

# How has the COVID-19 pandemic influenced reference, research, and instruction in health sciences libraries?

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# Overview

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- Overview of study about **reference, research, and instruction** services during COVID-19 pandemic
- Summarize key findings
- Implications for future of library services provision

# Introduction

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- Library work moved increasingly online during COVID-19 pandemic (especially due to social distancing concerns).
- Initially COVID-related resources were limited.
- There was/is an abundance of “misinformation” concerns about the coronavirus pandemic.
- However, there had not been *a nationwide study of how academic health sciences librarians provided services during the COVID-19 pandemic.*

# Purpose of Study

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- To gain a better understanding of the *scope of library services* that academic health sciences librarians provided **during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic** (March 2020-March 2021).

# Methods

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- National survey
- Encompassing a one-year period (March 2020-2021)
- Online survey developed and pre-tested
- Survey distributed in March 2021 via listservs inviting participation (MEDLIB-L and MLA Chapter listservs)
- A total of 205 academic health sciences librarians and other information professionals with health sciences liaison responsibilities in the U.S. completed the online survey (**N=205**)

# Summary of Survey Results (N=205)

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Key Findings about Reference,  
Research, and Instruction

# Type of Respondent Library Setting

Answer	% (n)
Academic health sciences library	63% (129)
Academic library setting, with liaison responsibilities to health sciences disciplines	24% (49)
Other:	13% (27)

# Scope of Reference Services

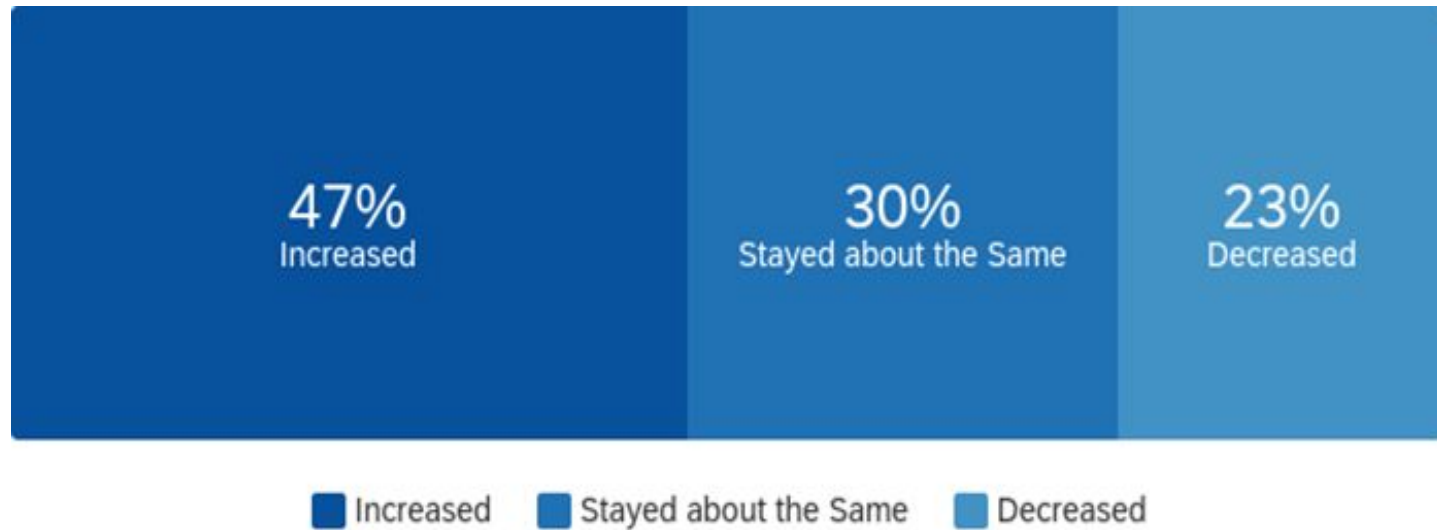
Answer	% (n)
Library offered email-based reference services	97% (199)
Library offered virtual/online reference services	89% (182)
Library provided information on its website regarding COVID-19 (e.g. LibGuide, etc.)	82% (168)
Library offered reference services via telephone	80% (164)
Library offered text-based reference services	33% (68)
Library offered in-person reference services	31% (64)



# Changes to Reference Work

Answer	% (n)
Increased virtual/online reference services	84% (172)
Reduced in-person reference services	82% (168)
Identified/provided general information resources regarding COVID-19	62% (127)
Identified/provided resources to combat misinformation regarding COVID-19	32% (66)
Increased phone reference services	25% (51)
No changes	4% (8)

# Volume of Reference Questions



# Reference Services and Patron Groups

Answer	% (n)
Faculty	76% (156)
Students	59% (121)
Researchers	51% (105)
Staff	47% (96)
Health care providers	42% (86)
University Administrators	22% (45)
General public	17% (35)
Public health department workers	7% (14)

# Types of COVID-Related Reference Questions

Answer	% (n)
<b>COVID-19 Treatments</b> (e.g., approved drugs, body positioning, protocols, etc.)	53% (109)
<b>Safety Precautions</b> (e.g., masks, sanitizer, social distancing, hand washing, etc.)	46% (94)
<b>COVID-19 Vaccines</b> (efficacy, side effects)	41% (84)
<b>Prevalence</b> (e.g., number of cases, hospitalizations, deaths, etc.)	38% (78)

# COVID-Related Reference Questions (continued)

Answer	% (n)
<b>COVID-19 Symptoms</b>	33% (68)
<b>COVID-19 Testing</b> (general, where to get tested, types of tests, etc.)	31% (64)
<b>COVID-19 Mandates</b> (local, state, national)	30% (62)
<b>COVID-19 Vaccines</b> (general, where to get vaccine)	24% (49)
<b>COVID-19 vs Flu</b>	14% (29)

## Factors Impacting Ability to Provide Reference Services during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Answer	% (n)
Additional work demands on time (e.g., other duties assigned)	59% (121)
Other demands on time (e.g., child care, personal health concerns, etc.)	43% (88)
Expected turnaround response time	31% (64)
Reduction in library staff	30% (62)
Reduction in library resources	17% (35)
Lack of available information/current evidence	7% (14)

# Research Services During COVID-19 (Top 5)

Answer	% (n)
In-depth literature search consultations	86% (176)
Curated COVID-19 research (e.g., through LibGuides, research guides)	66% (135)
Systematic review consultations	53% (109)
Access to COVID-related datasets	36% (74)
Evidence-synthesis	30% (62)

# Support for Online Teaching and Learning

Answer	% (n)
Provided online instruction for a course	92% (189)
Provided licensed digital resources for faculty/instructors	73% (150)
Provided open access and open educational resources	62% (127)
Provided copyright/fair use information	60% (123)
Provided instructional design advice	26% (53)



# Discussion and Opportunities

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Adapting Library Services in New Pandemic  
Information Environments

# Wrap Up: Concluding Thoughts

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- Evolving library services were responsive, adaptive, flexible, and creative.
- Demand in virtual reference and research services, especially **systematic review** consultations.
- There will also be an ongoing need for librarian **expertise in evidence synthesis** methods.
- Librarians delivered **instruction** and support for courses that rapidly moved online during the pandemic.
- **Opportunities and future outlook.**

# Thank you!

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# References

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