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Contract Academic Librarians in Canada
Stories From a Nation-Wide Survey

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Résumé de l'article

Le contrat temporaire est souvent présenté aux étudiant.e.s diplômé.e.s des programmes de maîtrise en bibliothéconomie et sciences de l'information comme une porte d'entrée clé dans le domaine de la bibliothéconomie universitaire, et pourtant, en dehors de quelques études importantes et réflexions personnelles sur le travail contractuel dans les bibliothèques universitaires, la littérature sur ce sujet est relativement rare. Ce document rend compte des données démographiques des bibliothécaires universitaires participant.e.s qui ont occupé des contrats temporaires au Canada, leur cheminement de carrière, les conditions dans lesquelles iels ont occupé des contrats, leurs expériences d'intégration en milieu de travail et d'autres résultats positifs et négatifs liés aux contrats temporaires. Un sondage en ligne a été distribué, posant des questions fermées et ouvertes. Les participant.e.s à l'étude (n=95) ont occupé un ou plusieurs contrats temporaires au cours de leur carrière en tant que bibliothécaires universitaires au Canada. Les données ont été analysées à l'aide d'Excel, Qualtrics, NVivo ainsi que des méthodes manuelles. Les résultats montrent que les participant.e.s ont tiré de nouvelles compétences, de nouveaux réseaux, de la satisfaction et de la confiance de leurs expériences contractuelles, tandis que d'autres se sentaient stressé.e.s, exclu.e.s, surmené.e.s, sous-apprécié.e.s et empêché.e.s dans leurs choix de vie. Beaucoup ont ressenti toutes ces choses en même temps, ce qui suggère que les bibliothécaires universitaires contractuel.le.s sont pris.e.s dans un ensemble difficile d'expériences structurelles et émotionnelles concurrentes.

Contract Academic Librarians in Canada: Stories From a Nation-Wide Survey

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ABSTRACT

The temporary contract is often framed to graduate students in MLIS programs as a key gateway into the field of academic librarianship, and yet outside of a few important studies and personal reflections on contract work in academic libraries, literature on this topic is relatively scarce. This paper reports on the demographics of participant academic librarians who have held temporary contracts in Canada, their career paths, the conditions under which they held contracts, their experiences of workplace integration, and other positive and negative outcomes related to temporary contracts. An online survey was distributed, asking closed and open-ended questions. Study participants (n=95) have held one or more temporary contracts during their careers as academic librarians in Canada. The data were analyzed using Excel, Qualtrics, NVivo, and manual methods. Findings show that participants derived new skills, new networks, satisfaction, and confidence from their contract experiences, while others felt stressed, excluded, overworked, undervalued, and prevented from making life decisions. Many felt all these things at the same time, suggesting that contract academic librarians are caught in a difficult set of competing structural and emotional experiences.

Keywords: *academic librarianship · labour · precarious labour*

RÉSUMÉ

Le contrat temporaire est souvent présenté aux étudiant.e.s diplômé.e.s des programmes de maîtrise en bibliothéconomie et sciences de l'information comme une porte d'entrée clé dans le domaine de la bibliothéconomie universitaire, et pourtant, en dehors de quelques études importantes et réflexions personnelles sur le travail contractuel dans les bibliothèques universitaires, la littérature sur ce sujet est relativement rare. Ce document rend compte des données démographiques des bibliothécaires universitaires participant.e.s qui ont occupé des contrats temporaires au Canada, leur cheminement de carrière, les conditions dans lesquelles iels ont occupé des contrats, leurs expériences d'intégration en milieu de travail et d'autres résultats

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positifs et négatifs liés aux contrats temporaires. Un sondage en ligne a été distribué, posant des questions fermées et ouvertes. Les participant.e.s à l'étude (n=95) ont occupé un ou plusieurs contrats temporaires au cours de leur carrière en tant que bibliothécaires universitaires au Canada. Les données ont été analysées à l'aide d'Excel, Qualtrics, NVivo ainsi que des méthodes manuelles. Les résultats montrent que les participant.e.s ont tiré de nouvelles compétences, de nouveaux réseaux, de la satisfaction et de la confiance de leurs expériences contractuelles, tandis que d'autres se sentaient stressé.e.s, exclu.e.s, surmené.e.s, sous-apprécié.e.s et empêché.e.s dans leurs choix de vie. Beaucoup ont ressenti toutes ces choses en même temps, ce qui suggère que les bibliothécaires universitaires contractuel.le.s sont pris.e.s dans un ensemble difficile d'expériences structurelles et émotionnelles concurrentes.

Mots-clés : *bibliothéconomie universitaire · travail · travail précaire*

Universities in Canada rely heavily on faculty members or part-time academic staff who hold temporary contracts (Foster and Birdsell Bauer 2018; Pasma and Shaker 2018; Rose 2020). Many academic librarians—who have academic or faculty status at many Canadian universities—also start their careers on temporary contracts. Some librarians may hold multiple contracts at the same or different institutions, some leave home and family for a temporary role in the hopes of eventually securing permanent employment in a competitive academic librarian job market, and many cope with some level of instability or insecurity.

To better understand the experiences of temporary work among academic librarians in Canada, we initiated a survey study. The intention of this Canada-wide survey was to capture demographic information about individuals who have held a temporary contract as an academic librarian, to reveal information about their career trajectory and the conditions under which they held one or more contracts, and to give voice to their experiences and perspectives related to their contract work.

This study addresses the following research questions:

1. What demographics are associated with academic librarians who have held temporary contracts in Canada?
2. What do career paths look like for contract academic librarians in Canada?
3. Under what conditions do librarians hold temporary contracts in academic libraries? (e.g., are their moving expenses paid; do they have access to professional development funding?)
4. How do academic librarians who have worked on a temporary contract describe their experiences with workplace integration and other positive and negative outcomes?

This paper does not present all the data gathered by the survey; certain topics, including reflections on supervision, training, mentorship, and working on contract during COVID-19, will need to be left for future reporting.

Literature Review

A 2018 report from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives reported that more than half of faculty appointments in Canada are contract positions (Pasma and Shaker). The Canadian Association for University Teachers (CAUT) released a study the same year documenting the experiences of contract academic staff in Canada finding a high level of concern about job security, and that more than half of the respondents explicitly wanted to secure permanent, tenure-track employment at their institution (Foster and Birdsell Bauer 2018). Based on an analysis of institutional data gathered by the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) through a Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act request, Deirdre Rose (2020) found that departments of social sciences and humanities rely most heavily on the work of non-tenured, part-time academic staff, and that reliance on this work is highest in Ontario and British Columbia. The broader labour market in Canada also relies heavily on contract work, with one in eight employees holding a temporary job in 2018 (Statistics Canada 2019). While academic librarians were not included in the above studies, the results are indicative of an increased normalization of contract appointments within academia. This upward trend of precarious contract labour creates a hierarchy within academic staff, as it entrenches a situation where tenured and tenure-track professors—who enjoy the protections, job security, and benefits of that system—are working alongside some of the most precariously employed individuals within the academic staff (Topp and Lubowitz 2019).

The temporary contract is often framed to graduate students in MLIS programs as a key gateway into the field of academic librarianship (Lacey 2019), and yet outside of a few important studies and personal reflections on contract work in academic libraries, literature on this topic is relatively scarce. Marta Bladek (2019) noted the difficulty of data gathering on contingent appointments when many libraries do not distinguish on their websites between temporary and permanent staff. A content analysis of job advertisements on a well-known Canadian LIS job site observed that 35 percent (222 of 641) of academic library jobs posted over a two-year period (2017-2019) were contract positions (Henninger et al. 2020). Although not all the positions analyzed were librarian positions, temporary contracts (over other types of precarious employment such as involuntary part-time or on-call work) were most significantly associated with librarians and academic libraries, and the likelihood

of academic institutions advertising contract positions was found to be higher than expected (Henninger et al. 2020).

Temporary contracts in academic libraries have been presented as advantageous mainly from a financial and managerial standpoint because of the flexibility and short-term financial commitment (Chervinko 1986). However, they have also been shown to have many challenges and negative impacts on contract staff, including employment and financial instability, mental and physical health impacts, difficulty integrating into new working cultures, and pressure to take on a higher than manageable volume of tasks (Henninger et al. 2019; Lacey 2019). Awkwardness and feelings of inferior status can also arise when working alongside tenured or tenure-track faculty librarians (Chervinko 1986; Mayo and Whitehurst 2012; Pontau and Rothschild 1986; Wilkinson 2015). Orientation, supervision, and integration have been identified as potential areas of concern for temporary librarians and those who employ them (Pontau and Rothschild 1986), and efforts such as providing mentorship, ensuring a high degree of feedback, recognizing their contributions, enabling their socialization with permanent staff, and ensuring effective orientation and onboarding have been recommended to mitigate these concerns (Bladek 2019; Pontau and Rothschild 1986). Nonetheless, Melissa Becher (2019) found that nontenure-track librarians holding appointments in a working environment with tenured and tenure-track librarians experienced feelings of exclusion and had the lowest job satisfaction of any other group in the study. Academic librarians writing from personal experience have discussed the challenges with temporary academic librarian contracts, including the exhaustion of having to adapt and integrate into one or more organizations over the period of a short-term contract (Lacey 2019; Lacey and Parlette-Stewart 2017), the increased workload that results from feeling compelled to say yes to projects (Lacey 2019), and the feeling for new graduates that temporary work is required in order to qualify for more stable work (Agostino and Cassidy 2019; Lacey 2019; Skyrme and Levesque 2019). At the organizational level, succession planning becomes a challenge due to the "built-in turnover" (Guise 2016, 4) inherent in hiring contract academic librarians who are simultaneously seeking permanent employment elsewhere.

The experiences of new academic librarians also provide context when considering issues such as socialization and training (e.g., Lacey and Parlette-Stewart 2017; Oud 2008; Skyme and Levesque 2019). Librarians holding several contracts at different institutions are perpetually "new," and have to undergo the process of integration and deciphering new workplace cultures each time they begin at a new institution. Institutional politics and other unwritten rules of a workplace are not typically accounted for in LIS onboarding (Snyder and Crane 2016) and understanding

these cultural dimensions of their work is a key area of difficulty for new librarians (Agostino and Cassidy 2019; Oud 2008). The socialization component of onboarding, which helps ensure that a new hire is integrated with and able to succeed in the organization, is an important factor that distinguishes it from orientation, which concerns tasks and processes (Winterman and Bucy 2019). This is an important distinction, and Andrew R. Carlos and Daisy C. Muralles (2022) found that many articles in LIS literature that claimed to be about onboarding were in fact about orientation because they did not account for the socialization processes involved. New academic librarians themselves have been shown to be aware of this gap in their onboarding (Keisling and Laning 2016). For contract academic librarians moving from one institution to another, or who may not work beyond six months at a given institution, these gaps would be ever more prominent because of the time constraints imposed by their contracts. Even for those contract librarians who have worked at multiple institutions and have built up some knowledge of the profession, the idiosyncratic nature of each new organization makes some of their knowledge less transferrable (Keisling and Laning 2016). Imposter syndrome is common in new librarians, in part as a result of inadequate preparation during their degrees, inadequate training on the job, and unclear job descriptions (Lacey and Parlette-Stewart 2017). Support from colleagues and mentors has been shown to be related to lower imposter syndrome in librarians (Barr-Walker et al. 2020). Even so, mentorship efforts and programs rarely account for the specific challenges faced by Black, Indigenous, and other librarians of colour when trying to fit into an overwhelmingly white profession (Brown et al. 2017). Challenges with socialization and integration are now complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic, and new librarians on contract or otherwise are faced with the reality of onboarding in an at least partially remote environment (Martyniuk, Moffatt, and Oswald 2021). Entry-level librarians are often responsible for public service work, such as reference and instruction, which are the roles that most require emotional labour (Sloniowski 2016; Versluis, Agostino, and Cassidy 2020). In the case of contract librarians, many of whom are being hired at the entry level, they also have to make space for the other types of emotional work already described, such as workplace integration and managing feelings of insecurity (Brons et al. 2020).

Scholars have examined contract work in libraries through the lens of precarity. The Bureau for Workers' Activities (2011) sees precarious employment as "usually defined by uncertainty as to the duration of employment, multiple possible employers or a disguised or ambiguous employment relationship, a lack of access to social protection and benefits" (5). Precarious employment has been understood as a social determinant of health (Benach et al. 2014) and more likely to be experienced

by racialized workers in Canada (Bernhardt 2015). Precarity is a structural feature of temporary contract work, though other types of precarity exist in all types of libraries. Precarity is also highly contextual and affects individuals differently (Brons et al. 2022). Precarious employment has been shown to impact library staff in a variety of ways, including mental, physical, and financial health, workload and work-life balance, and lack of stability preventing them from making big life decisions such as significant personal or financial commitments or having children (Henninger et al. 2019). LIS thinkers have drawn connections between precarious work in libraries and trauma (Hahn 2019; Rodriguez et al. 2019), organizational dysfunction (Brons et al, 2022), and disingenuous efforts at staff diversity when no pathway is offered to permanent employment (Alaniz 2019; Hathcock 2019). Neigel (2016) has argued that professional development opportunities are unevenly accessible to library employees depending on their status and job security, and that precariously employed staff are not always in a position to fund their own professional development to bolster their resumes. Precarity in LIS work is a focus for advocacy groups, including the Digital Library Federation Working Group on Labor in Digital Libraries (https://www.diglib.org/groups/dlf-working-group-on-labor-in-digital-libraries/) and the Collective Responsibility Project. A white paper associated with the Collective Responsibility Project argued that employers need to plan better projects, pay their contingent workers fairly, and provide them with resources equivalent to permanent staff (Rodriguez et al. 2019). Adena Brons and co-authors argued that precarious labour "must be made visible in order to be accounted for" (2022).

Our study captures the experiences of one specific group of precarious workers who have been left out of previous studies of university contract employees in Canada: academic librarians who have worked or are working temporary contracts. Our aim is to elaborate both the structural conditions and subjective experiences of this particular category of workers in contemporary Canadian universities. This paper contributes to our understanding of contract academic librarians by highlighting just how varied and even contradictory their experiences and journeys are. We have found that there is no singular story of contract academic librarian work.

Methodology

Survey Participants and Instrument

The study was conducted via an online survey open to any person who had held a temporary contract as an academic librarian in Canada during their career. The online survey, using Qualtrics software, included the informed consent, screening questions, closed and open-ended questions about the year of completion of

participants' MLIS (or equivalent) degree, how many contracts participants held (and in what provinces), and what positive and negative outcomes they experienced working on contract. A looping function was used in Qualtrics to ask participants a block of questions for each contract they indicated they had worked. That block included questions about each contract experience, including the length and type of contract, the type of institution, the type of work they were involved with, their experience with workplace integration, and whether they received support for moving expenses (if applicable) or professional development. Responses were not required for most questions, and embedded skip logic ensured that respondents only received questions that were relevant to them. The survey also gathered personal reflections followed by demographic information at the end. The Research Ethics Boards at Dalhousie University and Saint Mary's University both approved the study.

Data Collection and Analysis

The survey opened on August 30, 2021 and closed on September 30, 2021. Participants were recruited via professional listservs and websites. We also compiled a list of Directors, Deans, and University Librarians at university and college libraries in Canada, contacted them by email, and invited them to circulate the survey to all staff with an MLIS or equivalent degree. Data were exported from Qualtrics to Excel for analysis using descriptive statistics. Open-ended responses were analyzed for themes using NVivo, Qualtrics, and manual methods.

Results

Research Question One: Demographics

Participant demographics were collected at the end of the survey. Of the 95 respondents who completed the survey, 93 identified as either female (n=81, 85 percent) or male (n=12, 13 percent). One respondent identified in multiple gender categories and two selected "Prefer not to say." None of our survey respondents identified as transgender. Respondent ages ranged from 23 to 58, with five participants declining to state their age.

Participants were able to select more than one sexual orientation on the survey. Roughly two-thirds of participants (n=66, 69 percent) identified as straight or heterosexual, 39 percent (n=37) identified with at least one of the other orientations (see Figure 1), and eight percent (n=8) did not state their sexual orientation.

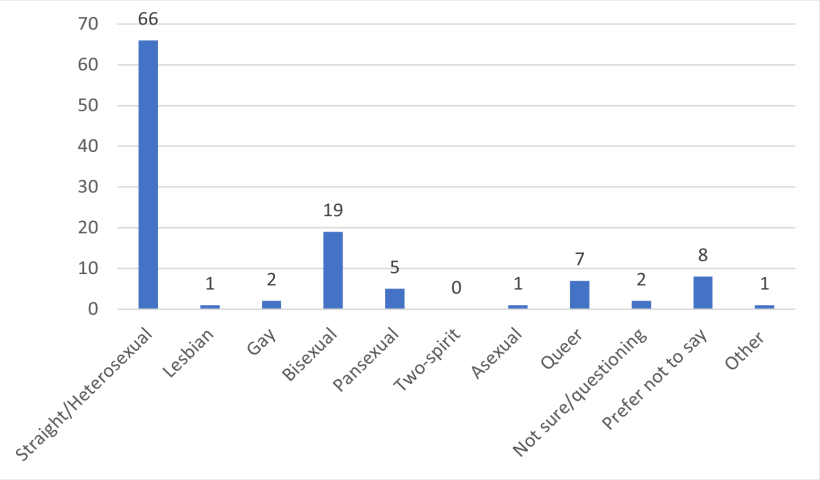

FIGURE 1 What is your sexual orientation?

Eighty-nine percent (n=85) of respondents were born in North America, three percent in Asia (n=3), two percent in South America (n=2), two percent in the European Union (n=2), and one percent (n=1) in Eastern Europe. Two participants declined to answer. The majority of respondents (n=91, 96 percent) held North American citizenship, while some participants held citizenship in the European Union (n=6, six percent), South America (n=2, two percent), and Asia (n=1, one percent). One participant declined to answer. Six participants held citizenship in multiple geographic regions, and 85 held citizenship only in North America.

When specifying racial identity, participants were able to select multiple answers. Four participants (four percent) gave more than one answer to this question. The majority of respondents (n=84) identified as Caucasian/white (see Figure 2).

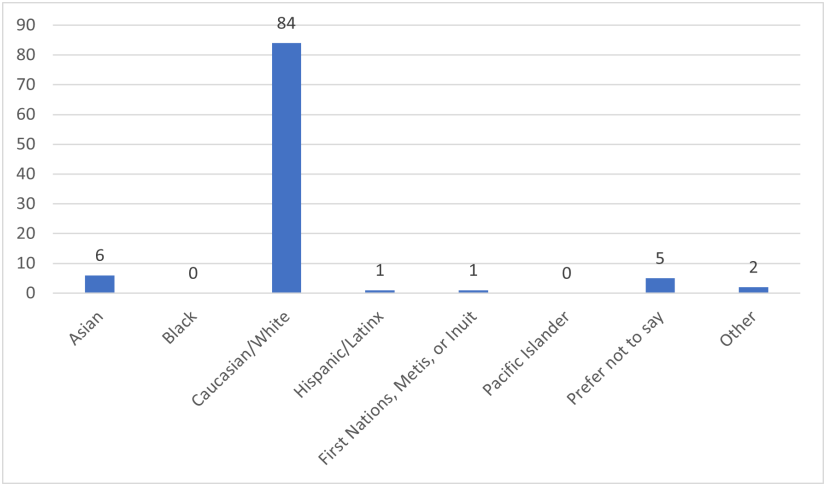

FIGURE 2 In which categories do you identify yourself?

Participants were asked whether they identified as having a disability. The majority of respondents (n=79, 85 percent) did not identify as having a disability. Other respondents identified as having mental and/or psychological disabilities (n=7, seven percent), pain-related disabilities (n=2, two percent), or vision-related disabilities (n=1, one percent). Three participants selected "Other" and identified as neurodiverse.

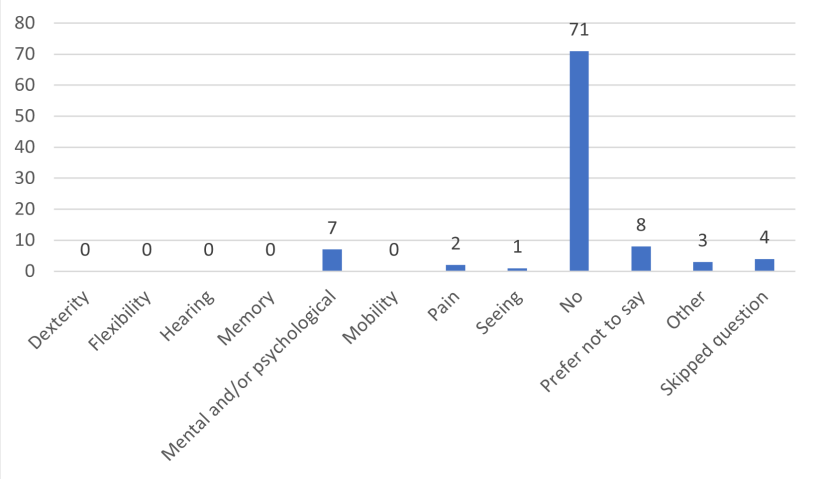

FIGURE 3 Do you identify as having a disability?

Research Question Two: Career Paths

We asked about the number of contracts held by participants and at how many different institutions, the duration and type of contracts held by participants, the prevalence of contract extensions, the type of institution at which participants held contracts, and participants' current employment status. We explore these questions using descriptive statistics.

I. Number of Contracts and Institutions

Participants in this study (n=95) had held between one (1) and 11 temporary contracts as academic librarians in Canada. The total number of contracts held by participants and examined in this study was 210.

Number of Contracts	f	%
1	44	46%
2	21	22%
3	17	18%
4+	13	14%
Total	95	100%

TABLE 1 Number of contracts held by participants.

The maximum number of institutions at which participants held temporary contracts was three (3). Most participants (n=66, 70 percent) had worked on contract at a single institution, while 15 (16 percent) had worked on contract at two institutions and eight (eight percent) at three institutions. Six participants (six percent) did not answer this question. Participants in this study worked up to 11 contracts at a maximum of three institutions; while we know that some participants worked multiple contracts at the same institution and that many of these contracts were extended, we cannot assume that participants sustained consistent work through contract renewals.

II. Contract Durations, Extensions, and Types

Study participants had worked a total of 210 contracts. As indicated in Table 2, these positions were posted as temporary contracts of varying lengths. The most frequently occurring contract length was 12 months.

Length of Contract	f	%
Less than 3 months	6	3%
3-6 months	42	20%
7-11 months	34	16%
12 months	74	35%
13-18 months	10	5%
24 months	17	8%
Other	27	13%
Total	210	

TABLE 2 Number of contracts held by participants.

Contract extensions were offered for 34 percent (n=71) of the contracts in the study, while 37 percent (n=78) were not extended. Many participants selected "Other" (n=61, 29 percent) for a variety of reasons. Some respondents were still engaged in the contract or awaiting notice of renewal, others had been offered but declined an extension, some had been extended under different terms than their original contract, and in some cases the contract position was made permanent.

For each contract held, participants were asked to indicate the type (see Table 3). The range of contract types was wider than we anticipated, as 41 percent (n=87) of the contracts were classified by respondents as "Other." Responses classified as "Other" included limited term replacements for reasons other than the options provided (such as medical leaves, secondments, or a librarian taking a temporary administrative position), residencies, or contracts that shifted from one type to another. The

most commonly stated "Other" type was a limited term appointment that the respondents did not characterize as a replacement. When reasons for the limited term appointment were given they included seasonal coverage, regularly occurring sessional appointments, or positions that were intended to be posted permanently in the future.

Type of Contract	f	%
Maternity leave	28	13%
Sabbatical leave	34	16%
Special project	34	16%
Contract extension	26	12%
Other, in your own words	87	41%
No answer	1	0%
	210	

TABLE 3 Type of contracts.

Of the 210 contracts in this study, 84 percent (n=177) were full-time contracts, 12 percent (n=26) were part-time, and three percent (n=7) were classified by respondents as "Other." The percentage of part-time contracts did not fluctuate for respondents based on whether this was their first or second contract. Part-time contracts were slightly less prevalent among those working their fourth contract or their fifth to eleventh contracts.

Part-time Contracts	f	%
First contract	13	14%
Second contract	7	14%
Third contract	3	10%
Fourth contract	1	8%
5th-11th contract	2	9%

TABLE 4 Part-time contracts.

III. Type of Institution

The majority of the contracts in this study (n=180, 86 percent) were held at public universities. Two percent (n=4) were held at private universities, ten percent (n=21) at public/community colleges, less than one 1 percent (n=1) in private colleges, and two percent (n=4) were classified by participants as "Other."

IV. Current Status

We asked participants about their current working situation. Thirty-six percent of respondents (n=34) were still working on a temporary contract in an academic library, 51 percent (n=48) held a permanent position in an academic library, and 14 percent (n=13) were not working in an academic library when they completed the survey.

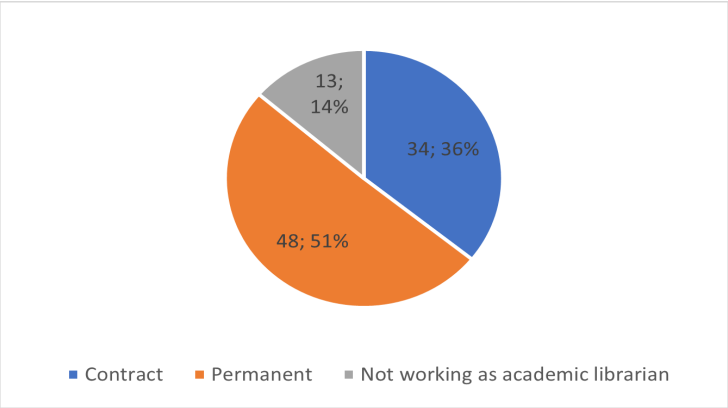

FIGURE 4 Current status.

Of those respondents who did hold permanent positions as academic librarians at the time of the study (n=48), 73 percent (n=35) held those permanent positions at an institution at which they had previously worked on contract. Twenty-seven percent (n=13) of this group held a permanent position at an institution at which they had never worked on contract.

While none of the respondents who earned their MLIS or equivalent degrees prior to 2005 currently hold contract positions (zero percent, n=5), we found that between 29 percent and 64 percent of participants in the other graduation year ranges identified are currently working on contract (see Table 5).

Year of Graduation	Total Number	Currently on Contract (%)	Currently in a Permanent Position (%)	Not Currently Working as Academic Librarian (%)
1990-1994	5	0%	100%	0%
1995-1999				
2000-2004*				
2005-2009	7	29%	71%	0%
2010-2014	18	17%	72%	11%
2015-2019	53	42%	43%	15%
2020-2024**	11	64%	9%	27%

TABLE 5 Year of graduation and current status in 5-year increments.
* Aggregated due to small number of participants in these ranges.
** Data for less than two years only; collected up to September 2021.

Research Question Three: Temporary Contract Conditions

I. Relocation and Moving Expenses

Of the 95 participants in the study, 37 percent (n=35) had to relocate for a contract position at least once. Two participants had to relocate twice, and one participant had to relocate three times. Of those respondents who had to relocate for their first contract (n=30, 32 percent), two had to relocate a second time for their next contract. One participant had to relocate for their first three contracts.

Of the 210 contracts in this study, 19 percent (n=40) required the librarian to relocate. The majority of these (n=31) were first contracts; 33 percent (n=31) of first contracts required relocation. Some second and third contracts also required relocation (see Table 6).

Relocation Required?	1st Contract		2nd Contract		3rd Contract		4th-11th Contract	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Yes	31	33%	6	12%	3	10%	0	0%
No	58	61%	43	84%	25	86%	13	100%
Other	6	6%	2	4%	0	0%	0	0%
No answer	0	0%	0	0%	1	3%	0	0%

TABLE 6 Contracts requiring relocation.

While 12 months was the most common length of contract for which participants relocated, several participants relocated for contracts as short as three to six months.

Contract Length	Relocations	%
3-6 months	7	18%
7-11 months	9	23%
12 months	14	35%
13-18 months	3	8%
24 months	4	10%
Other	3	8%
Total	40	

TABLE 7 Relocations by contract length.

Of the 40 contracts for which relocation was required, 28 percent (n=11) received full coverage of moving expenses, 15 percent (n=6) received partial coverage, and 55 percent (n=22) did not receive any support with moving expenses. Some respondents had other things to say about relocation and moving expenses, such as two participants who did not move but undertook 90-minute commutes. Others did not have to relocate only due to the working from home norms that emerged during the pandemic. Shorter contracts (less than one year) were less likely to receive reimbursement for moving expenses. In fact, of the 16 contracts under 12 months requiring relocation, moving expenses were partially covered in three instances and fully covered in only one instance.

II. Type of Work

Table 8 shows the type of work with which study participants were involved during their contracts. A high number of participants were involved in public services, including reference, instruction, and liaison work. Fewer participants reported involvement in other specialized academic library work like assessment, scholarly communications, research data management, and knowledge synthesis. We did find that a higher percentage of participants reported doing this kind of work for contracts with a more recent start date. Demand for these specialized skills has grown in more recent decades, which may suggest that contract work is becoming more specialized, though we cannot draw any firm conclusions. Although contract start dates ranged from 1993 to 2021, 82 percent (n=173) started between 2015 and 2021.

Type of Work	f	x
Reference/information services	178	84%
Instruction/information literacy	170	80%
Committee work	139	65%
Liaison work	130	60%
Collection development	118	55%
Library marketing/outreach	92	44%
Individual research	89	41%
Student engagement	77	36%
Library assessment	60	28%
Technology	54	25%
Coordinating programs	53	25%
Scholarly communications	51	24%
Data/statistics	48	23%
Digital scholarship	42	20%
Copyright	42	20%
Supervising others	38	18%
Access/circulation services	32	16%
Research data management	32	15%
Knowledge synthesis	32	15%
Other	31	14%
Technical services	27	13%
Cataloguing	21	10%
Union work	9	4%
Readers' advisory	7	3%

TABLE 8 Type of work.

We also compared the work of librarians currently on contract (n=34) and those currently holding permanent positions (n=48) and found that except for union work and supervision, librarians on contract are roughly as equally active as permanent librarians in the areas included in the survey. Contract librarians are even slightly more active in some areas, including individual research.

Type of Work	Currently in a Permanent Position (n=48)		Currently on Contract (n=34)	
	f	%	x	%
Reference/information services	36	75%	27	79%
Instruction/information literacy	38	79%	26	76%
Liaison work	34	71%	22	65%
Committee work	39	81%	29	85%
Readers' advisory	3	6%	3	9%
Collection development	33	69%	19	56%
Library marketing	23	48%	16	47%
Student engagement	27	56%	13	38%
Library assessment	21	44%	12	35%
Digital scholarship	10	21%	12	35%
Scholarly communications	14	29%	12	35%
Copyright	15	31%	7	21%
Research data management	11	23%	9	26%
Knowledge synthesis	7	15%	10	29%
Supervising others	17	35%	6	18%
Coordinating programs	19	40%	12	35%
Access/circulation services	7	15%	4	12%
Data/statistics	13	27%	6	18%
Union work	8	17%	2	6%
Individual research	26	54%	23	68%
Cataloguing	5	10%	3	9%
Technical services	9	19%	7	21%
Technology	12	25%	13	38%
Other	7	15%	4	12%

TABLE 9 Type of work by current status.

III. Access to Professional Development Funds

For each contract held by survey respondents, we asked them to specify whether librarians at the institution had access to professional development funds. We then asked them to specify whether they, as contract librarians, had access to professional development funds, and if so, whether they had access to the same amount of funds as permanent librarians. We found that of the 210 contracts in the study, permanent

librarians at the institution had access to professional development funds in 93 percent of cases (n=195). However, contract librarians had access to professional development funds in only 65 percent of cases (n=137).

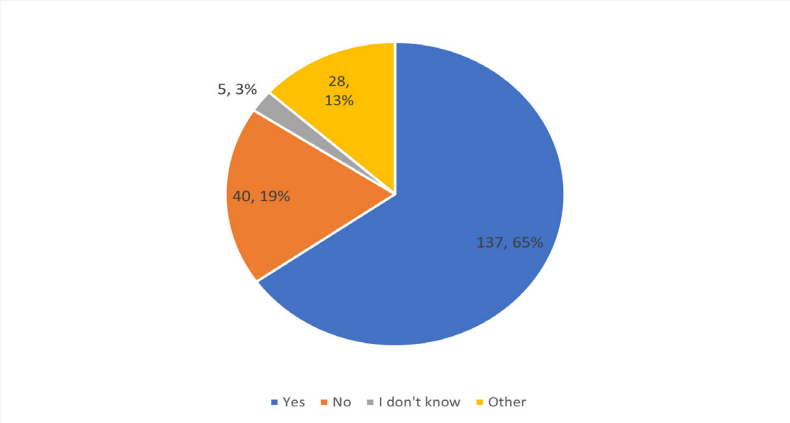

FIGURE 5 Access to professional development funds while on contract.

Respondents selected "Other" for a variety of reasons, including having to accumulate time before qualifying for professional development funding or having access to administrative or discretionary funds but not professional development funds, in which case travel or professional development was at the discretion of their manager.

In 48 percent of cases (n=100) respondents reported having the same amount of professional development funds as permanent librarians, while 30 percent (n=62) did not receive the same amount, eight percent (n=16) did not know, and 13 percent (n=27) selected "Other."

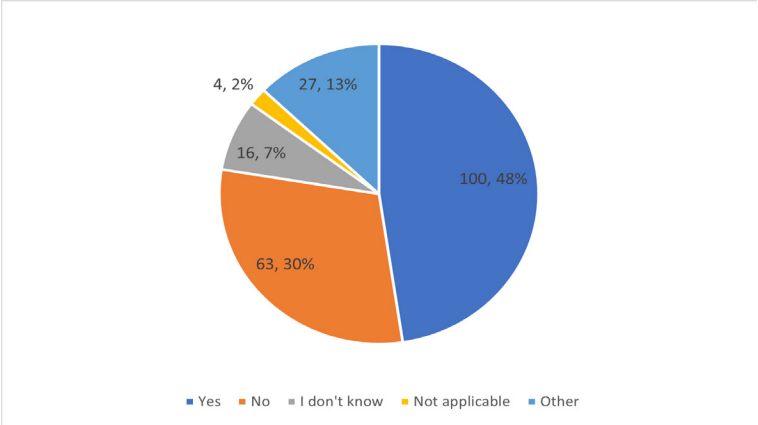

FIGURE 6 Did you have access to the same amount of professional development funds as permanent librarians?

Those who selected "Other" cited a variety of circumstances, including having their professional development funding pro-rated to the length of their contract, or in some cases, receiving more professional development funding than permanent librarians at their institution.

We offered respondents the opportunity to provide any additional information or comments that they felt would be relevant about each of their temporary contracts. Some participants took this opportunity to clarify certain idiosyncrasies related to their contracts, such as unique or shifting supervisory arrangements, mid-contract secondments or redeployments, or personal life stressors that may have impacted their experience. Some respondents clarified that their contract position had been made permanent or extended, or that they had competed for a permanent position; others reported that exploitative practices kept their position from becoming permanent (specifically that their employer did not renew their contract because the renewal would create a permanent position, as specified in the collective agreement). Other comments related more generally to the positive and negative outcomes of contract work in academic libraries, which are discussed next in this paper.

Research Question Four: Workplace Integration and Outcomes

I. Workplace Integration

For each contract participants held, we asked them the following open-ended question: *[During this contract], did you feel integrated into your organization? If you are willing, please elaborate on your answer.* We received a total of 199 responses to this question over the course of the survey, which represents 95 percent of the 210 contracts that were part of this study. Although the question was open-ended, we saw clear patterns in the responses and were able to code the responses as "Yes," "No," "Somewhat," or "Neutral."

Contract	Responses	Yes	No	Somewhat	Neutral
1st	93	53, 54%	16, 18%	22, 26%	2, 2%
2nd	46	30, 65%	10, 20%	6, 14%	0, 0%
3rd	28	22, 80%	3, 10%	3, 10%	0, 0%
4th +	32	20, 64%	3, 9%	8, 24%	1, 3%

TABLE 10 Perceptions of workplace integration.

Participants cited various reasons why they felt integrated into their organization. A recurring theme for those who responded "Yes" was that they had worked at the institution previously either as a student, in another non-librarian role, or on a

previous contract, and felt integration was easier or more natural because of that familiarity. Many participants who felt integrated cited their inclusion in committees, meetings, and social events as factors. For example, one participant who felt "very integrated" claimed they had "[joined] a number of committees, working groups, and such. Weekly team meetings also helped, and lots of informal conversations took place that allowed me to feel connected to the library team members in a virtual environment."

In addition to feeling included through these types of opportunities, many participants felt integrated when they were treated with the same level of respect as other permanent and/or senior librarians, or as one participant phrased it, when colleagues treated them "like a team member, not just a temporary replacement." Respondents who felt integrated also cited their workplace as having a healthy and collaborative culture more broadly, which translated into a supportive working environment for a contract employee. One participant noted that their library created space to "raise issues such as stress, imposter syndrome, and work-life balance, which helped me to feel like I could bring up challenges related to being on contract with my colleagues."

Responses were coded as "Somewhat" if the participant used "somewhat" or a similar word in their response, or if their response was qualified in some clearly stated way. For example, some respondents felt integrated into the university but not the library, or in their department but not the library, or felt integrated only in certain circumstances. Many respondents in this category reported feeling integrated to an extent but noted that they felt the scope of their work to be limited because of the duration of their contract, which prevented them from committing to certain projects or chairing committees. One participant noted union discussions as alienating, and a few participants reported being excluded from some meetings or events that other librarian staff were attending because they were expected to cover the reference desk. The limitations on social interaction created by COVID-19, or the lack of opportunities for—as one participant put it—"non-work related casual conversation," impacted some respondents. A respondent who had held numerous contracts at the same institution felt integrated over time with their colleagues but did not feel supported by the organization.

Participants who did not feel integrated into their organization cited a variety of factors. Some participants reported being physically separated from their colleagues, whether due to office configurations, library structure, or remote working conditions. COVID-19 and remote work was a common theme for participants who did not feel integrated. One participant made the following statement:

> In the pre-pandemic world, I could have gotten coffee or lunch with colleagues; in a remote world, very few people could spare time to walk me through a new process or explain how librarians approached information literacy at the school, etc. It took me twice as long to get the information I needed to learn simple procedures, which often meant I had to work on evenings and weekends to catch up on work.

The short-term nature of their contract itself was, for some participants, a barrier to feeling integrated. Exclusion from meetings or committee work was a common theme. In some cases, participants cited the attitudes of colleagues as factors, in particular a feeling that their work was not valued or understood. One participant felt like they were still in training throughout their contract, or in their words, "every day I was overloaded with information so every day felt like I was still in an orientation phase." One participant highlighted the impact of return-to-campus discussions taking place during COVID-19:

> I was still working remotely, as was everyone else. However, what made me even more isolated was the fact that during my second contract, the university and department started to discuss returning to campus, but I was never expected to work on campus, so none of these conversations were relevant to me.

II. Positive and Negative Outcomes

We asked participants to reflect on the positive and negative outcomes of contract work that they experienced both *at the time* and *in hindsight*. This information was gathered through two separate questions with four open text boxes (positive outcomes at the time; negative outcomes at the time; positive outcomes in hindsight; positive outcomes in hindsight). We acknowledge the limitations of these questions. Participants were being asked to project themselves back into their mindset at the time and to separate those reflections from later reflections "in hindsight," when in reality both sets of reflections were coming from a retrospective viewpoint. Indeed, many participants responded that their answers to both questions were the same. Please note that fewer instances of a particular theme *in hindsight* than *at the time* should not be interpreted as a perceived decrease in those outcomes. Some participants left the question blank, and no participants specifically stated that their outlook had changed in hindsight.

a) Positive Outcomes

Eighty-one participants shared their perspectives on positive outcomes of contract work at the time, and 71 answered the follow-up question about hindsight. Similar themes emerged in both sets of responses. The most prevalent themes occurring in both sets of responses were the varied opportunities and experiences, relationships with colleagues, and flexibility.

Opportunities and experiences. By far the most cited positive outcome of contract work was the range of opportunities and experiences, and this was articulated by 43 percent (n=41) of respondents regarding their perspective at the time, and by 36 percent (n=34) of respondents in hindsight. Some participants further articulated why these varied experiences were beneficial, such as building their resume or working with different people and learning about different workplace dynamics and cultures. One respondent reflecting on their perceptions at the time saw, "[t]he opportunity to see how different academic libraries operate, and get to work in different types of jobs and have a better sense of what areas of academic librarianship I like better." Another participant, reflecting in hindsight, commented that "Referencing these different experiences gave me the confidence and tacit knowledge needed to successfully land a permanent role. I was able to compare and contrast some of those experiences."

Relationships with colleagues. The second-most cited positive outcome was relationships with colleagues (n=17, 18 percent at the time; n=15, 16 percent in hindsight). The professional support they received from colleagues, the relationships formed, and the networking opportunities were highlighted, as well as the experience of working with different people.

Flexibility. Some participants cited the flexibility of contract work as a positive outcome (n=15, 16 percent at the time; n=11, 12 percent in hindsight). Most responses within this theme described the benefit of not being tied to the position or the city, or as one participant described it, "Being able to try out a position and see if it was a fit."

Emerging themes in hindsight. While there was substantial overlap between the themes across these two sets of responses, a few new themes emerged in hindsight. The theme of career advancement, while it did occur in the "at the time" responses (n=8, eight percent), occurred more often in hindsight (n=16, 17 percent); several participants described their contract positions as either leading to or preparing them for permanent positions. We also observed some comments from participants who felt that working on contract had made them better advocates either for themselves and their own work or for others. One participant stated that they had "developed sympathy for others in precarious situations" and another noted that they were "much more likely to fight for the rights of the precariously employed."

Other themes that occurred less frequently include feeling grateful for having a job in the field (n=9 at the time; n=3 in hindsight), increased confidence (n=5 at the time; n=1 in hindsight), and feeling financially secure (n=3 at the time; n=3 in hindsight). Some respondents (n=1 at the time; n=6 in hindsight) felt unable to comment because they were currently working their first contract, while others stated outright that they saw no positive outcomes to contract work (n=3 at the time; n=2 in hindsight).

b) Negative Outcomes

Eighty-three participants shared their perspectives on negative outcomes of contract work at the time, and 67 answered the follow-up question about hindsight. Once again, similar themes emerged in both sets of responses. The most prevalent broad themes occurring in both sets of responses were negative career impacts, uncertainty and instability, personal impacts, and negative outcomes related to colleagues. Many responses addressed multiple or even all of these broader negative outcomes simultaneously.

Negative career impacts. Thirty-five responses at the time and 25 responses in hindsight described perceived negative career impacts tied to their contract positions. Many participants felt that contract work impacted the path of their careers, while others experienced psychological impacts that influenced their careers and their approach to their work.

- *Lack of opportunities.* The most often-cited negative career impact was the lack of or limits on opportunities within contract work. Specifically, several participants claimed they felt unable to take on long-term projects or complete large projects because of the short duration of their contract, while others claimed they were excluded from certain committees, projects, or professional development opportunities because they were on contract. Several participants felt unable to achieve deep knowledge or specialization or further their own research while on contract.
- *Job hunting while working.* Some participants described the challenges of job hunting, scheduling interviews, and writing job applications while working full-time, which one participant described as "exhausting." Another aspect of the job search process that respondents highlighted was the experience of applying for a permanent position at the same institution where they were already working on contract. One participant articulated this experience as follows: "The stress of applying for a permanent position (which is the same job you are already doing) was horrible and almost too much to handle." Another participant, reflecting in hindsight, acknowledged that this scenario was also unfair to external candidates.
- *Powerlessness.* Several participants described a feeling of powerlessness when it came to their careers. For some respondents, this powerlessness was described in relation to their uncertainty about contract durations and extensions, but other participants described labour issues such as difficulty negotiating their salary or, in the words of one participant, "Fear of recrimination if I speak about my contract position and the possibility of permanent status." One participant described "frustration and helplessness regarding my ability to advocate for myself." Some participants also described workload issues, often related to what one participant described as "performative busyness." Participants described

taking on numerous tasks (four participants used the phrase "to prove myself"), leading to a particularly heavy workload.

- *Alienation and exclusion.* Some participants also described feeling alienated from their institution and/or from the profession as a whole. Some described this feeling as a lack of investment because they were only there for a short time, while others felt actively devalued by their workplace. One participant described "Growing feelings of being used and exploited for the benefit of the long-term gains of the institution, but not for myself." Some participants described a sense of alienation from the profession, and some have even left or are considering leaving the field. Notably, one participant stated that they felt,

> somewhat jaded with the academic library experience as a person of colour. Myself and a few POC friends left academic library jobs around the same time, just because we got good opportunities elsewhere, but we definitely have talked about feeling a sense of relief that it worked out that way.

Uncertainty and instability. Thirty-two responses at the time and 22 responses in hindsight raised issues of uncertainty and instability. This was described in relation to job uncertainty–not knowing whether a contract would be extended or where they would find their next contract when their current one ended. Participants described several related types of instability, particularly income concerns, the inability to plan or make big decisions impacting their futures, the challenges of relocating for contract positions, and for some participants, the lack of benefits in a contract position. Income instability is inherent in precarious work, but some participants also described being underpaid for their work. Relocation, as several participants articulated, is expensive.

Personal impacts. Twenty responses at the time and 26 in hindsight described personal impacts of contract work in academic libraries. By far the most commonly cited personal impact was stress; some variation of the root word "stress" appeared 64 times in various places across the survey responses. Other mental health outcomes were described as well, including anxiety, depression, and burnout. Several participants articulated difficulties in their personal lives and relationships, such as missing friends and family that they had to leave behind for a contract position or feeling isolated in a new city. A few participants described feelings of inadequacy, which was in two cases directly articulated as imposter syndrome.

Negative outcomes related to colleagues. Sixteen responses at the time and six responses reflecting in hindsight described some kind of negative outcome or experience related to colleagues. Some participants felt that they had not received adequate supervision or direction during their contracts, which impacted them negatively. Some described not feeling connected to their colleagues or being treated poorly by other librarians. In a few cases, the negative outcomes were seen as impacting the colleagues

themselves; for example, one participant felt guilty about not saying goodbye to the colleagues they worked with and supervised, and another felt that "Turnover in contracts, including mine, has a huge impact on my colleagues' work and the quality of service we're able to provide."

Some respondents (n=1 at the time; n=3 in hindsight) felt unable to comment because they were currently working their first contract, while others stated outright that they saw no negative outcomes to contract work in academic libraries (n=1 at the time; n=6 in hindsight). A few participants articulated overarching concerns with contract work as a labour practice in librarianship. For example, one participant stated simply that there is "[t]oo much built upon and relying on contingent labour," while another participant critiqued librarianship's "[m]ythologizing narratives" about getting one's foot in the door and paying one's due in a contract position.

Limitations of the Research

This study has several limitations. Participants self-selected into the study, and some librarians who have not held contracts recently may have self-selected out, thinking that the survey was only for those currently on contract. Responses were self-reported, which introduces the possibility for personal bias, positively or negatively, in the responses. The survey was circulated through academic librarian professional channels and workplaces and could therefore have been missed by those who have left the profession. Because we opened the survey to all individuals who had ever held a temporary contract as an academic librarian in Canada, some respondents were required to reflect years, or even decades, into the past. "Other" responses were numerous for some questions, which suggests the range of experience was broader than we anticipated and may offer avenues for follow-up research. Additionally, because the survey was conducted in English, it is not fully inclusive of our French-speaking colleagues.

Discussion

Demographics

Participants in this study were predominantly female, heterosexual, cisgender, white, and non-disabled. However, it is important to note that academic librarianship in Canada is a predominantly female, heterosexual, cisgender, white, and non-disabled profession, as confirmed by the Canadian Association of Professional Academic Librarians (CAPAL) 2018 census (Revitt et al. 2019). While not all of the CAPAL census categories mirrored ours, some comparisons can still be made. The CAPAL census indicated that visible minority librarians are underrepresented, comprising

only 9.1 percent of respondents. Consistent with the CAPAL results, nine percent of our respondents identified as at least one visible minority identity. We saw similar numbers to the CAPAL census in many categories with a few notable outliers. Specifically, 20 percent of our participants identified as bisexual, while only 4.94 percent did so on the CAPAL census, and 14 percent of our participants identified as having a disability or neurodiversity, while only six percent did so on the CAPAL census. More research is needed to determine if and to what extent librarians from marginalized identities are overrepresented in academic librarian contract positions. The coveted nature of temporary academic librarian contracts for new graduates due to the competitive job market is a complicating factor, and that new graduates need to compete so vigorously for these precarious positions may be at the heart of some of the tensions contract librarians experience. Furthermore, librarians with marginalized identities may be more likely to be left out of contract work altogether because of a lack of privilege necessary to be able to say yes to temporary work. One participant articulated this clearly by stating:

> Throughout this, I'm also very aware that as a white, cisgender person with no disabilities, I was able to navigate a series of contract positions where others (including Black, Indigenous, and colleagues of colour, trans and gender-nonconforming colleagues, disabled colleagues, and others) maybe could not, as they may not have had resources to navigate the financial and psychological insecurity of contract labour.

Career Paths

We found that the journeys of contract academic librarians in Canada are varied and complex. For some of our respondents, contract work led to stable work; for others it has not yet and may never. Some decided to opt out of the profession rather than being driven out, and sometimes it is hard to tell the difference between those two things. While 12 months was the most common contract length held by our respondents, a substantial number of contracts were shorter than 12 months (n=82, 39 percent), which is not much time to integrate into and make an impact on one's new workplace. We found that while contract extensions were not uncommon, they were slightly less common than not being extended. Some participants moved from a contract to secure a permanent position at their institution, but others had to look elsewhere, which took them on to yet another new workplace with yet another new set of colleagues and unwritten norms.

Conditions of Contract Work

The conditions under which our respondents held temporary contracts are also varied. Many of our respondents received full or partial support with moving expenses, but more paid their own moving expenses without assurance of work

beyond the end of their contract. We were interested to learn that librarians on shorter contracts (less than 12 months) were less likely to receive support with moving expenses than those on longer contracts, even though they were entering into an even more precarious position than a person on a longer contract. While many of our respondents had access to professional development funds while on contract, many had very limited access or no access, which supports Neigel's (2016) characterization of professional development as inequitably accessible in libraries. We were interested to learn that despite these limitations, many respondents on contract are doing as much if not more research than their permanent colleagues, and further studies could explore the interplay between professional development support for and research by contract academic librarians and how contract academic librarians navigate the challenges of developing a research agenda.

Perspectives

When discussing their perspectives on workplace integration and other positive and negative outcomes related to contract work, our participants voiced complex and often contradictory experiences. Although our participants felt integrated to different degrees, they agreed broadly that integration is about inclusion and respect, both for the work they are doing and for the unique challenges of their temporary status. For many of our participants, part of feeling included was knowing that their colleagues acknowledged that they are precarious workers, took an interest in their situation, and understood that their contributions came in spite of these challenges. Many participants saw the experience of multiple temporary workplaces as enriching their development and their experience of academic librarianship, while others found the experience of short-term work to be demoralizing, limiting in opportunities, and detrimental to their careers. Many of our participants felt well-supported by colleagues while others felt surveilled or unsupported, confused about the scope of their work, and pressured to say yes to more and more projects in order to prove themselves worthy of a permanent job. The lasting impact of this kind of yes attitude developed during early career precarious work would make for an interesting study. Consistent with the work of Henninger and co-authors (2019), many of our participants felt the documented effects of precarity on their mental and physical health, their financial well-being, and their sense of self-worth.

Conclusion

There is no singular story of contract academic librarian work. Some of our participants derived satisfaction and confidence from their contract experiences, while others felt stressed, excluded, overworked, undervalued, and prevented from

making life decisions. And many felt all these things at the same time, meaning that contract academic librarians are caught in a difficult set of competing structural and emotional experiences.

This study set out to reveal the conditions, career paths, working experience (remembered or ongoing), and demographic characteristics of academic librarians who have held or are currently holding temporary contracts as academic librarians. Based on the responses to this study, we offer several recommendations for academic libraries hiring librarians on temporary contracts. These are echoed by our participants, who voiced recommendations directly and indirectly when responding to our survey.

- *Advocate.* Advocate for new positions to be permanent rather than temporary. If an institution can only hire a librarian on a temporary contract, they should hire mindfully, ideally with the end goal of permanent employment for that individual. Advocate for a limit on temporary contract renewals before a position becomes permanent, and for temporary librarians to have the same benefits as their permanent colleagues.
- *Create opportunities.* Ensure that contract academic librarians have opportunities to take part in committees. Create capacity to involve contract librarians in both short-term projects with clear deliverables that can be completed by the end of their contract, and longer-term projects that may continue beyond the end of their contract. Help contract librarians have meaningful work to do that will positively impact their careers, including team-based work that will ensure they make connections within and beyond the institution.
- *Support professional growth.* Support contract librarians' research efforts and professional activities with professional development funding that is the same or greater than that available to permanent librarians.
- *Be transparent about the contract.* Ensure as much transparency as possible at the hiring stage so the librarian understands the likelihood of their contract being renewed or extended. If their contract is unlikely to be renewed, their colleagues and supervisors should support their next career steps by providing advice and mentorship on the job search process, pointing them toward professional development opportunities, reviewing their CV, and ensuring scheduling flexibility for the librarian to attend interviews at other institutions.
- *Improve onboarding.* Onboarding should be improved to account for the short-term nature of a contract. The literature has shown that socialization is a key piece of effective onboarding, and this process needs to be fast-tracked in order for the contract librarian to make the connections within their institution that will help them be effective during a short period of time. Onboarding should ensure plenty of opportunities for face-to-face or virtual contact between the contract librarian and all of their colleagues.

- *Provide mentorship.* Ensure that mentorship opportunities are in place for the librarian before they are hired so they are not left to find mentors on their own. Mentors should ideally come from within the institution, but if support in particular areas of the contract librarian's work is not available in the institution, supervisors or colleagues should help the contract librarian make connections outside of the institution.
- *Be emotionally supportive.* Be aware of, sensitive to, and supportive of the precarious nature of contract librarianship. Treat them as full colleagues while being sensitive to the exclusion that is built into the experience of working precariously among tenured or permanent colleagues.
- *Clarify expectations through supervision.* Establish a clear and direct supervisory relationship for the contract librarian. Provide clear expectations for the librarian's work during their contract. Provide proactive and ongoing feedback.
- *Provide guidance on workload and self-advocacy.* While workload is an issue for many academic librarians, contract academic librarians are simultaneously balancing their day-to-day tasks, their ongoing search for permanent employment, and the invisible work of learning to navigate a new institution in a short period of time. They may feel compelled to say yes to projects or tasks that are beyond their capacity in hopes of securing permanent employment. Check in regularly with contract librarians about their workload and engage other colleagues in open conversations about workload.

Future Research

Several indicators in our study would benefit from closer examination. The majority of our respondents were female, heterosexual, cisgender, white, and non-disabled, and more research is needed to investigate the specific experiences of contract academic librarians with marginalized identities. Our survey did include a set of questions related to COVID-19, and we hope to report on these findings; however, a richer picture of the experiences of contract academic librarians during the pandemic should be drawn through an interview study. We also included questions related to training, supervision, and mentorship but have not yet reported these findings. A study of supervisors and mentors may help to bridge the gap between needs/expectations and reality. The authors of this paper have both held multiple temporary contracts as academic librarians before finding permanent positions. We did not design the study to accommodate autoethnography or similar research methods but that is also a potential avenue for future research.

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