal, but that would leave my unit with one professional for 3 program areas. A study leave/sabbatical is not something I can take on any time soon.”

“My first and primary responsibility/priority is to serve our clientele. Right now, that job and committee work exceed a 'normal' workweek. An increase in professional staff to work with our increasing student population would 'free up time' for scholarship and more professional contribution.”
“The burden of our heavy workloads leaves little time or energy for scholarship during the work week. For me, the creativity and thought that goes into scholarship requires a significant block of time, free from the daily grind. Consequently, to engage in scholarship, I rely on my research leaves to provide me with the necessary relief from the demands of my job.”

“The issue of hours of work expected of librarians has an impact on time available for scholarly work. While little/no time is made available for scholarship as part of the 'normal' workweek, there is the expectation that librarians actually spend far more than 35 hours/week on their combined duties/responsibilities. That is where the time for both scholarship and professional contributions comes.”

Several participants expressed frustration that although there is an expectation for scholarly work in order to secure tenure and promotion, their burden of assigned duties leaves little time or energy for this purpose. Furthermore, as Table 1 demonstrates, most universities have not provided their librarians with either formal or informal guidelines concerning an appropriate time commitment to scholarship.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question: Does your university have an accepted guideline for the percentage of time librarians should devote to scholarship?</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>334</td>
<td>72.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't Know</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>16.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Respondents</td>
<td>463</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Scholarship Survey addressed the time commitments of librarians both in relative and absolute terms. It asked participants to estimate the average number of hours per week devoted to scholarship and to other professional responsibilities. It also asked participants to estimate the actual and ideal percentage of “overall time” devoted to various professional activities, including scholarship.

Figures 2 compares the distribution of hours per week devoted to professional responsibilities between full-time and part-time librarians⁸.
Figure 2 shows that the majority of survey participants spend an average of less than 5 hours per week on scholarship activities. Figure 3 also suggests that some part-time librarians spend as much or more time on scholarship as do full-time librarians. This may reflect the fact that part-time librarians have more discretionary personal time at their disposal to devote to scholarship.
The average time per week spent on all professional responsibilities including scholarship by 290 full-time librarians was 47.4 hours, while the median was 45.0 hours and the standard deviation was 8.5 hours. The large standard deviation indicates that the results were widely distributed. Figure 4 shows that nearly one third of full-time librarians reported working 50 or more hours per week on all activities combined, which is equivalent to the time commitment of the average university professor.

![Figure 4](image)

**Figure 4**

**Hours Per Week Devoted to All Professional Responsibilities (Including Scholarship) - Full Time Librarians**

- 35 - 39: 5 cases
- 40 - 44: 35 cases
- 45 - 49: 25 cases
- 50 - 54: 10 cases
- 55 - 59: 10 cases
- 60 - 64: 5 cases
- >64: 5 cases

N=290

**Actual vs. Ideal Time Expenditure (Percentage of Time Devoted to Various Professional Activities)**

Numerous survey participants had difficulty answering the questions concerning their actual and ideal distribution of time. This was partly because the original version of the question (see Figure 5) was awkwardly worded and partly because many had never given the issue much thought. Some participants observed that it is sometimes difficult to separate time spent on scholarship from time spent on other professional responsibilities. They felt that there is a point where these activities overlap.

Many participants interpreted the original version of Question 37 to apply only to scholarship activities during the “normal workday”. When it became apparent that the question was causing confusion, Questions 37 and 38 were revised (see Figure 6) and re-issued to the same population. Two hundred and eighteen responses were received to the follow-up questions.

The revised version of Question 37 made it clear that respondents were to consider scholarship activities performed both at work and at home during any hours of the week. The revised questions also allowed for percentage totals exceeding 100%, to address the concern of some participants that it was difficult to separate time spent on the various activities.
The differing approaches to these questions between the original and the follow-up survey resulted in different values being produced; however the general pattern of both charts is remarkably similar. Both charts show, as one would expect, that the majority of librarians' time is spent on the professional responsibilities of their position, followed by “contributions to the library”.

In the original survey the actual percentage of time spent on scholarship was 6.5%, and in the follow-up survey it was 8.2%. These results fall at the lower end of the 6% – 13.5% range reported by Brown in her comparison of the four U.S studies of librarian research time. However, in three of the four cases Brown’s percentage calculations were based on the assumption of a 40 hour work week. It is evident from the preceding discussion that this may have been a faulty assumption. The Scholarship Survey found that Canadian university librarians work an average of 47 hours per week, and nearly one third of them put in a total of 50 or more hours per week. Moreover, it is clear from many written comments on the Scholarship Survey, that it is precisely during the “extended work-week” – during evenings and weekends – that many university librarians make time for their research. Revising Brown’s calculations based on a longer work-week would lower her research percentages.

Figure 5 and Figure 6 show that in an ideal situation librarians would like to be spending almost twice as much time on scholarly activities. They would prefer to spend about 15% of their time on scholarship, an amount equal to the time spent on “contributions to the library”. For both charts the increase in time for scholarship is at the expense of time spent on other professional responsibilities. In the ideal situation librarians see themselves spending approximately 10% less time on activities related to their assigned duties.

The four French-speaking universities of Quebec present an interesting case study. Currently, librarians at these universities do not experience the same level of academic benefits and obligations as research university librarians elsewhere in Canada. At these universities librarians are not eligible for tenure or sabbatical leave and the expectations for scholarship are lower. The francophone librarians of Quebec spend approximately 5% more of their time on professional responsibilities and 5% less time on scholarship than the survey sample as a whole.
Q37: Please estimate the percentage of overall time you devote to the following activities:

Q38: In your opinion, what would be the ideal distribution of time amongst these activities: (please indicate percentages)

Q37: Please estimate the percentage of the time you devote to your role as a librarian that is taken up by the following activities. If applicable, please include time spent "at work" and at home, during "regular work hours" as well as evenings and weekends. (The total may exceed 100%):

Q38: In your opinion, of the time you devote to your role as a librarian, what would be the ideal percentage distribution amongst the following activities? (The total may exceed 100%)
Comparisons with the Teaching Faculty
Information on the time commitments of university professors is relatively scarce. Only one study could be found on the use of time by Canadian academics, and that example came from a single university. However, that study was consistent with data from a variety of U.S. and international sources suggesting that the time commitment of the average professor is in the range of 49-56 hours per week on all activities related to their university employment. The distribution of professors’ time is less uniform, and varies by time of year and type of university. The same sources cited above suggest that university professors on average spend 40-60% of their time on teaching and related activities, 20-30% on research, and the remainder on administration, community service and other activities.

Of course, time expended is just one measure of workload. Other dimensions include complexity, intensity, and impact of the work itself. These factors are much more difficult to assess, and include many elements which are ultimately subjective. Therefore an accurate comparison of the workloads of librarians and university professors is probably impossible.

Summary and Discussion
What is a reasonable workload for research university librarians and what percentage of that workload should be devoted to scholarship? Little has been written concerning the time commitments of university librarians, and it has proven difficult to get a grip on this subject. Some respondents to the Scholarship Survey found it challenging to estimate their scholarship contributions in terms of average hours per week, arguing that the time commitment fluctuates greatly at different times of the year. Other participants pointed out that a measurement based on “percentage of time” is also problematic since 10% of one person’s time may be vastly different from another’s.

It is clear that many full-time librarians are putting in 45-55 hours or more per week on their combined professional activities on a regular basis. However, in written comments to the Scholarship Survey many participants still spoke of their contributions to scholarship as being conducted on their “own personal time”, beyond the “normal work week”. Is it time for a change in perspective? As in any profession there is probably a minimum time commitment for university librarians to meet a basic standard of performance in their positions. Beyond the necessary minimum there is an almost unlimited scope for additional optional activities that may serve to advance a person’s career. Whether librarians choose to participate in such “extracurricular” activities depends on many factors, including their life situation, level of personal ambition, etc. In reality, a significant component of the “workload” of a research university librarian is voluntary and self-imposed. What is “personal time” and what is a “normal work week” under such circumstances?

Notwithstanding these comments, it is clear that a perceived lack of time is a major inhibitor preventing greater participation in scholarship by librarians. If 15% of overall professional time devoted to scholarship activities is a reasonable goal, how do we get there? How do we bridge the gap from 7-8% to 15%? To start with, library administrators and librarians at each institution must come to agreement on the appropriate mix of
professional activities. This mix will likely vary from library to library depending on local priorities. However, the rules and expectations must be clear to everyone.

Librarians would like to be spending twice as much time on scholarship as they currently do, but finding more time for scholarship may mean reducing time spent on other professional responsibilities. For librarians to spend 10% less time on the assigned duties of their positions means that either universities will need to hire 10% more librarians, or other adjustments will need to be made. The 8Rs Study\textsuperscript{16} found a significant degree of overlap between the roles of librarians and library paraprofessionals, and claimed that increasingly paraprofessionals are taking on functions traditionally performed by professional librarians. This evolution may provide the opportunity for universities to allow their librarians more time for research. However, the adjustment will not be without cost, as it will probably mean expanding the ranks of library paraprofessionals.

The 8Rs Study also pointed out that CARL university librarians are the highest paid librarians in Canada\textsuperscript{17}. They probably also work the longest hours and are subject to higher expectations in terms of scholarship. MLIS students considering a choice of library sectors for their future careers should realize that along with the financial and other rewards associated with being a university librarian there are also significant demands.

The challenge of balancing professional practice, scholarship, and service elements of our careers is not unique to librarians. According to a recent U.S. national survey of the environment for research in the natural sciences, university professors are also finding it increasingly difficult to manage their multiple responsibilities\textsuperscript{18}. The “struggle to juggle” seems to be a universal aspect of academic life.

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Notes


3. The membership of CARL consists of the 27 largest university libraries in Canada plus the Canada Institute for Scientific and Technical Information (CISTI), Library and Archives Canada (LAC) and the Library of Parliament. This paper will consider only librarians at the university members of CARL, which include the universities of: Alberta, British Columbia, Calgary, Carleton, Concordia, Dalhousie, Guelph, Laval, Manitoba, McGill, McMaster, Memorial, Montréal, New Brunswick, Ottawa, Québec à Montréal, Queen’s, Regina, Saskatchewan, Sherbrooke, Simon Fraser, Toronto, Victoria, Waterloo, Western Ontario, Windsor, and York.

Email addresses for the Scholarship Survey were collected from listings on university public websites. In several cases these listings were checked and verified by Directors or librarians at the various institutions.


“Full-time” was defined to include all librarians who reported spending 35 or more hours per week on their professional responsibilities excluding scholarship. A “Part-time” librarian was one spending less than 35 hours per week on professional responsibilities excluding scholarship.

Brown, op. cit.


Ibid. Table I.6a, 148.