Electronic services: Who's doing what?

By Mary Jo Lynch

Results of an ALA/ACRL survey

It is hard to pick up any periodical in the library field today without reading about technological developments, technological policies, or technological stress. Electronic services are no longer innovations. Instead they are integral parts of academic library service programs. But which electronic services are most widespread and which are still only in very large libraries? Will libraries continue to expand electronic services as we move into the next century? Those general questions and many more specific ones can be answered with data in *Electronic Services in Academic Libraries,* a report released by ALA in September.

In spring 1996, ALA and Ameritech Library Services collaborated on a survey of electronic services in academic libraries. Ameritech provided funds to cover ALA's direct costs. ALA's Office for Research and Statistics (ORS) and ACRL designed and directed the study. The Library Research Center of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign handled sampling, mailing, and processing.

In February 1996, a five-page questionnaire on "Electronic Services in Academic Libraries" was mailed to a sample of 1,132 academic libraries stratified by the four basic categories in the 1994 edition of *A Classification of Institutions of Higher Education* (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching). Respondents were asked to indicate whether they offer various electronic services by responding to 22 questions grouped into ten topical sections. A final question asked about plans for spending on those services over the next three years. This article highlights results displayed in detail on 19 tables in the 48-page report.

Catalogs and databases

• Electronic public catalogs are available in the majority of academic libraries as shown in Figure 1. Almost all are available from hardwired terminals and/or PCs in the library and they are also available, in some institutions,
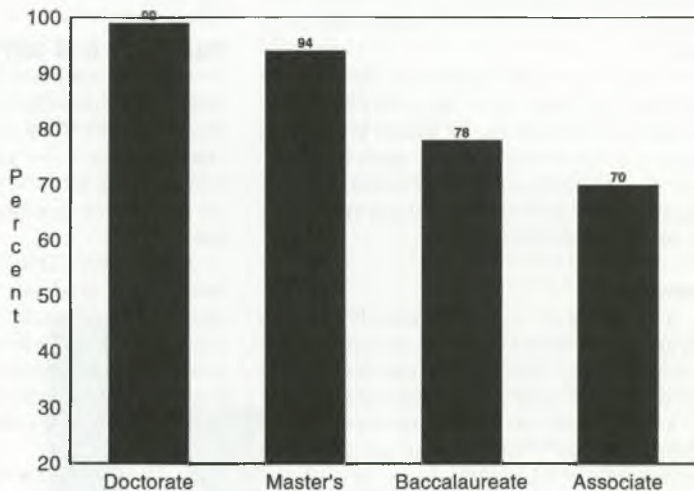
Figure 1. Electronic Public Catalogs

Mary Jo Lynch is director of the ALA Office for Research and Statistics; e-mail: mlynch@ala.org

through dial-up access from outside the library, through campus networks, and through the Internet.

• Electronic reference databases are available in the libraries of all doctorate-granting institutions and master's colleges. Only 3% of Baccalaureate colleges and 9% of associate of arts colleges lack electronic reference databases. They are most often accessed from hard-wired terminals and/or PCs in the library but are available also through a campus network or through the Internet in some institutions.

Figure 2. Electronic reserve lists and materials

Journals and reserves

• Three different types of electronic journals were defined for this survey. Full text of already published material is the most widely available type in all institutions. Seventy-one percent of doctorate-granting institutions, 52% of master's colleges, 48% of baccalaureate, and 38% of associate of arts colleges offer access to original free journal material, but original fee electronic journals are less likely to be available.

• Lists of reserve materials are available electronically fairly often, especially in doctorate-granting institutions, as shown in Figure 2, but text of reserve materials is much less available electronically; only 27% of doctorate-granting institutions and 5% of institutions in the other three categories offer it.

Internet

• Virtually all institutions offer library staff access to the Internet except associate of arts colleges where 12% do not offer it. E-mail is the most commonly offered type of access.

• Internet access is available to users in the library in all but 7% of doctorate-granting institutions, 18% of master's colleges, 24% of baccalaureate, and 39% of associate of arts colleges. Internet access is even more likely to be available to campus faculty, students, and staff outside the library.
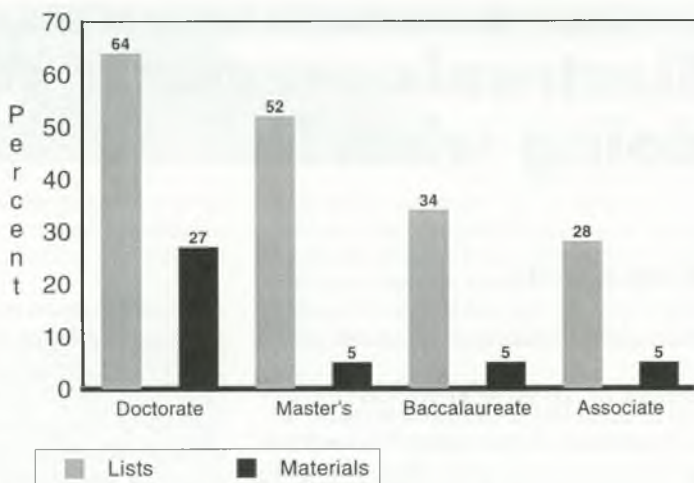
• Access to the Internet is offered to the public at 60% of doctorate-granting institutions, 50% of master's colleges, 47% of baccalaureate colleges, and 43% of associate of arts colleges. Web access is most common and e-mail is least common.

• Many academic libraries are information providers on the Internet, as shown in Figure 3. The electronic public catalog is often available especially from doctorate-granting institutions and many libraries have homepages on the Web.

Hardware and software

• Microcomputers not devoted to library functions are provided in more than half of academic libraries. They are most likely to be provided for student use. Text scanning equipment is available in a few academic libraries, primarily in doctorate-granting institutions for faculty use.

• Text-only CD-ROMs are available in more than 80% of academic libraries but are much less likely to be available for loan. Multimedia CD-ROMs are available for use in 81% of doctorate-granting institutions, 64% of master's colleges, 63% of baccalaureate colleges, and 61% of associate of arts colleges, but are not often available for loan.

• Technology for the disabled is available in the libraries of 85% of doctorate-granting colleges, 67% of master's colleges, 41% of baccalaureate colleges, and 52% of associate of arts colleges. Special computer workstations and/
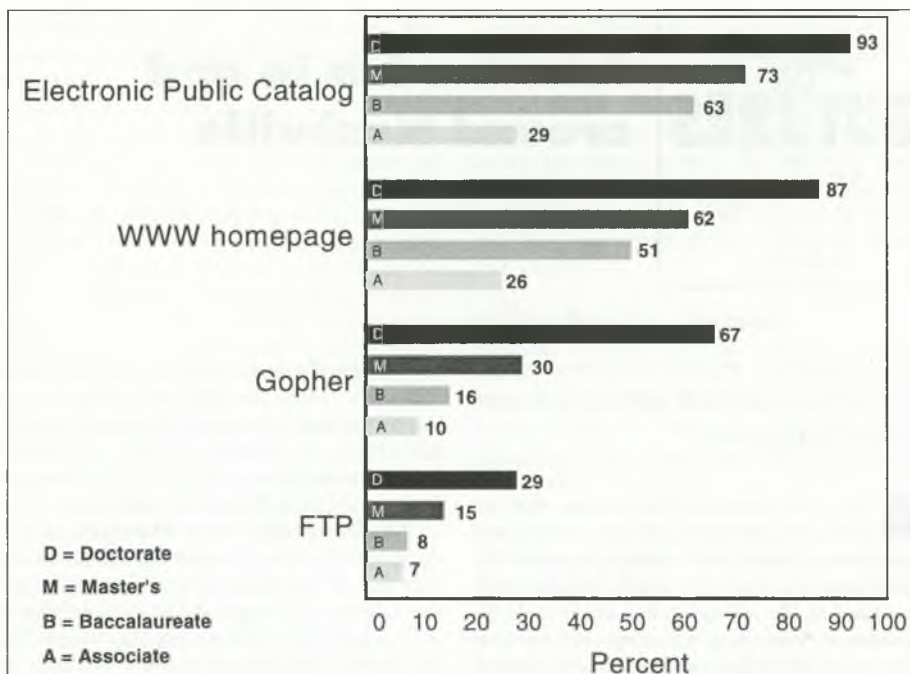
Figure 3. Libraries providing information on Internet

or reading machines for the blind are more likely to be available than equipment for the deaf.

Document delivery and digitizing

• Electronic document-delivery services are widely used by libraries in doctorate-granting institutions and somewhat less likely in others, as shown in Figure 4. The library pays the full cost of the service in almost half of the cases.

• Sixty-five percent of libraries in doctor-ate-granting institutions are digitizing documents but this is much less likely in other Carnegie categories. The primary purpose is to make material available on the Internet.

Conclusions

• Doctorate-granting institutions are most likely to offer electronic services, followed by master's colleges, baccalaureate, and associate of arts colleges. Within those categories, more public institutions than private ones offer these services.

• Academic librarians expect to increase expenditures on almost all of these services over the next three years.
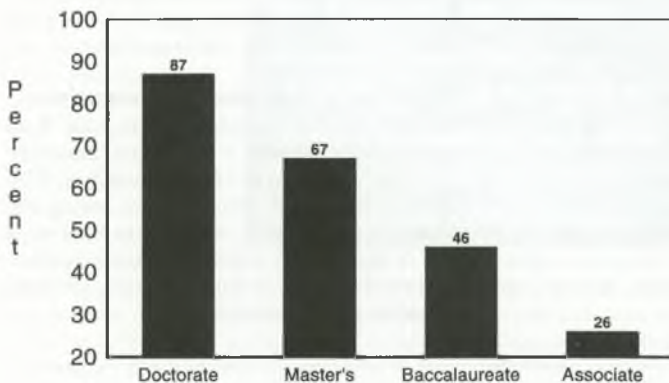
Au. note: copies of the full report are available from ALA. Send your order and a check for $6 (including postage and handling) to: American Library Association, Book Order Fulfillment, 155 N. Wacker Dr., Chicago, IL 60606-1719. ∎

Figure 4. Commercial electronic document delivery