

ALBANY COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY COMPARED WITH FIVE OTHER WYOMING COUNTY LIBRARIES

Working with data compiled by the Wyoming State Library, *Wyoming Public Library FY07-08 Comparisons*, Godfrey’s Associates, Inc. has compared the Albany County Public Library (ACPL) with five other county libraries in the state that serve a population between 27,000 – 41,000.

The libraries and their service area populations are:

Campbell County	40,433
Sweetwater County	39,305
Fremont County	37,479
Albany County	32,227
Sheridan County	27,998
Park County	27,073

All six counties have branch libraries as well as a central, or main, library. Campbell has one branch library, Sweetwater has eight, and the other four libraries have either two or three branch libraries. The consultant understands that those county libraries that have more facilities than Albany County will exceed Albany County in

some of the comparative data. However, when per capita computations are factored the “playing field” becomes somewhat leveled.

Only Albany County has a major university within its service area.

The statistical data compiled by the State Library does not distinguish between the central library and the branch libraries.

FINANCIAL DATA AND COMPARISONS

Local income for the six library systems is comprised of Mill Funds, Non-Mill County Funds, and City Funds. Sheridan is the only one of the six library systems that does not have – or did not report – Mill Funds. Only Sweetwater and Albany reported the receipt of City Funds. Sheridan had, by far, the largest amount of Non-Mill County Funds (their entire Local Income of \$1,139,000). Albany had the lowest amount of Non-Mill Funds (\$25,000).

On a per capita basis, Sweetwater has the largest income stream from local funds -- \$88.60, followed by Campbell with \$76.95.

Income

Local income ranged from a high of nearly \$3.48 million at Sweetwater to a low of \$640,821 at Albany County. The average of the six libraries for which data was available was \$1,838,191.

When looking at total income, Sweetwater is also the leader with a reported total of \$3,578,597, followed closely by Campbell with \$3,174,443. At the other end rests Albany County with \$847,724. The average of the six was \$1,942,730.

Table 6.1
Income & Expenditures Per Capita

<i>library</i>	<i>income</i>	<i>expenditures</i>
Sweetwater	\$91.05	\$97.67
Campbell	\$78.51	\$78.49
Fremont	\$44.61	\$44.51
Sheridan	\$44.28	\$43.75
Park	\$42.25	\$39.29
Albany County	\$26.30	\$24.97

Expenditures

Salaries almost always account for the largest share of any service organization’s operating budget. This is certainly true of public libraries.

Sweetwater expended over \$2.83 million for salaries, Campbell \$2.46 million. On the other hand, Park spent just over \$893,000. Albany County’s salary budget for personnel (wages plus benefits) was \$569,341, or 17.67 per capita.

As for averages, \$1,063,458 was the figure for wages and \$392,283 for benefits.

Benefits, as a percentage of personnel expenditures, ranged from 33.0 percent in Sweetwater to 17.8 percent in Albany County.

When looking at personnel costs (wages plus benefits) as a percentage of all expenditures, we find Albany County at 70.74 percent and the average being 74.03 percent.

For library materials (all formats), the range from high to low was \$365,000 for Campbell and \$357,000 for Sweetwater to not quite \$76,500 for Albany County. The average of the six libraries was \$186,372.

Other expenditures averaged \$320,199 with Sweetwater allocating \$641,000 (the highest figure) and Park expending \$113,045 (the lowest total). Albany County’s total for Other expenditures was \$159,026.

Financial Conclusions

Given the ever-increasing cost of library books and other materials, the need to consistently upgrade and expand technology, the modest increases in salaries and employee benefits, and the slow but steady rise in the Consumer Price Index, a per capita income of under \$40.00 makes it increasingly difficult to deliver the quality of service many users of public libraries expect today – and will expect tomorrow and the day after tomorrow ...

LIBRARY RESOURCES

For purposes of this comparative evaluation the consultant studied the collection holdings and the staff of the six libraries.

Library Collection Holdings

The collection sizes include all formats. The average collection size of the six library systems is 178,373.

Sweetwater’s collection is the largest – 262,634 (Sweetwater has eight branch libraries, far more than any of the other libraries), followed by Campbell with 243,719 items. Campbell has only one branch library. The smallest of the six is Albany County’s collection total of 127,257 items. Table 6.2 is the ranking of the six systems on a per capita basis.

Table 6.2
Central Library Holdings Per Capita & Number Branch Libraries

<i>library</i>	<i>holdings per capita</i>	<i>number of branch libraries</i>
Sweetwater	6.68	8
Campbell	6.03	1
Park	5.72	2
Sheridan	5.34	3
Fremont	3.52	2
Albany County	3.95	2

The average per capita figure is 5.21. The average number of branch libraries is three. Another factor, not measurable with the available data, is the age of the collections. Albany County staff indicate, and consultant observations attest, that the Albany County collection in several areas contains dated materials that are now of questionable value.

Collection Turnover Rate

When dividing the annual circulation by the holdings, a collection turnover rate is produced. That is, if you have 10 collection items and your circulation is 20, then the turnover rate is 2.0 (20 divided by 10 = 2). A higher rate

almost universally means that the collection is more responsive to the needs of the community being served than a lower rate.

However, one factor that can drive a turnover rate lower is the size of the non-circulating collections, i.e. materials that can only be used in the library facility and not borrowed by the public.

The collection turnover rate for the six libraries – when factoring the total collection size with the annual circulation – produced an average rate of 1.60. That is, the public, in the course of one year, used every item held by the six libraries just over one and one-half times each. This is a very low rate when compared to libraries on a national basis.

The library with the highest rate was Sheridan with 2.00, followed by Fremont, with a turnover rate of 1.86. Albany County’s rate was 1.48.

Library Staff

For this study the staffs of the six Wyoming libraries have been divided between Professional Staff (those with a Master’s Degree in Library Science, e.g. the MLS), Librarian Staff, and Non-Librarian Staff.¹ Staff for the branch libraries operated by the six libraries has been included in the numbers.

¹ The consultants assume that “Librarian Staff” refers to staff that, regardless of the educational attainment level, occupy positions of a professional nature. “Non-Librarian Staff” are presumed to be staff that occupies clerical-type positions.

Sweetwater has the largest Professional Staff (5.62 FTE). Park, with 5.00 FTE, has the second highest number of Professional Staff. Albany County's professional FTE is 4.40. The average is 3.34 FTE.

Librarian Staff (FTE) ranges from 17.50 at Sheridan to 0.50 at Albany County. The average is 7.36.

Non-Librarian Staff average of the six libraries is 18.05. Campbell has the highest number – 30.70 FTE followed by Sweetwater's 26.21. The lowest number is Sheridan with only 4.0 Non-Librarian Staff. **The Sheridan county data, as reported, was in error according to the Sheridan county librarian.** Albany County has 12.27 Non-Librarian Staff members.

Table 4 provides the total staff FTE counts for the six library systems.

Table 6.3

Total Staff and Number of Library Outlets

<i>library</i>	<i>FTE</i>	<i>number of library outlets</i>
Sweetwater	44.96	9
Campbell	37.70	2
Fremont	27.10	3
Sheridan	24.50	4
Park	21.00	3
Albany County	17.17	3

Library Resources Conclusions

Historically, the size of the collections, especially the book collections, was considered for many years to be the true measure of quality library service. The general consensus

was that the larger the book collection size, on a per capita basis, the better the library.

The advent of media, starting with LP recordings, then videocassettes and books-on-tape, changed the thinking with regard to measuring a library's worth in terms of service. Now, with books-on-CD, music CDs, and DVDs, media is often more popular than book collections in many public libraries.

Another formerly held "sacred" measure held that a library of any worth should have a minimum of 2.0 items per capita. That was, for years, the "minimum standard." Now, there are no "standards," at least not of a national bearing. There are some libraries that have 5.0 and above collection items per capita. And there are others, of course, that have less than 2.0.

The consultants do not subscribe to the "bigger is better" theory - quite the opposite. We believe a quality collection that is responsive to the needs of the community being served can be achieved without the expense of acquiring, processing, and housing larger and larger collections. Collection turnover is a key measurement in our opinion.

As for staff, the Wyoming measure is the number of staff per 25,000 persons served, i.e. the service area population. Dividing the service area population by the total staff FTE arrives at this figure.

Albany County's figure is 1,876.94. This means that for every 1,877 people in the service area there is one FTE staff member to assist them. The 1,877 figure is the "worst" ratio of the six libraries if one is of the opinion that more staff per persons served equals better service. The

“best” number is Sweetwater’s 874.22. The average of the six libraries is 1,273.10.

LIBRARY USAGE

Library usage is typically measured in four areas:

- Circulation of library materials (books and media borrowed by the users)
- Reference questions answered (Reference Transactions)
- Program Attendance (how many persons attended the various programs offered by the library)
- Visits (how many persons walked through the doors into the library).

The sum of those four compilations gives us what we at Godfrey’s Associates call “Contacts.” That is, Circulation + Reference Transactions + Program Attendance + Visits = Contacts. Table 5 is a summary of the five measurements on a per capita basis.

Table 6.4

Library Usage Measurements Per Capita

<i>library</i>	<i>circulation</i>	<i>reference transactions</i>	<i>program attendance</i>	<i>visits</i>	<i>contacts</i>
Campbell	9.0	2.7	1.0	5.3	18.0
Sweetwater	8.9	0.7	1.0	7.8	18.4
Fremont	6.5	1.1	1.0	6.8	15.5
Albany	5.8	0.1	1.0	2.8	9.8
Sheridan	10.7	1.2	1.0	6.0	18.9
Park	9.7	0.7	1.0	10.9	22.3

In terms of total Circulation, Campbell, followed by Sweetwater, were highest with 363,212 and 350,958 respectively. The lowest total was Albany County with 188,356. Campbell had, by far, the greater number of Reference Transactions – 108,656 and Albany County the least number with 2,674.²

As for Program Attendance, all of the six libraries had a 1.0 per capita figure. Visits to the library were led by Sweetwater (306,219) and Park (295,799). Albany County’s number was 90,988. Campbell and Sweetwater had over 720,000 Contacts and Albany County had 314,245.

Library Usage Conclusions

Of the four areas in which library usage is measured, Circulation data is the most reliable because the vast majority of libraries capture Circulation by machine. Thus, the data is not subject to human error and interpretation as are, for instance, Reference Transactions or Program Attendance.

The consultant’s experience has shown that the reasons for a library having a high circulation count are these:

- Emphasis on acquiring and maintaining a rather large collection of very popular, best seller type books
- Limit on the loan period to seven days for the most popular books

² Albany County Library staff has informed the consultants that they have been lax in recording reference transactions. A recent effort to be more attentive indicates that the annual reference transaction count could approach 12,000.

- Insistence on acquiring and maintaining a comparatively large collection of DVDs, especially popular movies, and new -books-on-CD
- Significance on merchandising of the collections
- Shelving that is not overly crowded with the top two shelves (on a 84-inch high upright) and bottom shelves as full as the middle three or four shelves
- Stress given to re-shelving recently returned materials to the shelves as rapidly as possible
- Refusal to maintain a large reference collection of print-on-paper materials
- Disallowance of reserved material, e.g. holds, to remain on the reserve shelf for more than one week.

Of course, the demographics of a service area can be a very important factor. The demographics that generally result in higher use of a public library are:

- Educational attainment level (the higher the level the greater the usage of the public library)
- Home ownership (as opposed to a lot of rental properties)
- Children under the age of 18 living at home (as opposed to singles or empty nesters).

Another key factor is the number of school age children and the quality of the services for children and teens.

CONCLUSIONS

The Albany County Public Library does not compare well with its peer group, at least from a statistical point-of-view. It is below average in terms of:

- Local income
- Total income
- Income per capita
- Salary and Benefit expenditures
- Library material expenditures
- Expenditures per capita
- Collection holdings
- Circulation, Reference Transactions, Visits, Program Attendance, and total Contacts
- Total staff.

What the numbers do not tell us is what impact the current library facility might have on some of the collected data. For example:

- If the building is significantly undersized the shelves may be overcrowded and materials harder to access
- Professional staff may be stretched too thinly over too many responsibilities and have inadequate working conditions
- Access to the building may be difficult for some and parking may be limited.

Without a doubt, budget reductions have had an impact on collection development and staffing.

We do not wish to attach too much emphasis on the results of this comparative analysis due to the financial disparity that exists between some of the counties and Albany County. However, the results should not be ignored. There is some information that suggests where improvements can – and may need to – be made.