



Comparing Academic Library Spending with Public Libraries, Public K-12 Schools, Higher Education Public Institutions, and Public Hospitals Between 1998–2008

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This study compares the overall spending trends and patterns of growth of Academic Libraries with Public Libraries, K-12 schools, higher education institutions, and hospitals in the period of 1998 to 2008.

Academic Libraries, while showing a growth of 13% over inflation for the period, far underperformed the growth of the other public institutions in the study. Academic Libraries lost nearly 25% of their share of higher education total spending, suggesting a shift in higher education priorities. Academic and Public Libraries are shown to have very different investment and spending priorities with Academic Libraries as a group reducing staff and investing in their collections, while Public Libraries have expanded their staff and services significantly, but not collections. Patterns of spending and investment differ markedly for Academic Libraries by size of institution, while size of library or community is not a differentiating determinant for staff or services growth.

Keywords: Academic Libraries; Academic Library spending; Academic Library staffing trends; Academic Library utilization

OVERVIEW AND BACKGROUND

In attempting to understand recent spending and investments of Academic Libraries, the study analyzes two specific areas: 1) financial and overall spending trends of public educational and service organizations, specifically: libraries, K-12 schools, institutions of higher education, and hospitals; and 2) the comparative investment strategies and spending trends between Academic Libraries and (non-academic) Public Libraries.

This work builds on previous research conducted on Academic Libraries [1] and an analysis of changes in expenditures, staffing, and utilization from 1998 to 2008 and perceptions of economic constraint. In a recent work [2], Public Libraries are shown to have significant growth and diversification in their use over an extended period. Data from Academic Libraries described in this previous work is now compared to expenditure, staffing and utilization data from Public Libraries, as well as expenditures among a number of other public institutions, including education (both elementary/secondary and higher) and hospitals. Though there are landmark studies analyzing the recent financial trends of Academic Libraries [3–5] none of these have focused on the relationship of academic library fiscal trends in the context of other publicly funded institutions. The goal of this research specifically is to place in context the changing state and relative economic growth of both Academic and Public Libraries. The tables and accompanying narrative provide a basis for answering a few key research questions:

What are the comparative positions of the above mentioned selected institutions which receive public funding? What is the relationship of funding and investment activities for publicly funded libraries and other public educational and service institutions, i.e., K-12 schools, institutions of higher education, and hospitals? Has funding increased or decreased for these institutions between 1998 and 2008, taking into account inflation?

Are the spending and investment trends documented previously [6] with regard to Academic Libraries similar to those observed among non-academic, Public Libraries?

How has the utilization of Public Libraries declined or grown relative to Academic Libraries? How are Public Libraries being utilized currently and what are the usage trend-lines for the physical use of the library?

DATA SOURCES

This report combines data from a number of separate sources to provide indications of changes in direct expenditures among a variety

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of public institutions. The following section identifies each of these sources and describes their contribution to this report.

- 1) Academic Library Survey (ALS): the academic library survey is conducted on a two-year cycle by the National Center for Education Statistics. The universe consists of libraries associated with degree-granting postsecondary institutions in the United States. Information collected in these surveys includes staffing levels of librarians, other professional staff, and student assistants, as well as expenditures, collections information, and utilization of library services.
- 2) Public Library Survey (PLS): the Public Libraries survey is a voluntary survey conducted annually by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), with data collection responsibilities overseen by the US Census Bureau. Information collected in this survey is similar to that collected in the ALS, with generally less detail. Nevertheless, where possible in this report, similar items have been compiled from both sources for comparative purposes.
- 3) Census of State and Local Government Finance: this survey is conducted every 2 years and provides information on revenue and expenditures for a variety of functions administered by state and local governments. This data is used in this report to provide information on expenditures for libraries, education, and hospitals.

These data series provide the backdrop upon which the comparative analysis as described in the article is based. It should be noted where possible that data collected for areas outside of the United States (e.g. territories, etc.) has not been included in this analysis. Unless otherwise noted in the text, all dollar values prior to 2008 have been adjusted to account for inflation. Calculations to adjust nominal into inflation-adjusted amounts are based on the percentage difference between the Consumer Price Index (All Items) between 1998 and 2008 as published by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. This is done by adjusting the 1998 figure by the rate of inflation (32%) and viewing the resultant (adjusted) change. Unadjusted percentage increases less than 32% indicate declines in real terms.

OVERALL SPENDING TRENDS OF ACADEMIC LIBRARIES AND PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

Analysis

The following section provides the respective estimates from each data series compiled here for comparative purposes. Table 1 provides a high-level examination of the change in total expenditures for the institutional entities under study between 1998 and 2008.

As Table 1 indicates, expenditures by Academic Libraries grew at 13% above inflation, less than half of the percentage increase over this time period exhibited by Public Libraries (31%). K-12 schools and higher education institutions significantly outperformed Academic Libraries—with K-12 schools growing 3 times and higher education 4 times faster than Academic Libraries. All institutional spending has grown faster than inflation due to the positive changes indicated between adjusted values for 1998 and unadjusted 2008 figures. Other than Academic Libraries, all institutional spending on an adjusted basis has grown faster than total national population growth over this time period, at 13% [7].

As can be seen in Figure 1, if one compares these selected institutional types by their growth over the period and their share of public spending at the end of the period, four categories can be created to illustrate these trends:

- 1) Leading: institution(s) with above average growth and above average share;
- 2) Building: institution(s) with above average growth but below average share;
- 3) Slipping: institution(s) with below average growth but above average share;
- 4) Declining: institution(s) with below average growth and below average share.

The axes of the figure are percentage growth over the period (x axis) and percentage share at the end of the period (y axis; 2008), while the size of the bubble represents the actual dollars expended by the institutional type. Figure 1 indicates that higher education is clearly leading these institutions—substantial in its size and growth, while hospitals are building as their growth increases and their share of public spending builds, K-12 schools have the largest share but their growth has declined relative to the group and as a result its relative position has slipped, and finally Public Libraries and Academic Libraries are small and clearly declining.

As can be seen in Table 2 if one includes spending on Academic Libraries and higher education as representing the total spent on higher education, the share of expenditures on Academic Libraries relative to the total has declined over this time period by (24%), even as inflation-adjusted spending on Academic Libraries has grown by 13%.

COMPARISON: PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS TYPES

In this section, an examination of changes in expenditures among the four selected institutional types is undertaken. As noted previously, this

Table 1
Comparison of total expenditures (1998–2008) by selected institution type

Institutional type	Total expenditures (Units in \$000s/\$2008 adjusted)		\$ Change	% Change
	1998	2008		
Academic Libraries	\$5,769,427	\$6,533,314	\$763,887	13%
Public Libraries	\$8,175,605	\$10,724,925	\$2,549,320	31%
K-12 schools	\$419,845,877	\$565,631,236	\$145,785,359	35%
Higher education (auxiliary enterprises)	\$148,993,515	\$223,293,543	\$74,300,028	50%
Higher education (other)	\$25,642,311	\$37,138,399	\$11,496,088	45%
Hospitals	\$91,916,054	\$128,853,219	\$36,937,165	40%
Total	\$693,340,791	\$963,273,443	\$269,932,652	39%

Note: 1998 values have been adjusted to account for inflation; based on CPI-U percent change.
Sources: ALS (1998–2008, author calculations); PLS (1998–2008, author calculations); Census of State and Local Government Finance.

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