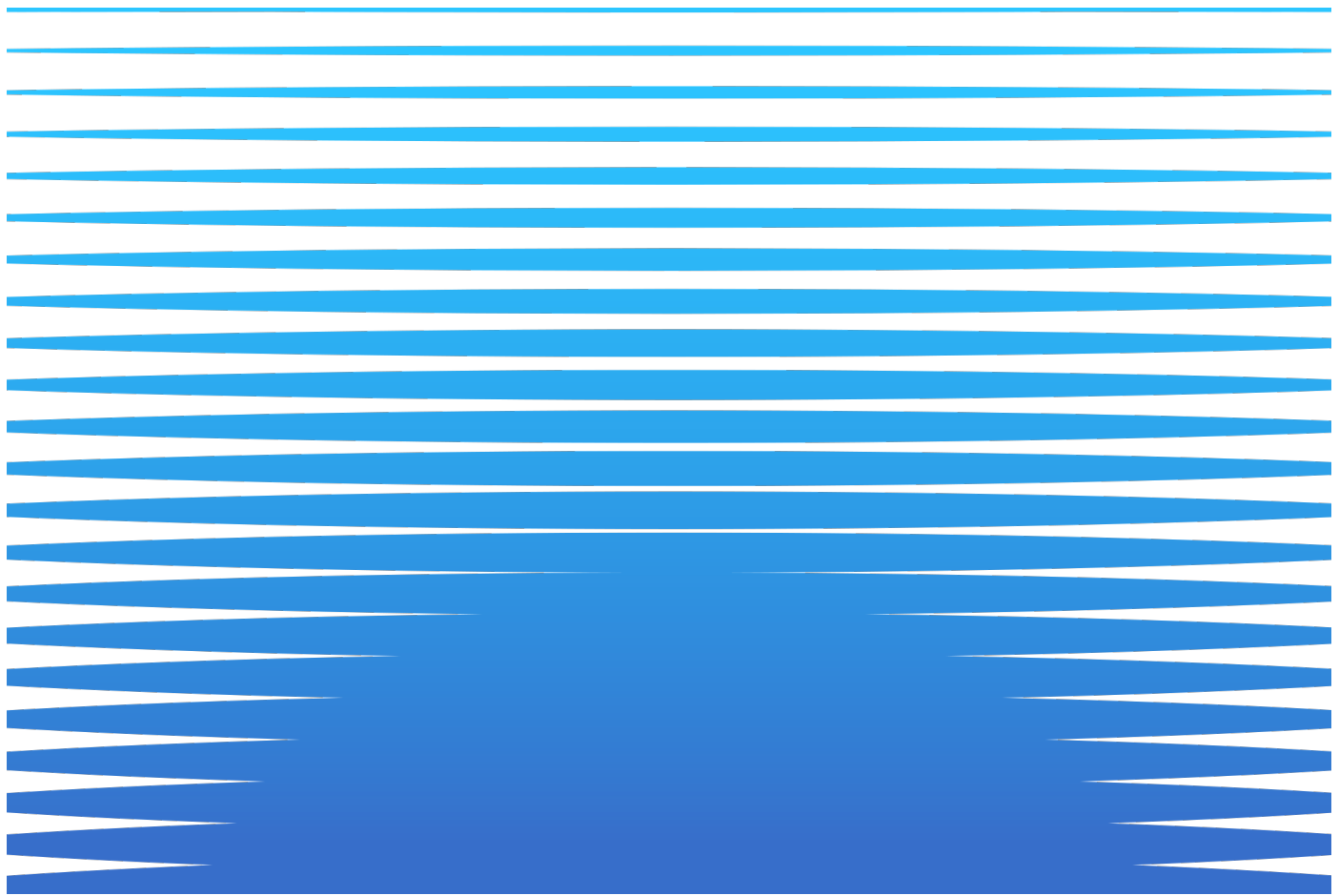# Library Strategy and Collaboration Across the College Ecosystem

Results from a National Survey of Community College Library Directors

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ITHAKA S+R

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Executive Summary

To ensure students attain success throughout their college experience, it is not only necessary to understand their individual needs and challenges, but also to examine the college systems and structures that bolster or discourage their success. Students bring their whole selves to their college experiences, and many face significant personal challenges related to their most basic material, financial, and technological needs outside of the classroom. It is not uncommon for students to possess multiple identities—as caregivers or full-time employees, for example— beyond their identities as learners in a college setting. This is particularly true for community college students.

And, naturally, these individualized challenges are not the only ones students face. Many find the bureaucracy and nomenclature of higher education structures to be overwhelming and opaque, and thus cannot take full advantage of services across the college ecosystem that may be available to them. Ensuring that students can seamlessly access needed support services, especially those students who need help the most, requires college leaders to continuously examine and make improvements to structures and systems that have historically been established.

Community college libraries are one key part of this ecosystem of services that aims to advance student success. They provide spaces, scholarly resources, technologies, and support services that contribute to learning and a sense of belonging. To carry out these functions, they often partner with other academic affairs support providers, like tutoring and writing centers. Partnerships with IT departments have been especially crucial as the library has taken on more of a leadership role with technology loaning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

How can the library be best positioned to continue enabling student and institutional success? The Community College Academic and Student Support Ecosystem research initiative seeks to examine how student-facing service departments—including academic libraries—are organized, funded, and staffed at community and technical colleges across the country. In February 2021, we surveyed 321 community college library directors to provide the community with a snapshot of current service provision, leadership perspectives on the impact of COVID-19, and challenges faced in making decisions and navigating change.

Key Insights

- From the perspective of library directors, there is a lack of alignment between institutional priorities and library contributions. They recognize the importance of institutional efforts to increase retention, enrollment, and graduation, but believe the library's most critical contributions are tied to increasing student learning.
- Library leaders see value in presenting data on the library's impact toward college objectives. However, few leaders believe their library has clearly articulated these contributions or tied data collection to institutional objectives.

- Collaborations between the library and other units on campus are expected to take greater hold in the years to come, while external partnerships with third-party vendors and public libraries are likely to stay relatively stable.
- Cross-campus collaborations are enabled both through specific initiatives and broader organizational structures. The most significant collaborations between libraries and other units generally take place within academic affairs, for example with writing and tutoring centers, and with IT departments that are outside of the academic and student affairs ecosystem.
- Community college libraries have taken an increasingly major role in technology provision during the pandemic in response to student need. Partnerships with IT departments are often crucial for maintaining and troubleshooting devices, while the library generally leads on device lending.
- Budgets have taken a significant hit during the pandemic, with nearly half of all library leaders reporting some level of budget decrease in the current fiscal year. There is a strong desire, when funds are available, to make a greater investment in improving access to digital content.

Introduction

Over the past three years, we have aimed through the IMLS-funded Community College Academic and Student Support Ecosystem (CCASSE) initiative to provide the higher education community with insight into the organization of student-facing support services and how the library can best position itself to enhance student success, especially in collaborating with other departments. This report summarizes the findings from the latest phase the project, a national survey of community college library directors and leaders.

In 2019, for the first phase of the initiative, we surveyed chief academic affairs and student affairs officers on how academic and student support services at their college are organized, funded, and staffed, the resource challenges and constraints they face, and their vision for future service provision.[1] The next stage of research took place in 2020 with a series of interviews with chief academic and student affairs officers, vice presidents of student and academic affairs, faculty, library directors, and students. These interviews explored institutions' organizational strategies to align supports with student needs, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on their service provision, and challenges in connecting students with the resources they need.[2] The initiative will conclude over the next year with a series of virtual convenings and an invitational workshop for project advisors, community college leaders, and funder representatives to discuss research findings and generate evidence-based recommendations for the field.

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[1] Melissa Blankstein and Christine Wolff-Eisenberg, "Organizing Support for Success: Community College Academic and Student Support Ecosystems," *Ithaka S+R*, December 5, 2019, https://doi.org/10.18665/sr.312259.

[2] Danielle Cooper and Rebecca Springer, "Student Focused: Fostering Cross-Unit Collaboration to Meet the Changing Needs of Community College Students," *Ithaka S+R,* March 3, 2021, https://doi.org/10.18665/sr.314874.

Methodology

The population for this survey is library directors and those in equivalent positions at not-for-profit, associate-granting institutions across the United States. As the title of these roles varies considerably across community college libraries, contact information for the sample was gathered anew. The process entailed creating a list of applicable colleges and locating contact information for the official with the most senior role at their library, including those with titles like Library Director, Director of Library Services, and Head Librarian, among others, via their college's website or by calling the college directly. In effort to streamline our reporting, we refer to these individuals as *library directors* or *library leaders* throughout this report, recognizing the actual underlying titles vary.

After iterating on a draft questionnaire with project advisors, we tested the survey through a series of cognitive interviews to ensure that it was understood consistently and clearly across respondents. We conducted five cognitive interviews in January 2021 with library leaders in the survey population.

The survey was fielded between February and March 2021, distributed under the signatory of Ithaka S+R leadership and advisors to the project. Approximately 983 library leaders received the survey, with 321 completing the survey for an overall response rate of 33 percent.[3] Respondents were offered an invitation to a pre-release presentation of findings in advance of this report as an incentive to complete the survey.

Overall, respondents to the survey are relatively newer to their position within the last five years, and are predominately women, between the ages of 44 and 55, and white (see Appendix A for participant demographics). On average, the colleges represented by respondents have graduation rates within 200 percent of normal time to degree of 33 percent (SD = 10.8), a full-time retention rate of 60 percent (SD = 9.1), a part-time retention rate of 43 percent (SD = 9.2), and a transfer-out rate for their total cohort of 18 percent (SD = 8.9). On average, the libraries represented in the sample have about four full-time librarian employees (SD = 4) and three full-time library technicians (SD = 3). These libraries also have about five part-time librarians (SD = 6) and three part-time librarian technicians (SD = 3).[4]

Throughout the report, findings are often stratified by institutional size and setting. The resulting sample of respondents broke down in the following manner:[5]

- Very small and small, two-year (< 1,999 FTE students): 99
- Medium, two-year (2,000-4,999 FTE students): 107
- Large and very large, two-year (5,000+ FTE students): 78

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[3] Margin of error is 4 percent for *n* = 321 at the 95 percent confidence interval.

[4] As defined by IPEDS "full-time" and "part-time" are "as defined by the institution. The type of appointment at the snapshot date determines whether an employee is full time or part time."

[5] Some institutions had multiple senior officials at different libraries at their institutions. As such, their institutional data were only counted once. Only two respondents participated along with others at their institution.

▪ Four-year, primarily nonresidential:[6] 35

Acknowledgements

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[6] As defined by IPEDS, "primarily nonresidential" includes colleges with fewer than 25 percent of degree-seeking students that live on campus and/or fewer than 50 percent who attend full time. This subgroup within the sample is comprised of respondents within the small, medium, and large, 4-year, primarily nonresidential Carnegie classifications for size and setting and were excluded from stratified analysis due to their low number of respondents compared to other subgroups.

Evolving Role of the Library

Library leaders identify supporting student learning, developing community, and providing technological resources to be their library's most important contributions to student success. Given this, library leaders have focused their efforts on increasing student learning through information literacy instruction and especially in meeting the demand for technological resources during the COVID-19 pandemic. Over the past year, many libraries had to vastly shift their strategies to offer remote and digital support, often scaling up current technology loaning services to provide students with laptops and Wi-Fi hotspots. With these rapid changes and escalation of services, libraries needed to collaborate with other departments across the college, most notably their IT departments. Library leaders believe such cross-institutional collaborations will increase over time.

Multi-faceted college and library objectives

Community college library directors highly value major student milestones—like year-to-year retention, enrollment, and graduation—as indicators of institutional success. A little under 80 percent of survey respondents rated increasing student retention as an extremely important objective to their college, followed by 71 percent for increasing enrollment, and 61 percent for increasing graduation (see Figure 1). However, there are observed differences between library leaders' valuation of their college's most important objectives and those of chief academic officers (CAOs) and student affairs officers (SAOs).[7]

> There are observed differences between library leaders' valuation of their college's most important objectives and those of chief academic officers and student affairs officers.

While large shares of library directors and their administrator colleagues rate student enrollment as highly important, many indicators of success resonate more strongly with CAOs and SAOs than with library directors (see Figure 1). For instance, 76 percent of CAOs and 57 percent of SAOs rated increasing student learning as an extremely important objective compared to 43 percent of library directors. This gap is also seen for other objectives, such as increasing graduation and course completion. Larger shares of CAOs also rated increasing student transfer and improving post-graduation outcomes as extremely important compared to their library director and SAO colleagues.

Additionally, a larger share of library directors rated their colleges' objective of addressing social justice imperatives as extremely important compared to CAOs and SAOs. However, a second survey conducted by Ithaka S+R in 2020 with community college chief academic and student leaders revealed that the number of provosts who consider this objective to be extremely

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[7] This survey of CAOs and SAOs was fielded in 2019 as part of the same research initiative. Melissa Blankstein and Christine Wolff-Eisenberg, "Organizing Support for Success: Community College Academic and Student Support Ecosystems," *Ithaka S+R*, December 5, 2019, https://doi.org/10.18665/sr.312259.

important more than doubled between 2019 and 2020.[8] This increase may be in response to the ways in which the pandemic has revealed existing and worsening inequities within higher education, as well as the renewed demands for racial justice led by the Black Lives Matter movement and heightened calls to dismantle systemic racism within higher education.

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[8] Melissa Blankstein and Christine Wolff-Eisenberg, "Moving the Needle on College Student Basic Needs: National Community College Provost Perspectives," *Ithaka S+R,* April 28, 2021, https://doi.org/10.18665/sr.315290.

Figure 1. Based on anything you know, have heard, or just happen to think, how important are each of the following objectives to your college? / And, how important are each of the following objectives to your college?

Percent of library directors who rated each objective as extremely important, and percent of academic and student affairs leaders who rated each objective as extremely important in 2019.
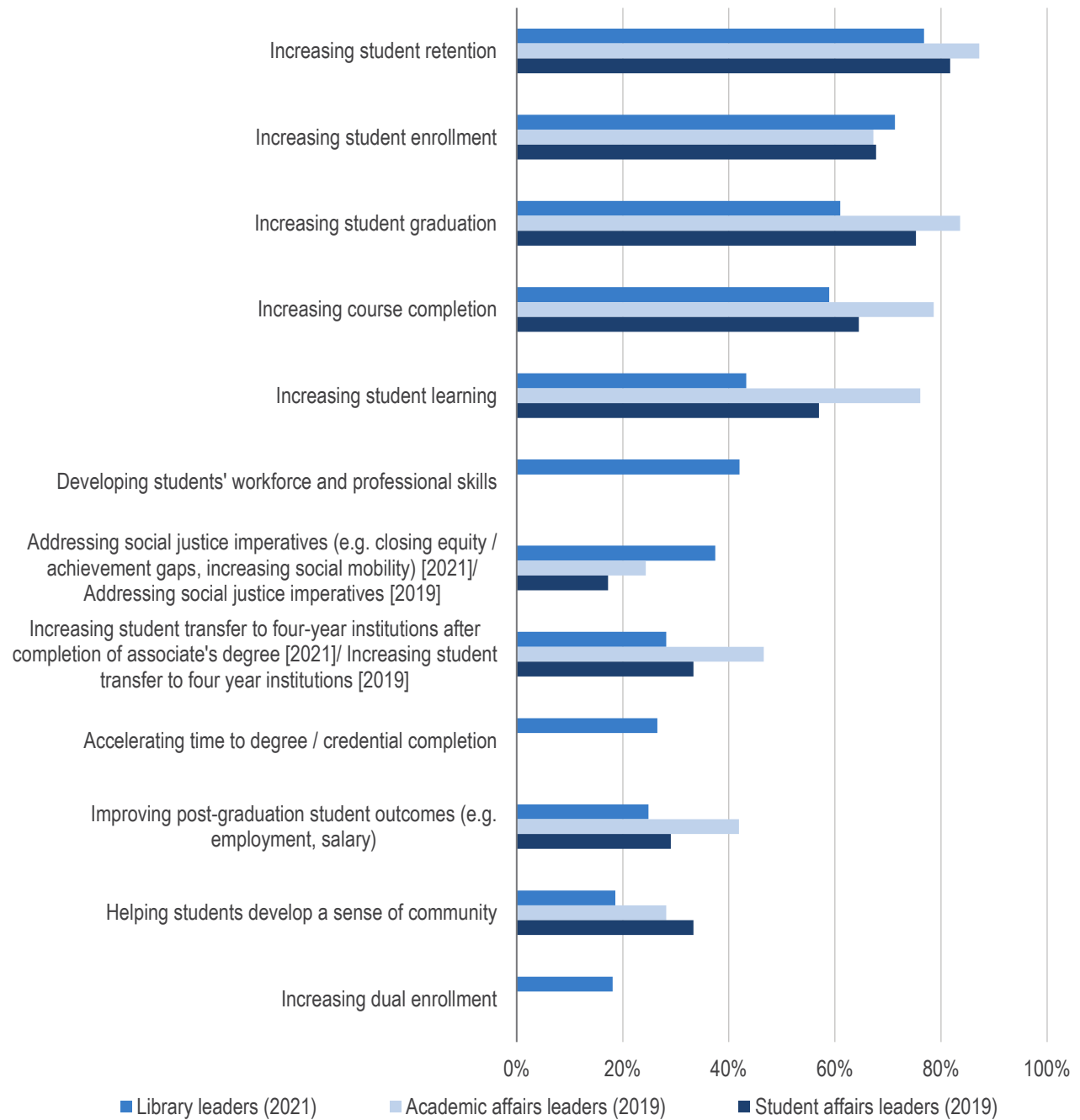
Library leaders see increasing student learning and developing community as their most influential contributions to the college.

Despite rating relatively traditional student milestones as among their college's most important objectives, library leaders see increasing student learning and developing community as their most influential contributions to the college. In other words, library leaders think they are having the greatest impact on college objectives that are of relatively average value, based on even their own valuation of those college objectives. For instance, 80 percent of library directors believe that their library contributes a lot or a great deal towards increasing student learning, followed by 56 percent who believe their library contributes significantly to helping students develop a sense of community (see Figure 2). Meanwhile, less than half of library directors rated these objectives as extremely important to their college overall.

Figure 2. In your opinion and/or based on evidence gathered, to what extent does your library contribute to each of the following possible student success objectives?

Percent of respondents that rated their library contributes a lot or a great deal to each objective.
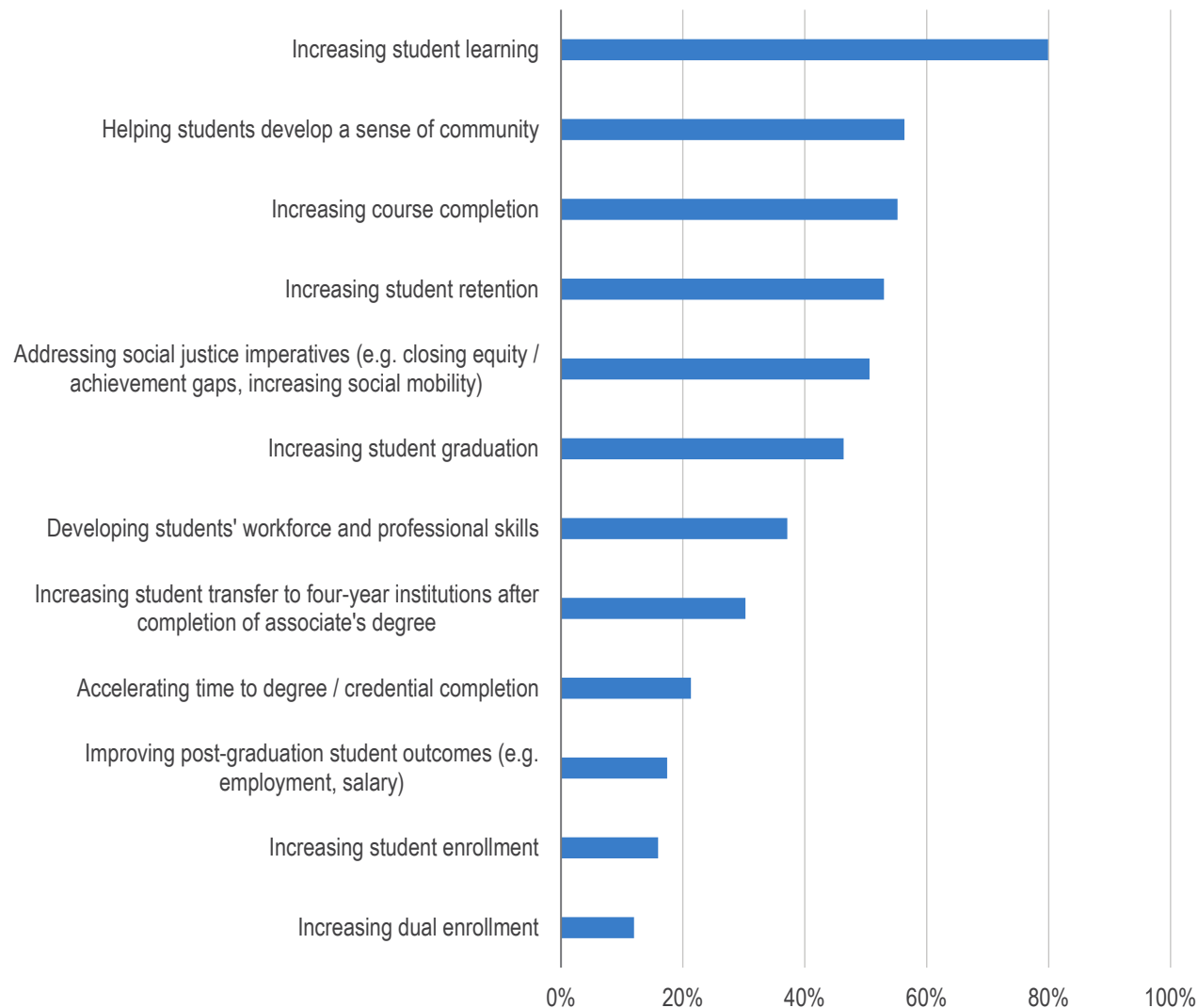
Further, while libraries consider developing community to be one of their most important contributions, this objective is strongly aligned with student affairs, whereas most libraries typically report to academic affairs. In our earlier survey of college academic and student affairs leaders, 41 percent of student affairs officers rated helping students develop a sense of community as extremely important to their department's objectives compared to 31 percent of chief academic officers. Library leaders, on the other hand, see developing community as an integral part of their contributions towards their institution's success objectives. Perhaps, since the library is more often organized under academic affairs, library leaders do not see this objective resonating within their organizational structure, possibly playing a role in their average valuation of the objectives to which they most contribute.

Sixty-four percent of library leaders at large or very large colleges believe their library contributes a lot or a great deal towards helping students develop a sense of community compared to 59 percent at medium colleges and 52 percent at small or very small colleges. This difference may be due to the greater challenge of developing a sense of community at larger colleges, and thus a greater need for the library to play a role.

Library leaders have developed services, spaces, and resources that align with these student success objectives. They have focused efforts on increasing student learning through information literacy instruction, developing community through their physical space, and advancing a number of objectives through the provision of technology (see Figure 3). It is extremely important to 83 percent of library directors that their library helps students develop research, critical analysis, and information literacy skills, and 75 percent see the library's role in providing an informal academic environment that supports student learning as essential. Roughly equivalent shares of library leaders anticipate that in the next five years these two functions will remain just as important to their role at their college (see Figure 3).

As library directors see their greatest institutional contributions are helping to foster learning and community, it naturally follows that their most important functions revolve around the student experience. A smaller but still sizable portion of leaders also see their role intersecting with faculty support and the provision of scholarly resources; 52 percent rated supporting faculty teaching activities and 37 percent rated buying resources like academic journals, books, and electronic resources as extremely important.

Figure 3. How important is it to you that your college library provides each of the functions below or serves in the capacity listed below? / And, in five years, how important do you anticipate each of the following functions of your library will be?

Percent of respondents that rated each function as a currently extremely important function, and percent of respondents that rated each as a function they anticipate will be extremely important in five years.

2021 (Currently important)   2026 (Predicted to be important)
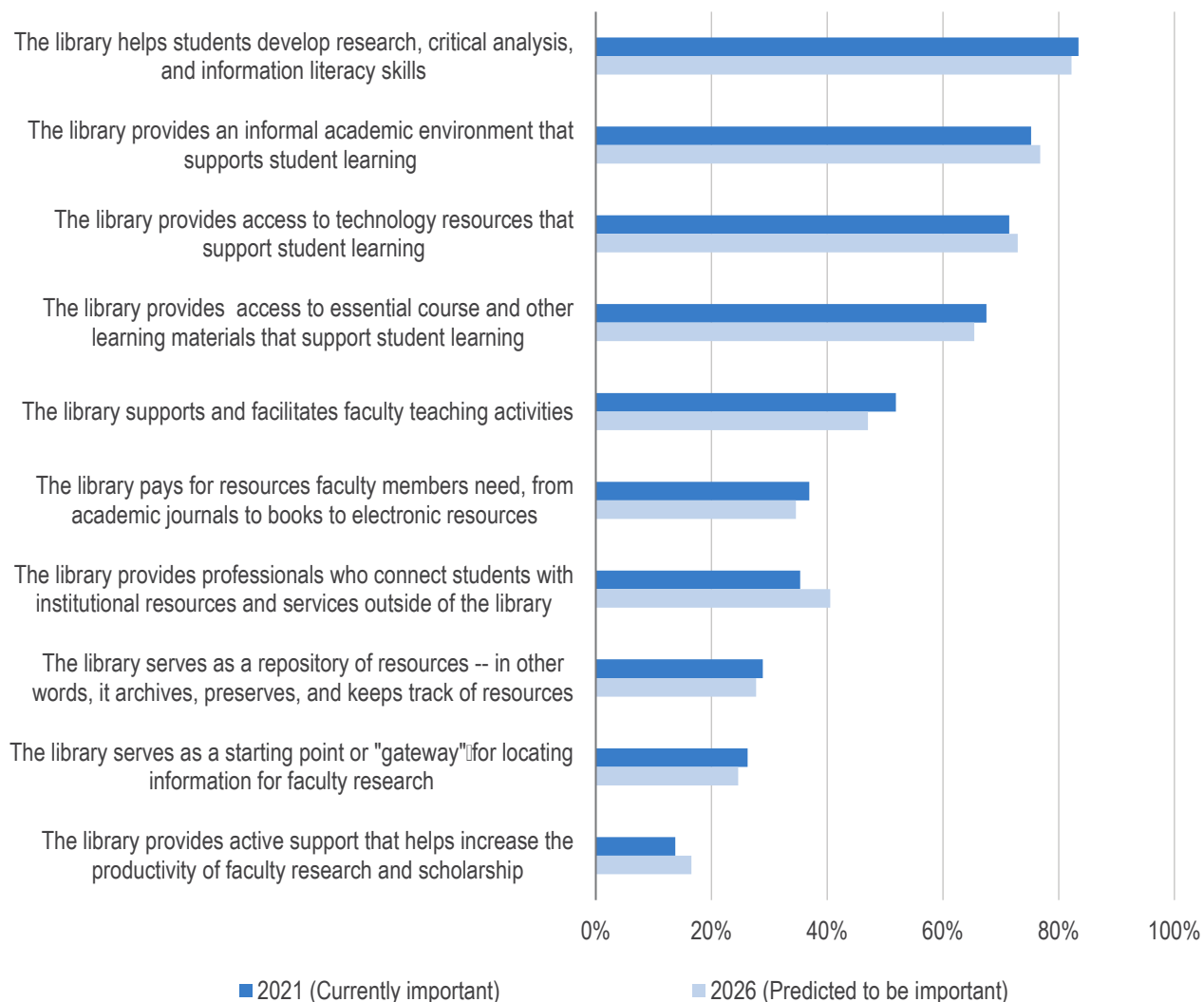
Providing access to technological resources was more often rated as an important function by respondents from small or very small colleges compared to those at larger colleges; 77 percent of library leaders from small or very small colleges rated technology provision as extremely important compared to 72 percent from medium sized colleges and 66 percent at larger colleges. While there are currently perceived differences in the importance of providing access to technological resources, this will eventually even out over time. Seventy-seven percent of respondents at large and very large colleges anticipate that the provision of technology will

remain extremely important over the next five years, compared to 71 percent at small and very small colleges and 72 percent at medium sized ones.

New technology priorities

Even prior to the pandemic, many community colleges provided students with access to technology—often through the library—both on campus and off. And students have demonstrated substantial demand for such services. An Ithaka S+R survey developed in partnership with Northern Virginia Community College and six additional college partners of over 10,000 community college students conducted in 2018 revealed that 42 percent of students rated the ability to borrow technological devices such as Wi-Fi hotspots as an extremely valuable service. A majority of student respondents identified the library as the place they would most likely access this service.[9]

At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and the shift to remote instruction, many libraries had to vastly change their approaches to loaning technology. Some libraries had to rapidly build new programs, quickly purchasing more technology to loan due to high demand. Many needed to develop unique partnerships with other departments across the college. As one library leader stated, "prior to COVID-19, we did not loan tech equipment for remote use. We now are the central loan point for approximately 200 laptops and Chromebooks for the college, as well as graphing calculators and digital piano keyboards used in special programs, all of which used to be handled by their different departments and programs."

At this time, there appears to be no single set of best practices or policies for these technology lending services across colleges. In other words, each college, often led by the library, provides access to different technology to the best of their ability and with the resources and partnerships they have available. Library leaders are currently loaning out Wi-Fi hotspots and laptops, as well as tablets, Chromebooks, and calculators. Additionally, many libraries are collaborating with their IT departments to varying extents to purchase devices and for help with troubleshooting, formatting, and maintaining them. For instance, one library leader mentioned that their library "collaborates with IT to obtain these items (the library budget does not support the purchase of tech gear) and to help troubleshoot problems," and another stated that they "work with IT to acquire and maintain this equipment." In some select cases, students are lent the devices through their IT department with the library's help in tracking these loans over time.

Some library leaders described how with increased CARES Act funding and other pandemic-related funds, their institutions were able to purchase more devices to loan out to students. As one relayed, "Since the pandemic started, we have been able to make use of CARES and CARRSAA funds to purchase some 'work-from-home' laptop kits and mobile hotspots to circulate to students who need them." However, the pandemic did also hinder some colleges' abilities to loan out devices. As one noted, "since March 2020 we have not had access to college facilities and have not been able to circulate laptops/Chromebooks to students to support their

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[9] Melissa Blankstein, Christine Wolff-Eisenberg, and Braddlee, "Student Needs are Academic Needs: Community College Libraries and Academic Support for Student Success," *Ithaka S+R*, September 30, 2019, https://doi.org/10.18665/sr.311913.

transition to remote learning. This has created a significant barrier for our students who are most in need of this kind of equipment in order to engage in online/remote learning." Another shared that "[we] froze our loaning of technology due to concerns about properly disinfecting."

> "COVID has increased our need for items to loan on a long-term basis—so this means both the funding needed to purchase these items and the changes to the policies that allow longer-term usage."

For those libraries that loaned technology prior to the pandemic, their leaders are now also considering making substantial and long-term changes to their prior lending policies, like extending the length of time students can loan technology out from their library. One explained, "We check out laptops and hotspots to students for entire eight-week sessions. Our IT department purchases the equipment and repairs damaged units. We used to only check out laptops for three days at a time." Another director described how "COVID has increased our need for items to loan on a long-term basis—so this means both the funding needed to purchase these items and the changes to the policies that allow longer-term usage." As the pandemic has revealed already existing and worsening inequities within higher education, this is an opportune time for libraries to reconsider existing policies and services, and center equitable, accessible, and holistic policies and services to support students' needs both inside and outside the classroom. These changes in policies signal that there is much on the horizon for community college libraries.

Areas for increased investment

Though library budgets—like their parent college budgets—are greatly constrained, especially because of the COVID-19 pandemic, there are several areas where new areas of investment are expected in the coming years. When asked what activities they anticipate will increase over the next five years, the majority of library leaders indicated increased teaching support and cross-institutional collaboration. Overall, three quarters of library leaders anticipate their library to increase support for instructional materials such as open educational resources (OER), followed by 68 percent who anticipate increased collaboration, and 55 percent the increased utilization of learning analytics tools (see Figure 4). However, it will be difficult for most libraries to find funds for these investments given ongoing and recent budgets cuts, which will be explored later in this report.

While the majority of library leaders anticipate internal collaboration to increase over time, the majority also anticipate that collaboration or partnerships with external stakeholders will remain relatively the same. Seven in ten library leaders expect contracts with external vendors and partnerships with public libraries will remain relatively the same, and 51 percent anticipate partnerships with other academic libraries to remain the same over time. As libraries have needed to collaborate with other departments now more than ever, it seems appropriate that library leaders anticipate cross-institutional collaboration to increase in the next five years as the impacts of the pandemic continue to affect institutional budgets and priorities.

Figure 4. Do you anticipate the prevalence of each of the following to decrease, stay the same, or increase within your library over the next five years?

Percent of respondents that indicated each as increasing, staying the same, or decreasing within the next five years.
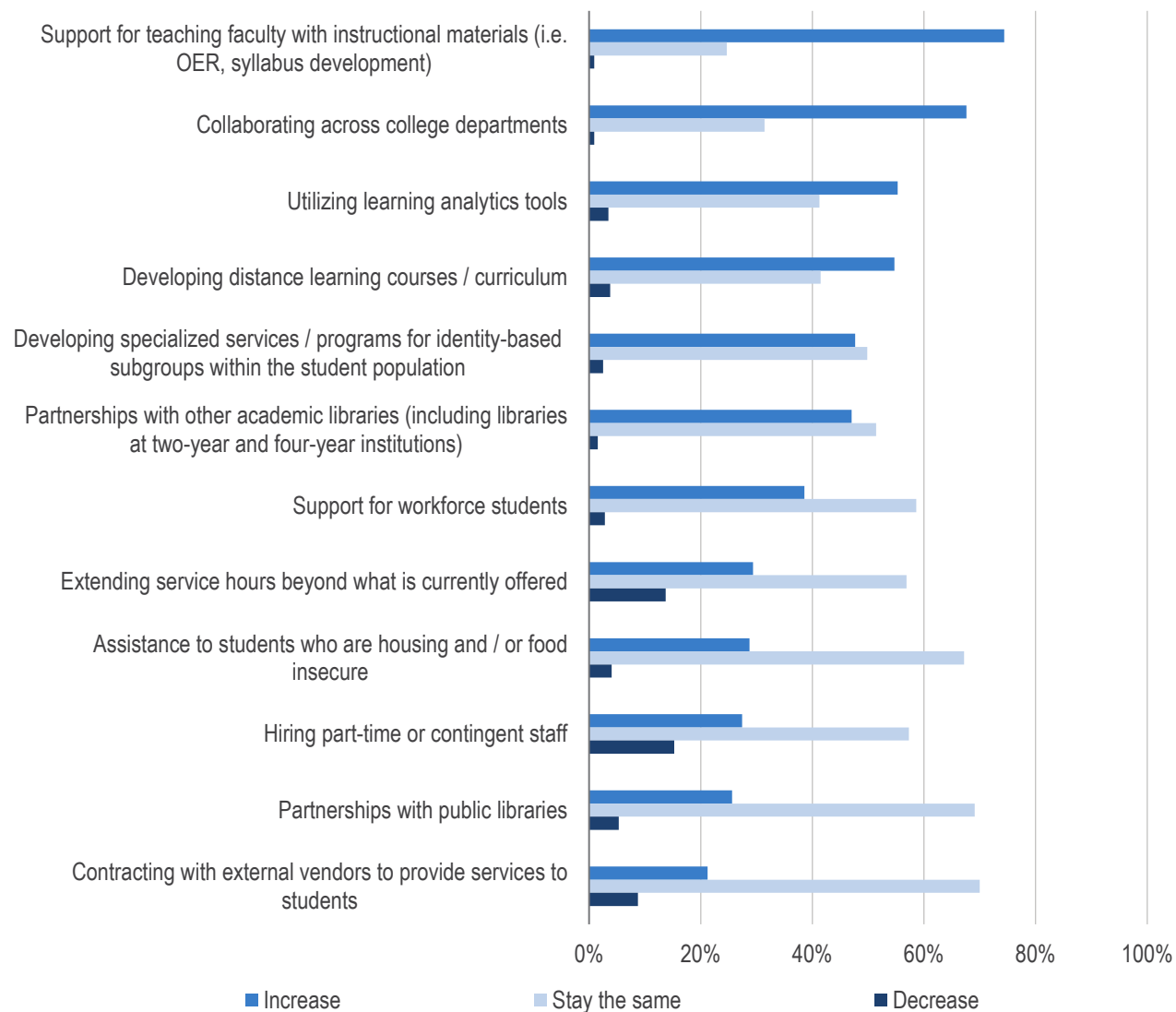
Cross-Departmental Collaborations

A major goal of this initiative is to map the departments with which community college libraries regularly collaborate and the ways in which they do so. Overall, 56 percent of library directors agree that their library currently collaborates closely with other units on campus to improve student success. About 54 percent of leaders indicated that their library is part of a learning resource center or co-located with another service department, so some collaborations are at least in part a function of deliberately established organizational and physical structures.

Overall, 70 percent of library leaders responded that their library collaborates with their IT department to a great extent, followed by 56 percent that collaborate with their institution's tutoring center, and 54 percent their writing center (See Figure 5). The extent to which colleges are collaborating with departments varies by institutional size. Generally, libraries at large and medium sized college are collaborating with other departments to a somewhat greater extent than libraries at smaller colleges: 51 percent of library leaders from small or very small colleges agreed their library collaborates closely with other departments, compared to 61 percent at both medium and large colleges.

Figure 5. How closely does your library collaborate with each of the following departments and student support service providers?

Percent of respondents that indicated their library collaborates closely with each of the following providers a lot or a great deal.
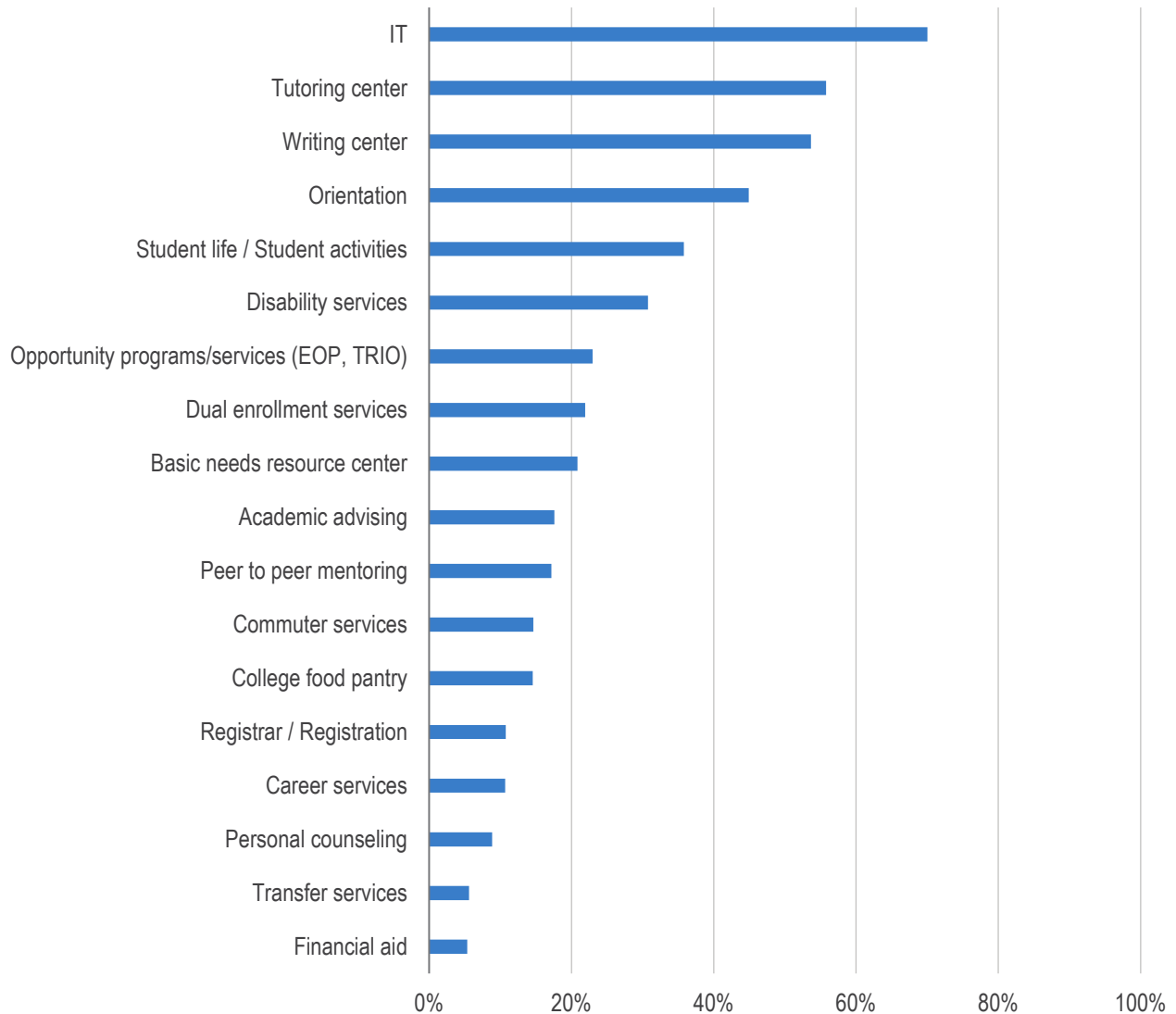
Collaboration with other departments at smaller colleges may present challenges simply because they have fewer personnel. On average, libraries at small and very small sized colleges have about two full time librarians and library technicians compared to three full-time librarians and technicians at medium sized colleges and about seven full-time librarians and five full-time library technicians at larger colleges. Smaller college libraries also have fewer part-time staff on hand than libraries at larger colleges. One library leader from a small college described how their library is "currently severely understaffed with little expectation of change. I am the only library employee, and the student services coordinator is the only employee of that department.

We all HAVE to collaborate to get anything done." Another library leader from a medium sized college also offered that the amount of work needed to get done was just not possible given limited library staff, "Due to a severe reduction in library staff (primarily professional librarians) we cannot provide the level and variety of service(s) we have in the past. Not humanly possible."

> "Due to a severe reduction in library staff (primarily professional librarians) we cannot provide the level and variety of service(s) we have in the past. Not humanly possible."

One way to facilitate cross-departmental collaboration and streamline services for students is through a learning resource center (LRC) or learning commons, which often includes departments like tutoring and writing centers, among other academic support services. Another approach, often overlapping with the creation of a LRC is physically co-locating departments in the same location on campus.

At many colleges, shifts in organizational structures have led to libraries overseeing other departments through LRCs or learning commons. One respondent described how "A few years ago tutoring and library services were combined under the direction of the director of the library. We eventually rebranded to the Learning Commons and the library director position was re-titled to Dean of the Learning Commons." In addition to these organizational changes, many libraries also have undergone infrastructural changes to their physical library locations with the addition of other student support providers taking residence either within the library directly or within the library building. For instance, one respondent mentioned that their "Library and Learning Centers have been established as one academic support team. The Library and the Writing Center share space, staff, and the same desk for services in a library space that was renovated five years ago to become a Learning Commons."

Incorporating libraries into broader LRCs or learning commons, as well as situating the physical library space with other student support departments, is currently in place at a little under half of colleges; 43 percent of respondents indicated that their library is part of an LRC or equivalent and 43 percent indicated that their library is co-located with other college departments or student support service providers. However, a library that is part of a LRC is not always co-located with other departments, as only 16 percent of library directors indicated their library is part of an LRC *and* co-located with other departments, while the remaining libraries are either part of a LRC *or* co-located with other departments.

Even though 70 percent of leaders replied that their library is collaborating with their IT department, many are not co-located. More frequently, libraries that are co-located with other departments are co-located with their tutoring center (68 percent) or writing center (60 percent), compared to 27 percent with either disability services or IT. This may be due in part to how a college is organized. According to our earlier survey of chief academic officers and student

affairs officers, IT departments rarely report to either academic or student affairs, while it is more common for tutoring and writing centers to report to academic affairs.[10]

> "We are a physically a central point on campus so often get questions for many other supports and services at the college. The students see us as an information gateway for everything college-related."

When asked about the ways in which they collaborate and engage with other departments, libraries most often refer students directly to other departments and services (see Figure 6). Library leaders see their libraries as hubs of student activity and information seeking, with one respondent noting, "we are a physically a central point on campus so often get questions for many other supports and services at the college. The students see us as an information gateway for everything college-related." Another described how they maintain relationships with other departments because of how frequently they refer students to those services, "We most frequently refer students to the Writing Center and they do the same for us, so we have a historically closer relationship—although the amount of collaboration beyond these referrals ebbs and flows."

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[10] Eighty percent of both chief academic and student affairs officers indicated that IT departments report to neither academic nor student affairs, while 76 percent and 59 percent of these leaders indicated writing centers and tutoring centers respectively report solely to academic affairs.

Figure 6. Which of the following activities does your library perform in collaboration with other departments and student support service providers at your college? Please select all that apply.

Percent of respondents that selected each activity.
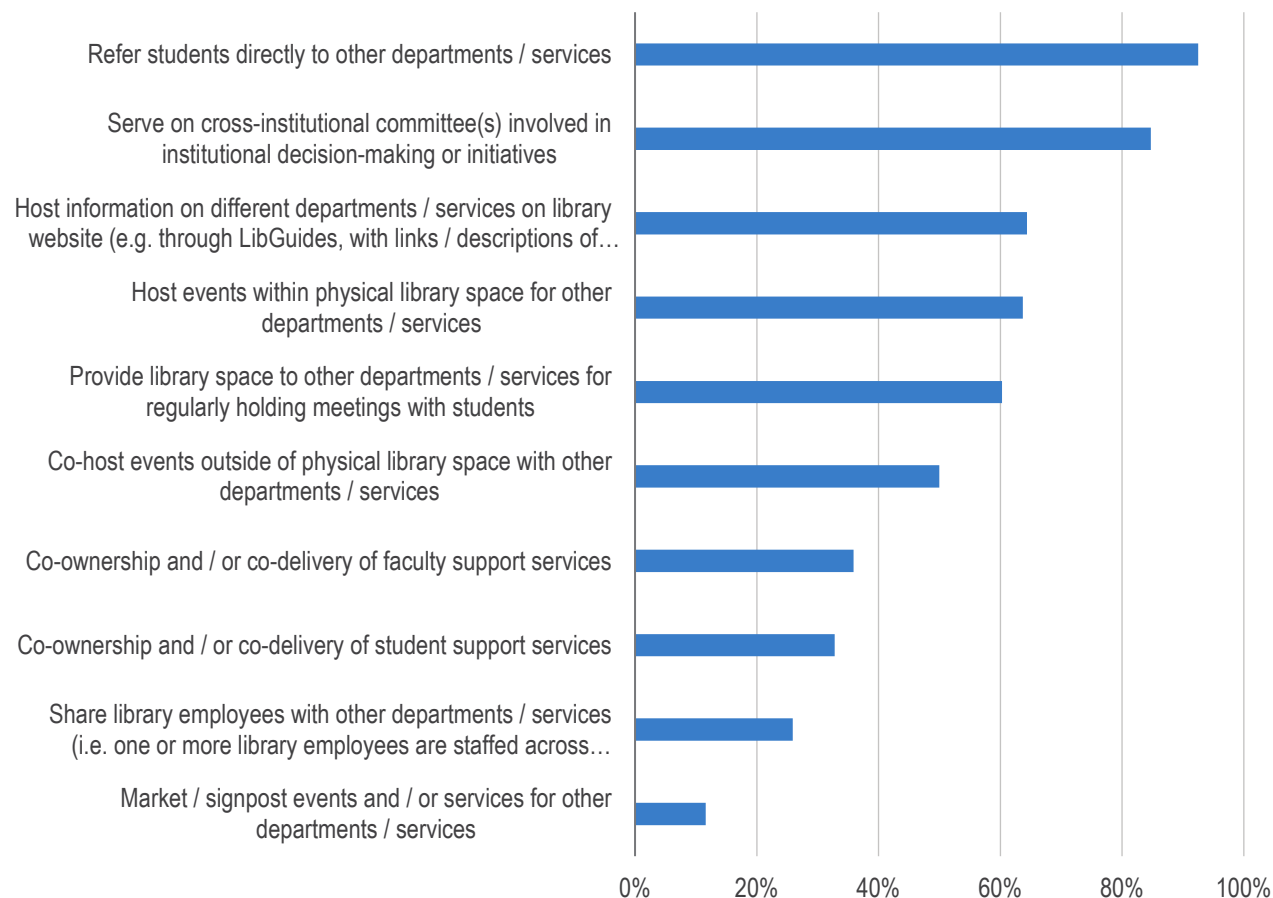
As physical locations are a central component of the library's role, many use their space to host events, classes, workshops, makerspaces, meetings, and even student life activities. According to one respondent, their library "hosts student events, continuing education classes, and student, staff, faculty free workshops in our makerspace. We also host the student podcasting club in our recording studio." Another leader mentioned that "the library provides physical and virtual space for art exhibitions, orientation, career workshops."

While many collaborative activities are already in motion, organizational silos and a general misunderstanding of the library's value may thwart additional opportunities. For instance, one respondent described how collaboration at their campus typically starts as a library-centered effort before it becomes a cross-institutional function, "collaboration begins as a personal investment, and only after time does it begin to look institutional." Another offered that "our organization is fairly siloed and I believe this is an area of opportunity. We have dabbled in some collaborations, such as with instructional designers, but overall the library is not sought out for

collaboration or expertise by other units on campus." Some library leaders believe that this underutilization of the library and cross-collaboration stems from the undervaluation of the library. One noted that, "our mission and resources are generally undervalued by faculty and administrators," and another offered that "the library at our institution is not valued. The only partnerships are between faculty and the library or when another department needs to pass a service off to the library."

> "Collaboration begins as a personal investment, and only after time does it begin to look institutional."

Indeed, library leaders who agree that their library collaborates with other units at their college are also significantly more likely to agree that their institution's senior academic leadership considers the library as an important contributor towards student success.[11] As libraries have multi-faceted roles that may be complex to articulate, there are unrealized opportunities to demonstrate their value, maximize partnerships, and advocate for additional financial resources.

Proving and Improving Library Impact

Many library leaders do not merely view their library as just the *provider* of resources, services, and spaces for students alone, but see themselves as part of an ecosystem that is *responsible* for student success. However, despite their important contributions towards their institutions, many do not feel that they are considered by others to be part of the senior academic leadership, nor are they confident in the ways in which they are demonstrating their contributions towards student and institutional success.

> Many library leaders do not merely view their library as just the *provider* of resources, services, and spaces for students alone, but see themselves as part of an ecosystem that is *responsible* for student success.

There is a disconnect between library leaders, chief academic officers (CAOs), and student affairs officers (SAOs) on the perceived importance of each function of the library (see Figure 7). Much larger shares of library leaders rate each function of the library as extremely important than their CAO and SAO colleagues. Where 71 percent of library leaders consider their support of students' research and information literacy skills as extremely important, only 46 percent of academic and student affairs leaders rated this function equivalently.

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[11] $r(318) = .444$, $p < .001$.

Figure 7. How important is it to you that your college library provides each of the functions below or serves in the capacity listed below? *Percent of respondents that rated each function as extremely important.*

The library helps students develop research, critical analysis, and information literacy skills

The library provides an informal academic environment that supports student learning

The library provides access to technology resources that support student learning

The library provides access to essential course and other learning materials that support student learning

The library supports and facilitates faculty teaching activities

The library pays for resources faculty members need, from academic journals to books to electronic resources

The library provides professionals who connect students with institutional resources and services outside of the library

The library serves as a repository of resources -- in other words, it archives, preserves, and keeps track of resources

The library serves as a starting point or "gateway" for locating information for faculty research

The library provides active support that helps increase the productivity of faculty research and scholarship

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%

■ Library leaders (2021)   ■ Academic affairs leaders (2019)   ■ Student affairs leaders (2019)

This disconnect in how leaders view the role of the library may stem from organizational differences, as well as an inability to sufficiently describe and demonstrate the library's contributions towards institutional and student success. Six in ten library leaders agree that they and their direct supervisor share the same vision for the library, yet only 44 percent agree that their institution's senior academic leadership considers the library to be an important contributor towards student success. About four in ten library leaders also agree that they are considered by academic deans and other senior administrators to be a member of their institution's senior academic leadership. Despite this, library leaders are largely part of their institution's decision-making, as 85 percent of respondents indicated they serve on cross-institutional committees involved in decision-making (see Figure 7 above), which according to

open-ended comments often take the form of curriculum committees, faculty and leadership councils, and other planning committees.

The collection and communication of data can be a beneficial and evidence-based way to demonstrate contributions towards student success. While 72 percent of library directors believe that the utilization of data on contributions towards college objectives will be compelling enough for additional financial support from their institutions, only 42 percent agree that their library has clearly articulated how it contributes towards student success. When asked what types of data library leaders collect and analyze, almost 90 percent employ utilization data such as door and download counts, 81 percent use feedback from users like satisfaction data or evaluations of library programs, and 51 percent gather compelling anecdotes.

And while library leaders do see the benefits of presenting data as a way to advocate for more resources, many are not linking their data on their library services with student level data to assess their impact on institutional objectives like enrollment or retention; only 46 percent indicated they are currently collecting and analyzing data on library contributions towards institutional outcomes. Collecting on and reporting these data out to college leaders may be an important step in demonstrating the library's value and bolstering arguments for increased budgetary allocations to further their mission and support students.

Budgets Constraints and Priorities

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on community colleges, including decreased enrollment and corresponding revenue, have been significant and well-documented.[12] When asked about how their library budgets have changed in the current (2020-2021) fiscal year in comparison to what they would have expected prior to the pandemic, 45 percent had experienced budget cuts, 36 percent saw no change, seven percent saw an increase, and 12 percent did not yet have a budget when the survey was fielded in early 2021.

For the 45 percent of library leaders experiencing budget cuts, there was no clear trend as to the extent. Eleven percent had cuts of five to nine percent, followed by nine percent of leaders who had a budget cut of one to four percent, and eight percent who had a budget cut of ten to 14 percent. Library leaders at smaller colleges were more likely than their peers than at other sized institutions to see no budget change for this fiscal year: almost 40 percent of libraries at small colleges saw no budget change compared to 37 percent of those at medium colleges, and 32 percent at large colleges. However, 17 percent of library leaders at small colleges did not yet have their budget determined by the time of this survey, compared to 12 percent of library leaders at medium colleges and eight percent at large colleges.

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[12] Research Center, "No Quick Turnaround in Sight for Undergraduate Enrollment Decline," Tableau interactive graph, https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/researchcenter/viz/Spring2021StayInformed1/Story1; Emma Whitford, "State Funding Hit Lands Hard on 2-Year Colleges," *Inside Higher Ed*, March 21, 2021, https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2021/03/23/state-funding-two-year-colleges-declined-year-while-four-year-colleges-saw-small-dip.

With these budget disruptions, many library leaders are unsure about their long-term budget recovery, as 15 percent believe the pandemic's impact on their library's budget will be permanent and 47 percent are unsure of the pandemic's impact on their budget. This uncertainty about their future budgetary allocations may even stem from before the pandemic, as three quarters of chief academic and student affairs officers from a survey prior to the pandemic anticipated that the library's budget would remain relatively the same over time; in fact the library was the organizational unit for which increased budgets were the least expected compared to other units.[13] However, in the face of uncertain budgets, library directors remain confident about the importance of the role their libraries play in relation to physical space and digital service offerings. Eighty-three percent of library leaders agree that physical library space remains crucial to their long-term mission despite the focus on digital services due to the pandemic. Accordingly, 76 percent of library directors anticipate that their library will need to invest more significantly in digital services and resources in the long-term after the pandemic.

> In the face of uncertain budgets, library directors remain confident about the importance of the role their libraries play in relation to physical space and digital service offerings.

Library leaders show great enthusiasm for increased investment in digital resources. If given a 10 percent budget increase, a hypothetical scenario for assessing strategy and priorities, 51 percent would allocate additional funds towards online or digital journals or databases, and 41 percent towards streaming media services as well as e-books (see Figure 8). Less than five percent would devote resources to employee travel and professional development, digital preservation, print preservation and collections management, or print journal subscriptions.

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[13] Melissa Blankstein and Christine Wolff-Eisenberg, "Organizing Support for Success: Community College Academic and Student Support Ecosystems," *Ithaka S+R*, December 5, 2019, https://doi.org/10.18665/sr.312259.

Figure 8. If your library were to hypothetically receive a 10% increase in your budget, in which of the following areas would this extra money be allocated? Please select up to three areas.

*Percent of respondents that selected each activity.*
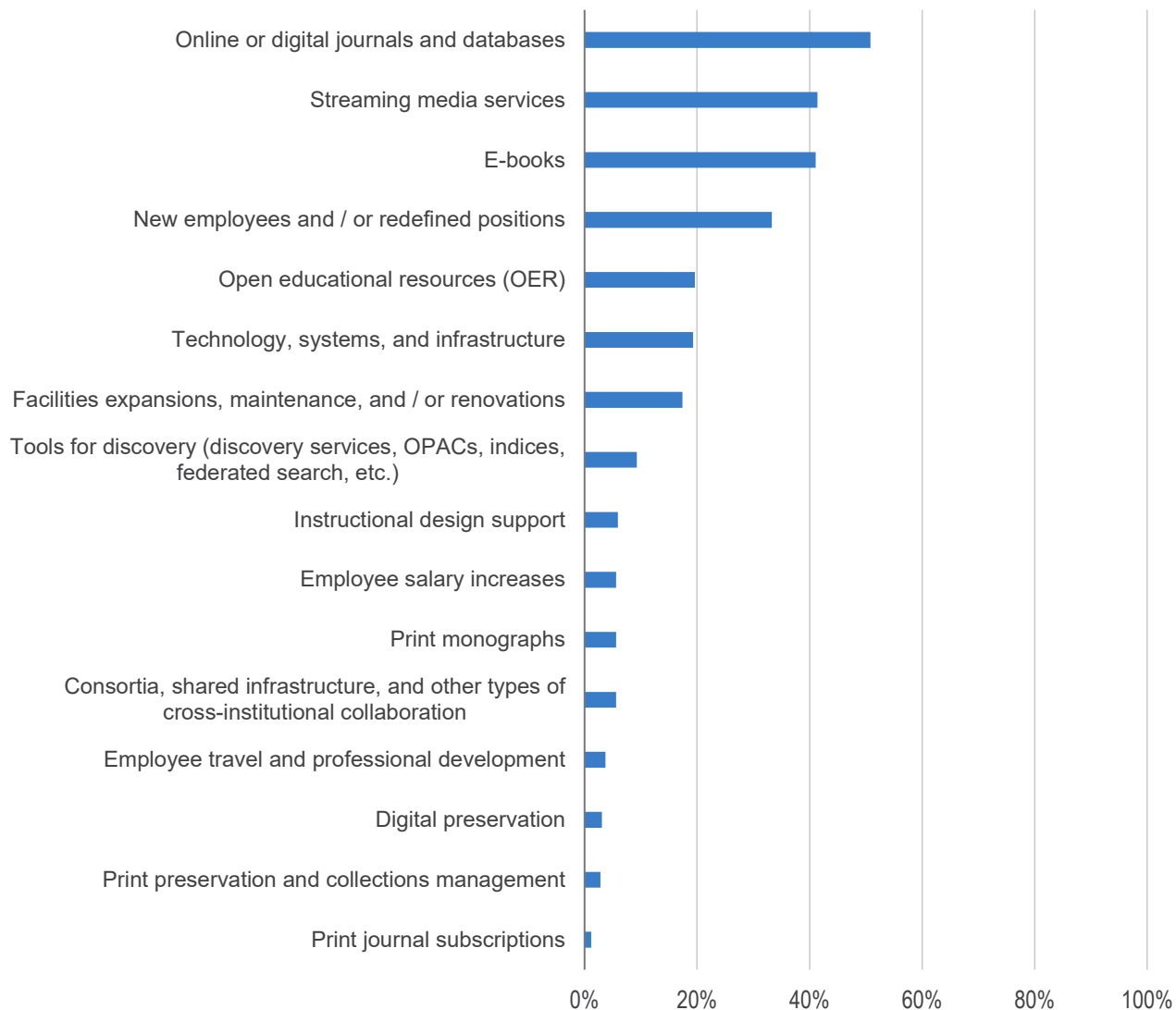
Despite having fewer full- and part-time employees on average compared with their larger peers, only 26 percent of library leaders at small colleges would allocate additional funds towards new employees compared to 36 percent of leaders at medium and large colleges. Leaders at smaller colleges are much more interested in building their digital collections and resources instead: almost 60 percent of library leaders at small colleges would allocate additional funds towards online or digital journals and databases compared to 50 percent of those at medium and large colleges. However, leaders across the board lack funds needed to make these desired investments, and many, as previously discussed, have only faced more significant financial challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Indeed, the most pressing challenge facing libraries, according to respondents, is a lack of financial resources required to make desired changes. When we asked library leaders to select their three most pressing challenges, 76 percent selected financial resources, followed by 26 percent for employee skills in key areas and 25 percent for general resistance to change among employees (see Figure 9). Notably, while the second most selected challenge was a lack of employee skills in key areas, if given additional funds, less than five percent would allocate those funds towards professional development and travel, with a third of leaders rather allocating funds towards new or redefined positions instead.

Figure 9. What are the primary constraints on your ability to make desired changes in your library? Please select up to three items below.

Percent of respondents that selected each challenge.
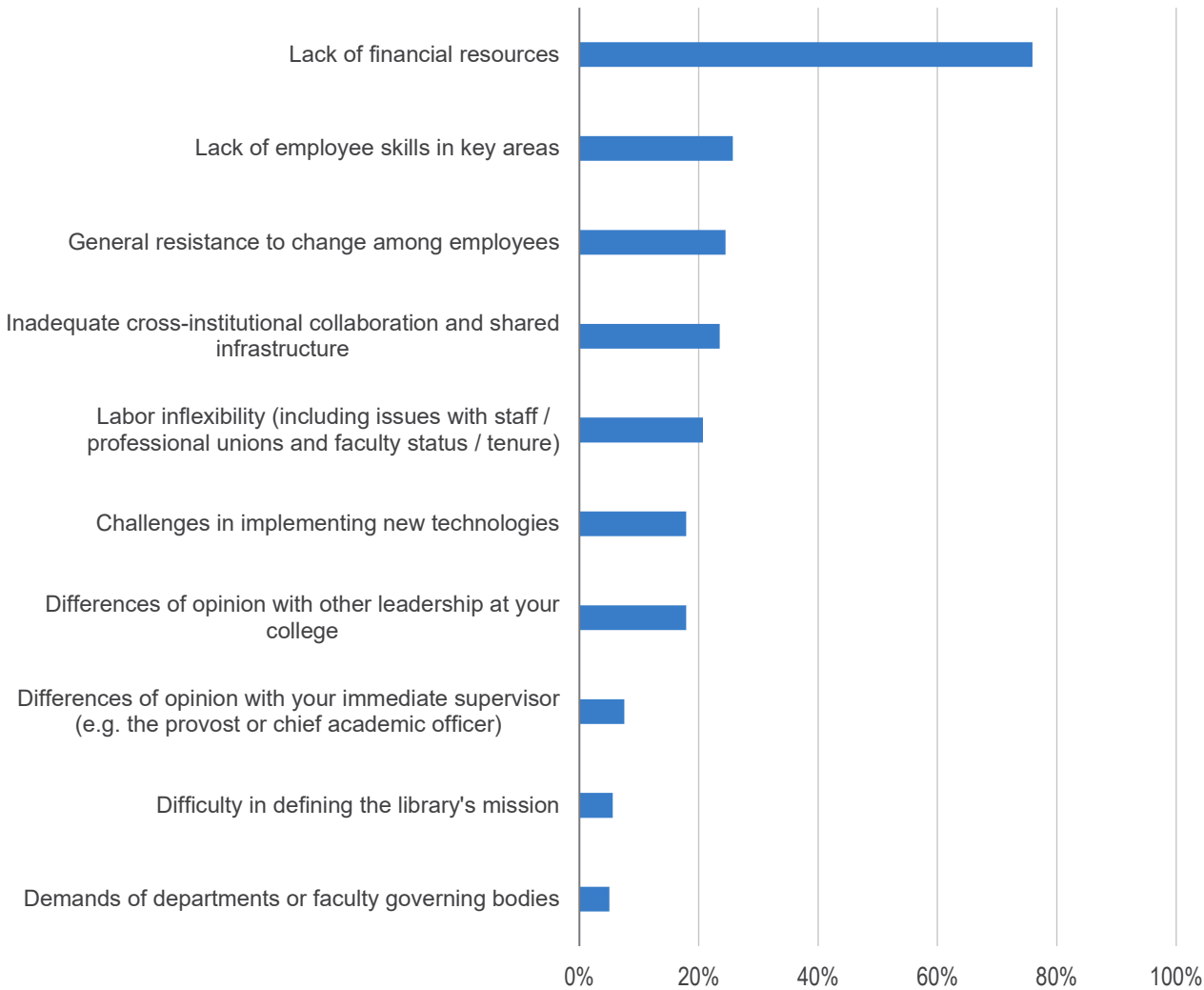
Concluding Thoughts

The library is well positioned to play a key role in supporting student success—helping to increase student learning, develop a sense of community, provide technological resources, and act as a hub for many other services. And yet it is clear from findings across our research that the role of the library is often misunderstood. There are opportunities for greater edification of the modern community college library's provision of services, spaces, and collections, as well as cross-departmental collaboration.

While partnerships with IT departments, writing centers, and tutoring centers are strong, collaborations with student affairs departments—like student life, academic advising, and basic needs resource centers—have not yet been as fully realized. Many student affairs departments focus greatly on helping students develop a sense of community and addressing social justice imperatives, and there is natural alignment between these areas and those to which libraries also contribute. Institutional structures may prevent libraries and their student affairs counterparts from fully realizing the benefits of cross-departmental collaboration, ultimately to the detriment of students being able to effectively navigate assistance across them.

To discover opportunities for greater collaboration and valuation of the library, library leaders must be prepared to communicate with other institutional leaders about the multi-faceted roles of their organizations. Articulating how the library contributes to key institutional outcomes like retention, graduation, and enrollment—whether through the library itself or more centralized offices like institutional research—will be especially important. And the library should not only communicate existing efforts but seek to maximize new contributions to these outcomes; recent collaborations with IT departments toward emergency technology provision during the COVID-19 pandemic serve as one strong example of such efforts.

And as community college libraries continue to move from relatively traditional roles as supporting curricular success to supporting a more holistic set of student outcomes, administrators outside of the library may need to rethink their own assumptions about the current and potential roles of the library. Today's students face increasingly complex challenges inside and outside of the classroom, and it will take all leaders across the college working together, with a deep understanding of each other's contributions, to achieve the most positive outcomes for their students.

It is our hope that this report can play a small part in facilitating these conversations and collaborations, highlighting areas of strength and areas for improvement. We look forward to hosting several convenings in the coming year, to move from research to solution-building with members of the community, as our work on this particular research initiative comes to a close.

Appendix A: Participant Demographics

Population demographic	Frequency	Percentage[14]
Years as director at current institution		
0 – 5 years	160	50%
6 – 10 years	80	25%
11- 15 years	41	13%
16 – 20 years	15	5%
21+ years	24	8%
Gender		
Man	90	28%
Woman	214	67%
Non-binary	2	<1%
Prefer not to answer	15	5%
Transgender		
Do you identify as transgender? - Yes	5	2%
Age		
22 to 34	12	4%
35 to 44	63	20%
45 to 54	128	41%
55 to 64	80	26%
65 and over	30	10%
Race/Ethnicity		
American Indian or Alaska Native	8	3%
Asian or Asian American	9	3%
Black or African American	17	5%

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[14] Percentages may not total 100 percent due to rounding.

Hispanic, Latino, Latina, or Latinx	10	3%
Middle Eastern or North African	2	1%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	1	<1%
White	258	81%
Another option not listed here	4	1%
Prefer not to answer	21	7%