

The Future of Academic Librarianship in SUNY and Beyond

A Conversation



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3 Questions on Academic Library Staffing for ACRL's Mary Jane Petrowski

Understanding changes in academic library staffing.

By [Joshua Kim](#)

Mary Jane Petrowski, associate director at the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), reached out in regard to my piece on academic library staffing trends. In that piece, I shared some IPEDS data that seem to demonstrate a steep drop in academic library staffing since 2012. As Mary is ideally positioned to unpack and contextualize academic library staffing trends, she agreed to help us figure out what is going on.

Q: From what I understand, the IPEDS data that I highlighted are inadequate for telling the story of academic library staffing trends. Why is this so? And what are the trends in academic library staffing over the past decade or so?

A: It's important to note that the availability of [full-time-equivalent] academic library staffing counts has varied over time as the responsibility for data collection has rotated among several



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<https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/learning-innovation/3-questions-academic-library-staffing-acrl%E2%80%99s-mary-jane-petrowski>



ACRL Petrowski Analysis

20%

Decline in total academic library staffing

2012 -> 2022

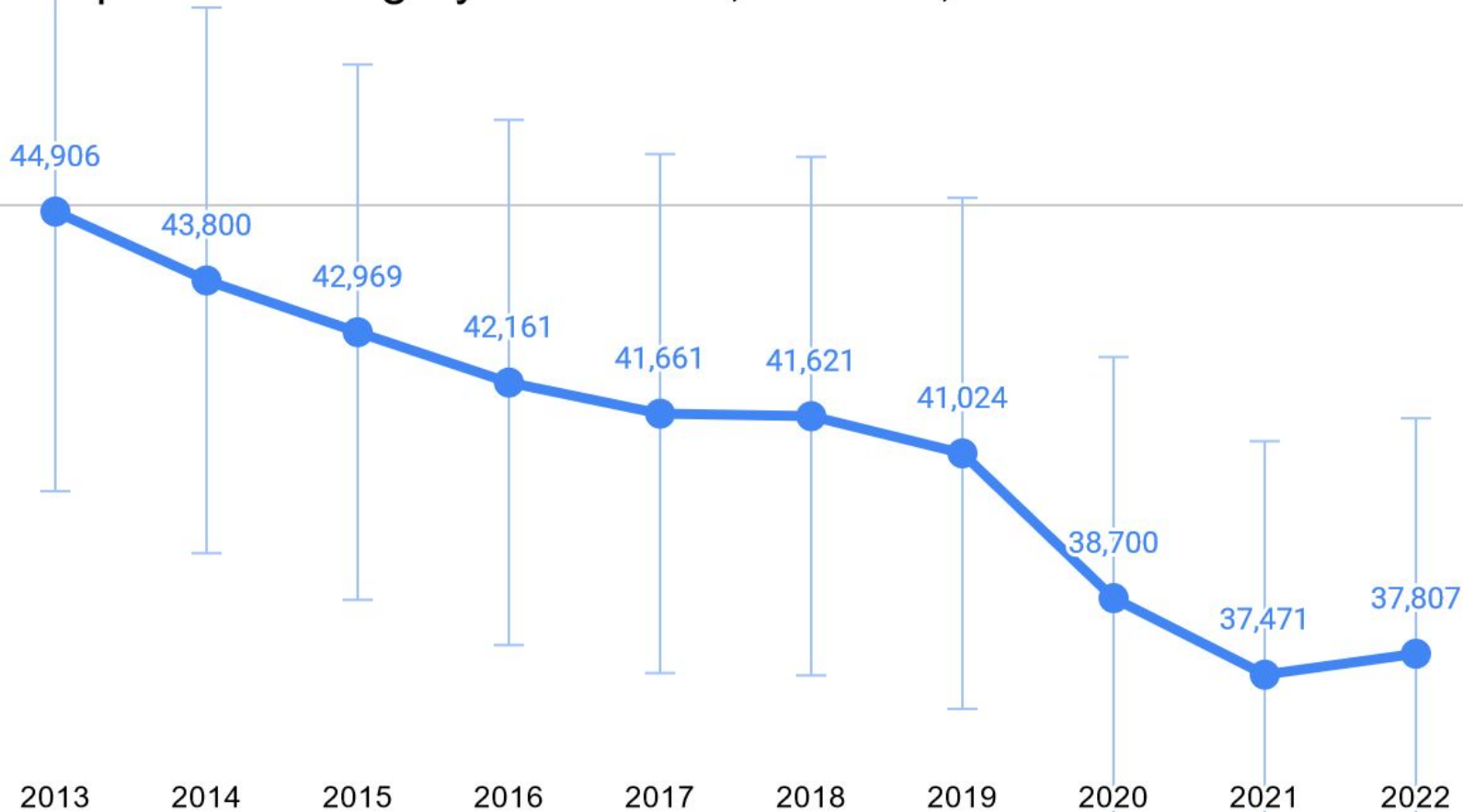
9.6% decline in FTE Librarians

21.7% decline in *Other Paid Library Staff*

but

31.7% increase in Professional (non-librarian) Staff

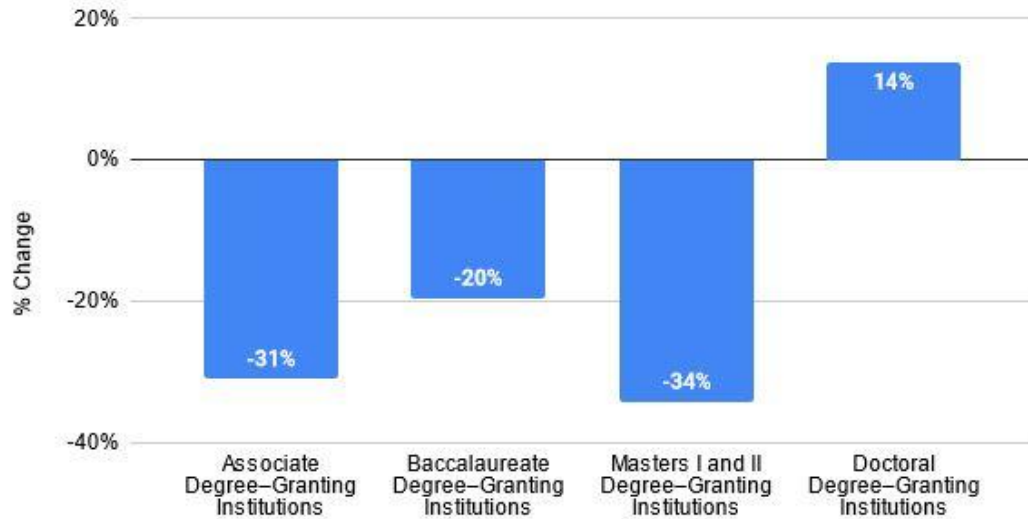
Number of people employed by postsecondary institutions by occupational category: Librarians, curators, and archivists



ACRL/IPEDS/NCES 10 Year Data on Change in FTE Librarian Employment by Sector

	2012	2021	Number	% Change
Associate Degree–Granting Institutions	4,522	3,098	-1,424	-31%
Baccalaureate Degree–Granting Institution:	2,609	2,098	-511	-19.60%
Masters I and II Degree–Granting Institutior	5,669	3,730	-1,939	-34.20%
Doctoral Degree–Granting Institutions	11,410	12,970	1,560	13.70%

ACRL/IPEDS/NCES 10 Year Data on Change in FTE Librarian Employment by Sector



Data drawn from Kim, J. & Petrowski, M. J. (2023, February 21). Three questions on academic library staffing for ACRL’s Mary Jane Petrowski: Understanding changes in academic library staffing. *Inside Higher Ed*. <https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/learning-innovation/3-questions-academic-library-staffing-acrl%E2%80%99s-mary-jane-petrowski>

Table accuracy confirmed with Mary Jane Petrowski via email on March 30, 2023.

FIGURE 10

Average Number of Librarians (FTE) per Institution Over Time, by Region



Note. Includes institutions reporting ≥ 1.0 FTE librarian. Data source for number of librarians: Academic Libraries Survey, 1998–2010; IPEDS Human Resources survey, 2012–2020.

Godbey, S. & Hoffman, S. (2024).

Characteristics of United States academic libraries in 2020 and regional changes from 1996 to 2020. *College & Research Libraries* 85(2).

<https://crl.acrl.org/index.php/crl/article/view/25778/34159>

Average staffing levels (FTE), 2019-2022

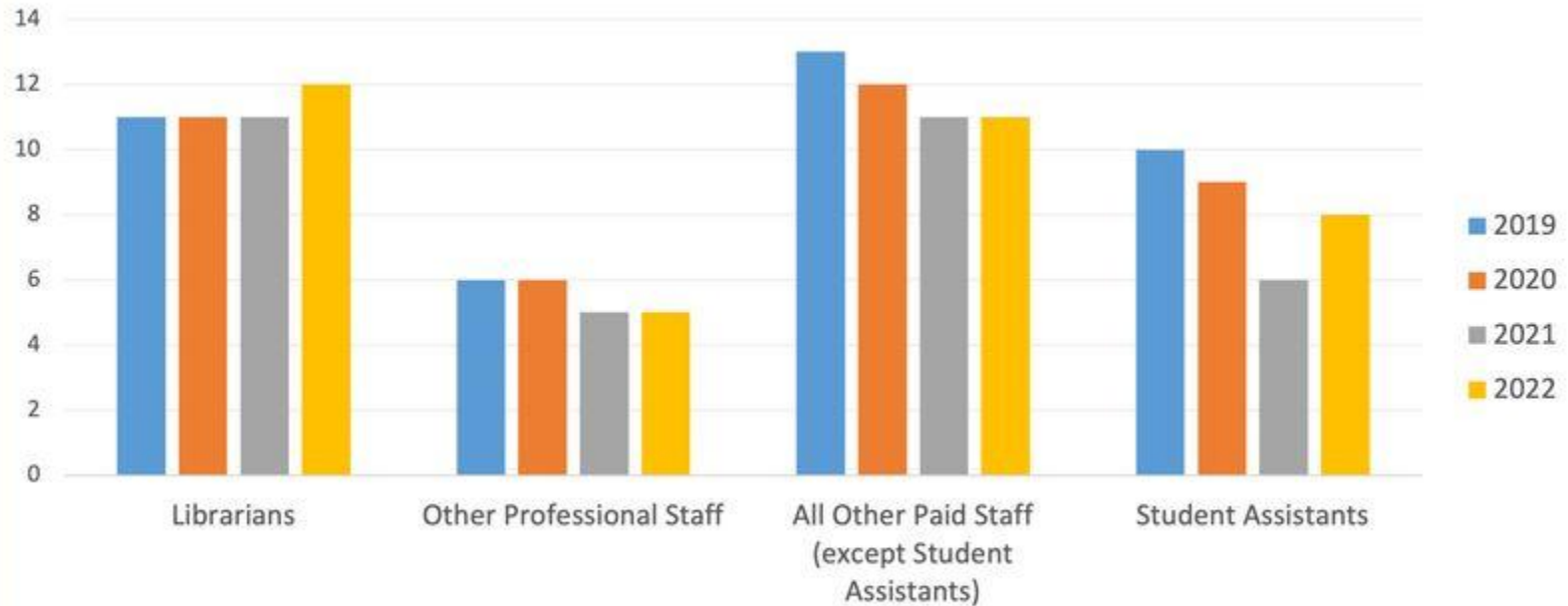
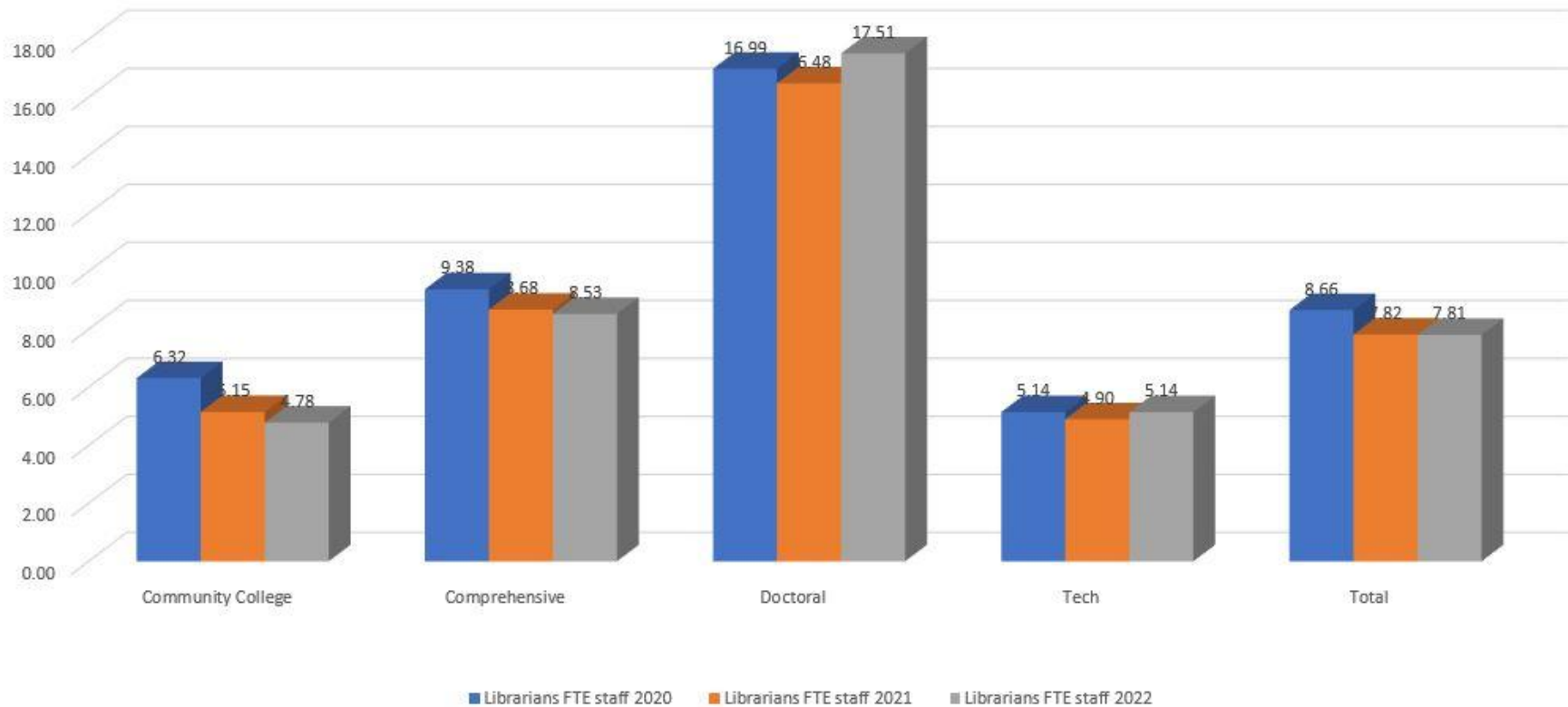


Figure 2. Average staffing levels, 2019, 2021, and 2022

Savage, D., & Borrelli, S. (2024). 2022 ACRL Academic Library Trends and Statistics Survey: Highlights and Key Findings. *College & Research Libraries News*, 85(5), 199. <https://doi.org/10.5860/crln.85.5.199>

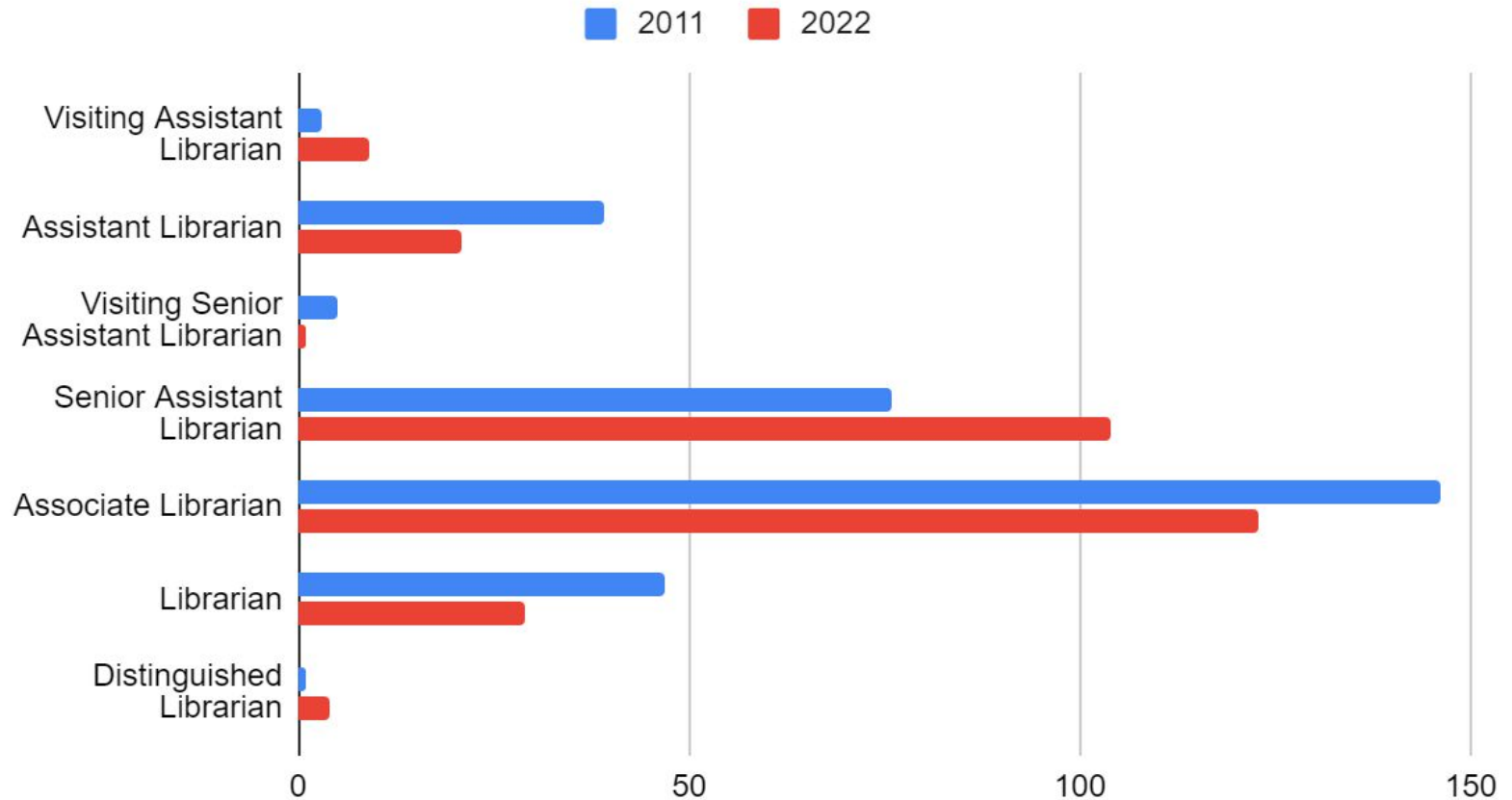
Is the same trend evident at SUNY?

SUNY Librarians FTE



UUP Librarians at Rank Comparison 2011 & 2022		
	2011	2022
Visiting Assistant Librarian	3	9
Assistant Librarian	39	21
Visiting Senior Assistant Librarian	5	1
Senior Assistant Librarian	76	104
Associate Librarian	146	123
Librarian	47	29
Distinguished Librarian	1	4
	317	291

UUP Librarians at Rank Comparison 2011 & 2022



Library School Trends

2014 6,184 masters degrees awarded (Library Journal)

2020 4,965 masters library degrees awarded (Data USA)

- ❑ all library degrees, not just masters, declined by 5% (period not specified) (Data USA)

2021-2022 - 2.77% drop in library science graduates in the workforce (Data USA)

SUNY Empire State College proposing to add an MLIS degree program

Precarity

- ❑ Larger numbers of PT librarians
 - ❑ 42% of overall Canadian librarian job openings (2017-19) (Brons et. al. 2022)
 - ❑ 8 out of 14 of current SUNY librarian job openings (unofficial)
- ❑ Visiting assistant librarians / adjunct librarians / interns
- ❑ Effects
 - ❑ Turnover
 - ❑ Time for training / acclimatization
 - ❑ More stress, harassment, increased unpaid work (Brons et. al. 2022)

Contraction? Possible Factors **External** to the Library

- ❑ College closures
The Hechinger Report recently reported that “colleges are now closing at a pace of one a week.”
- ❑ Program eliminations and cuts
- ❑ Declining enrollments / Demographic cliff
- ❑ Positions created in response to state and federal mandates (Compliance officer, Title IX officer, etc.)
- ❑ Administrative Misunderstanding
Why am I employing 70 people to run a study hall?
- ❑ Rising cost of fringe benefits (may depend upon library)

Contraction? Possible Factors **Internal** to the Library

- ❑ Increasing Digitization
 - ❑ ARL data shows print circulation declining by 91% from 2000-2022 (Breeding, 2024)
 - ❑ Electronic journals don't need to be individually checked in, claimed, shelved, reshelved, bound
 - ❑ Free online resources are perfectly adequate to support student needs in areas such as citation, reference, and article searching in some fields (not full text delivery)
- ❑ Changing Nature of Cataloging
 - ❑ Prevalence of OCLC / ALMA records
 - ❑ Less need for original cataloging
- ❑ Changing Nature of Reference / Research Help
- ❑ Pattern of Disintermediation (Badke, 2019)

Questions

- ❑ Is the drop in librarianship reflected long-term in positions in SUNY?
 - ❑ If so, has the drop occurred in particular job titles?
Are they the titles we would predict?
 - ❑ If so, who is doing the work?
- ❑ Where do professionals fit into these numbers?
- ❑ How has the librarian precarity affected your campus?
- ❑ What is the impact of college downsizing / closures?

*Nothing in life is to be feared,
it is only to be understood.*

*Now is the time to understand more,
so that we may fear less.*

- Marie Curie

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<https://hiringlibrarians.com/2022/10/31/hows-the-math-now-looking-at-the-lack-of-library-job-growth-over-the-last/>