

Reference Competencies

From the Employer's Perspective: Implications for LIS
Education

Competing Forces in LIS education

- ▶ Theory vs. Practice
- ▶ Sources vs. Service
- ▶ Print vs. Electronic



Issues of Accountability

- ▶ Learning outcomes
- ▶ Outcomes
 - ▶ Graduation rates
 - ▶ Employment rates
 - ▶ Salaries



Research Questions

- ▶ Which competencies are most highly valued by current reference librarians and hiring managers?
- ▶ Do these librarians find skills lacking in their new hires?
- ▶ What are the implications for LIS curricula?



Methods

- ▶ Survey
- ▶ Mix of open and closed-ended questions
- ▶ Random sample of 457 libraries from a U.S. nationwide list of academic libraries
- ▶ Asked participants to select “necessary” competencies from three separate lists: general, technology, and interpersonal.



General	Technology	Personal/Interpersonal
Second Master's degree	Online searching	Verbal Communication
Budgeting	Programming	Written Communication
Foreign language	Web design	Listening
Marketing	Web maintenance	Working in teams
Supervisory experience	Social media	Approachability
Ability to conduct research/publish	Hardware troubleshooting	Comfort with instruction/teaching
Knowledge of cataloging	Software troubleshooting	Self-motivated
Assessment/evaluation	Chat/IM	Stress management
Customer service		Building relationships with co-workers
Familiarity with Paper Sources		Building relationships with other professional colleagues
Familiarity with Online Sources		Conflict management
Search Skills		Adaptability/Flexibility
Negotiating		Sense of humor
Current Events Awareness		Organizational awareness
Traditional Reference Interview		

Response Rates

- ▶ 436 participants from 212 institutions
 - ▶ 46.4% response rate
- ▶ Range in age from under 25 to over 71
- ▶ 76.4% female
- ▶ 96.8% hold an MLS degree
- ▶ Highest proportion of respondents had between 8 and 15 years experience in the field





What Employers Want

Overview of Findings

Overview

- ▶ Interpersonal skills are among the most important
- ▶ Technology skills, especially online searching are also highly rated
- ▶ “Traditional” skill– reference interview, knowledge of print and online sources– still considered important
- ▶ Instruction is increasingly a focus of reference

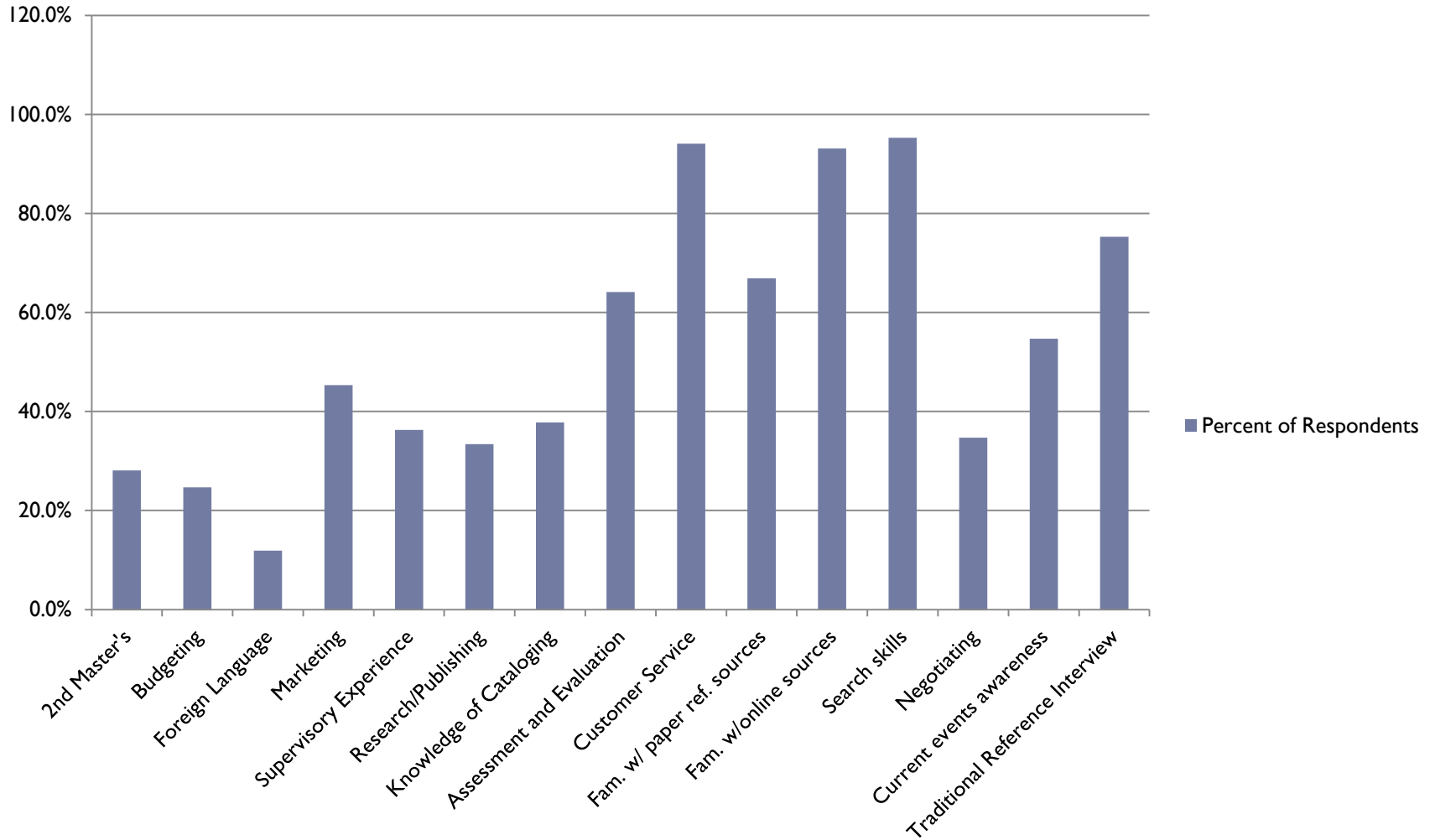


Overview Cont'd

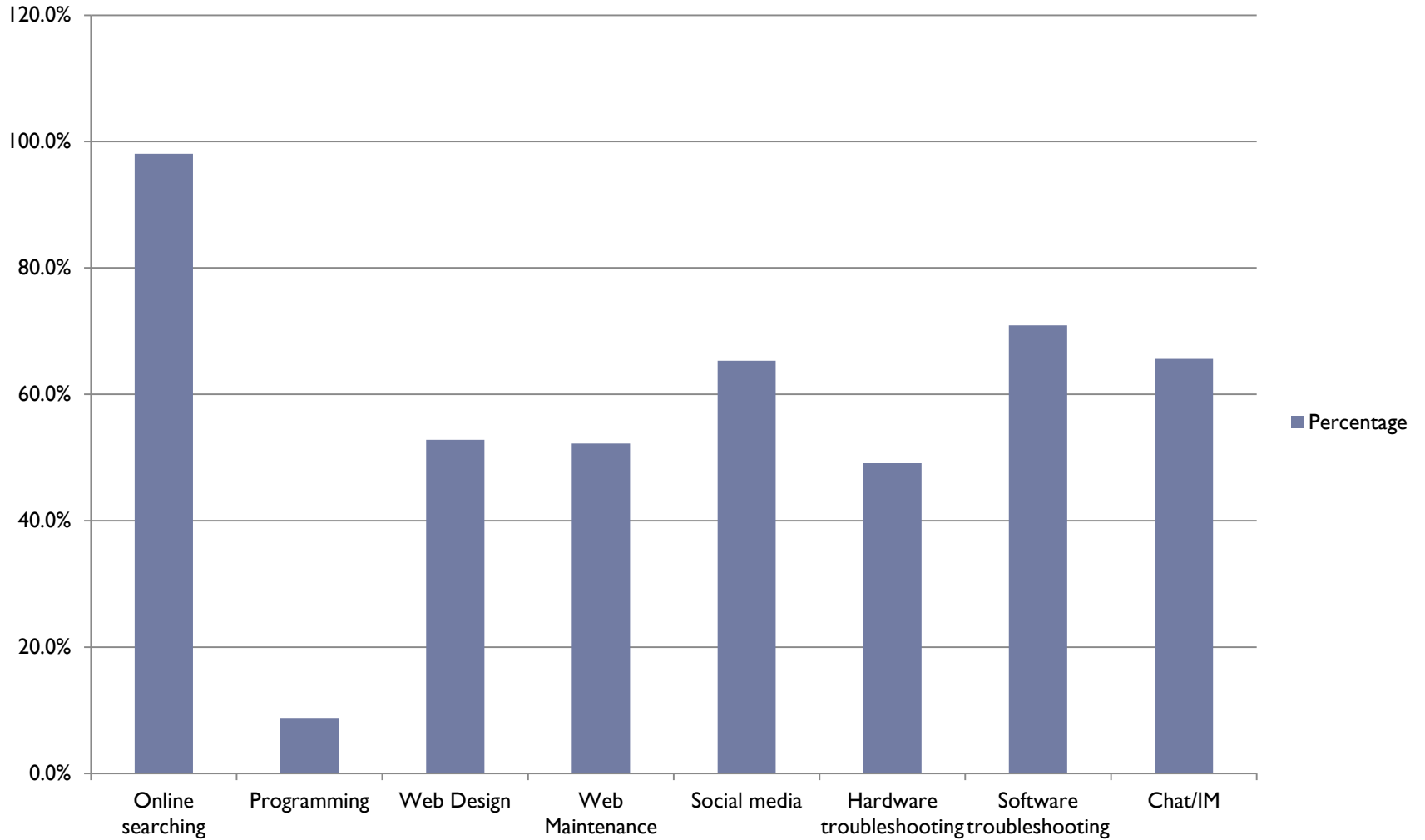
- ▶ **Of lesser importance are:**
 - ▶ 2nd Master's (but this is correlated with Carnegie Classification)
 - ▶ Knowledge of a foreign language
 - ▶ Programming



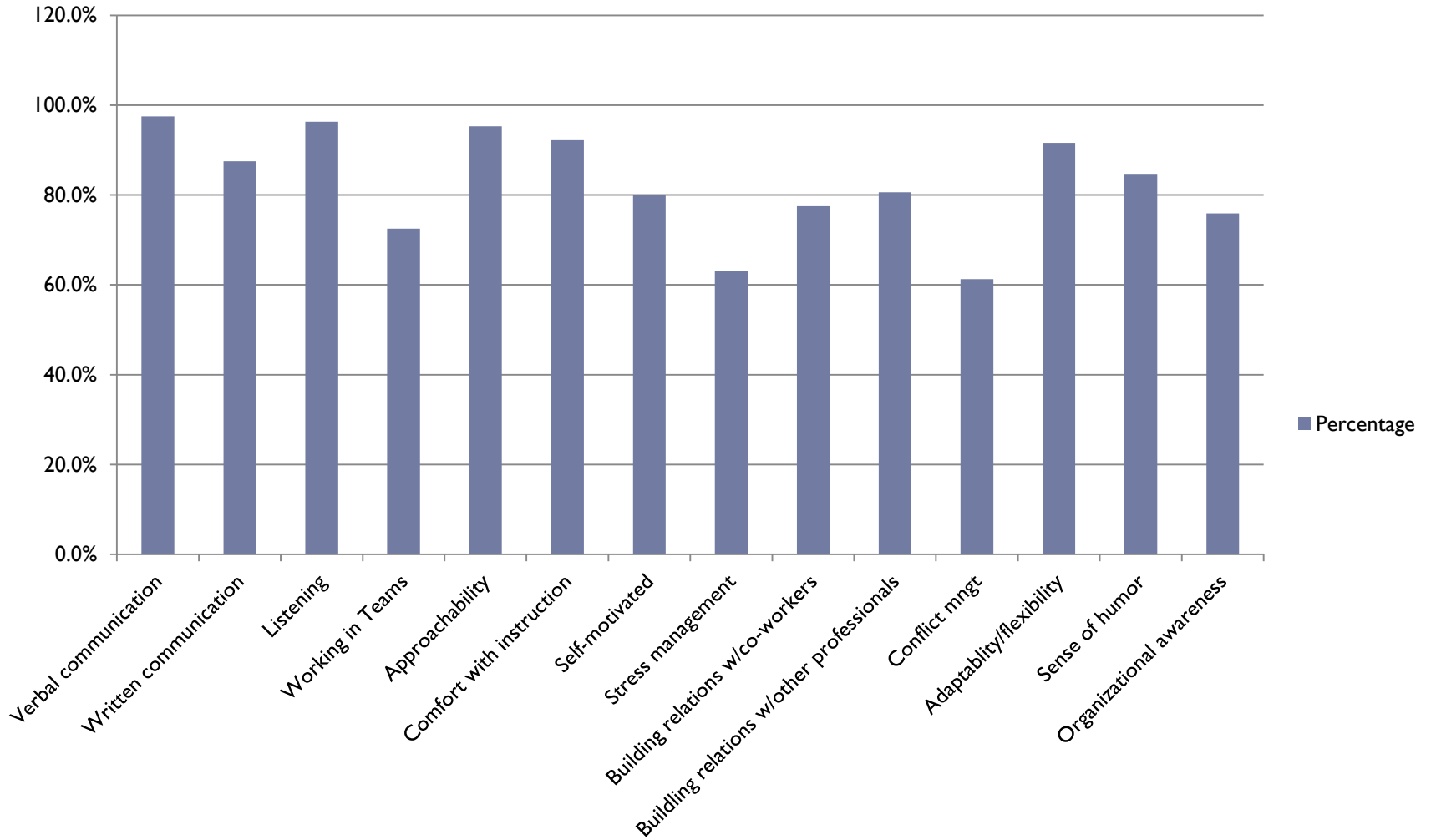
General Skills



Technology Skills



Interpersonal Skills



Most Highly Rated

- ▶ **General Skills:**
 - ▶ Search Skills
 - ▶ Customer Service
 - ▶ Knowledge of Print and Online Sources
- ▶ **Technology Skills**
 - ▶ Online Searching
 - ▶ Troubleshooting
 - ▶ Knowledge of Chat/IM/Social media



Most Highly Rated

- ▶ **Interpersonal Skills**
 - ▶ Verbal Communication
 - ▶ Listening
 - ▶ Approachability
 - ▶ Comfort with Instruction
 - ▶ Adaptability/Flexibility



Old and New

- ▶ **Traditional competencies are still important:**
 - ▶ Reference interview
 - ▶ Knowledge of sources
 - ▶ Choosing Print resources not correlated with age/length in the profession
 - ▶ Do new librarians know print resources?
 - ▶ Searching
 - ▶ Do new librarians have strong search skills?
- ▶ **New competencies are not replacing old ones but being added to them**



Implications

- ▶ Always more material to “cover”
- ▶ Continued focus on balancing ever more sources with traditional and new services
- ▶ Integrating technology and technology skills



Interpersonal Skills

- ▶ Very important- emphasized in close- and open-ended questions
- ▶ Emphasis on customer service, listening, approachability, communication
- ▶ 22% of respondents believe new hires lack interpersonal skills



Implications

- ▶ Do we address this area?
- ▶ How do we teach interpersonal skills?
- ▶ How do we assess them?



New Areas

- ▶ **Reference is a multi-function position**
 - ▶ Collection Development
 - ▶ Technologist
 - ▶ Instruction
 - ▶ Supervision
 - ▶ Access Services
 - ▶ Cataloging
 - ▶ Archives



Implications

- ▶ Students must be exposed to the basics of
 - ▶ Instruction:
 - ▶ Planning
 - ▶ Pedagogy
 - ▶ Assessment
 - ▶ Management:
 - ▶ Supervision
 - ▶ Hiring/training
 - ▶ Budgets



Conclusions

- ▶ **Interpersonal skills are essential**
 - ▶ Find ways to teach approachability, listening, customer service
- ▶ **Sources are important**
 - ▶ Type or titles?
- ▶ **Search skills must be emphasized, underpinned by knowledge of cataloging and classification**



Conclusions

- ▶ Reference work is a broad area encompassing more than question-answering services
- ▶ Competencies cannot be addressed in a single course but should be comprised of a sequence forming a coherent program

