

ALBANY COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY COMPARED WITH EIGHT PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN UNIVERSITY COMMUNITIES

Using data from the latest editions of the *Public Library Data Service*¹ published by the Public Library Association (PLA) and the *American Library Directory*² published by Information Today, Inc., the consultants have developed a set of statistics that compares the Albany County Public Library with eight other libraries. The nine libraries (Albany County plus eight) share these common elements:

- Each serves between 28,220 and 47,660 persons
- Each is located west of the Mississippi River
- Each has a large to medium sized university/college located within the service area boundaries.

One element the nine libraries do not share is that of branch libraries. Albany County is the only one of the nine with branch libraries. In addition, only Albany County is a county library system. The other eight are all municipal libraries.

Here are the nine libraries, in descending order of their respective university populations:

¹ *Public Library Data Service Statistical Review 2008*, Chicago, Public Library Association, c2008.

² *American Library Directory*, Information Today, New Jersey

• Logan (UT) Public Library	24,500
• Cedar Falls (IA) Public Library	12,609
• Bozeman (MT) Public Library	12,338
• Prescott (AZ) Public Library	11,739
• Brookings (SD) Public Library	11,706
• Albany County Public Library	10,437
• Cape Girardeau (MO) Public Library	9,570
• Emporia (KS) Public Library	6,000
• Joplin (MO) Public Library	5,593

Only two of the nine libraries – Logan and Emporia – reported data to the PLA and were thereby included in the 2008 edition of *Public Library Data Service*. Therefore, the data elements are not consistently present, making comparisons less meaningful than they otherwise would be. Nonetheless, the consultants believe that some quite valid comparisons can be made. Moreover, from those comparisons, some meaningful indicators for the Albany County Public Library can be noted.

In addition, the data for Albany County used for these comparisons was provided by the Library or taken from information compiled and published by the Wyoming State Library.

FINANCIAL DATA AND COMPARISONS

The consultants looked at local income, other income, and total income as well as income per capita.

On the expenditure side of the ledger we studied personnel, materials, and other plus expenditures per capita.

First, let us examine the income data of the nine libraries.

Income

Local income ranged from a high of nearly \$1.47 million at Cape Girardeau to a low of \$640,821 at Albany County. The average of the six libraries for which data was available was \$976,551.

The high for Other income was \$426,000 at Bozeman while Cape Girardeau reported \$19,000. Again, data was available six libraries, producing an average Other income figure of \$164,836. Albany County reported just under \$207,000 in Other income.

When looking at Total income Prescott jumps to the top with a reported total of \$2,229,473, followed by Cape Girardeau’s \$1,486,359 and Logan at \$1,483,767. At the other end rests Albany County with \$847,724 and Emporia with \$876,802. Of the seven libraries for which data was available the average Total income was \$1,296,828.

It is logical to assume that libraries serving larger populations would have larger incomes (and expenditures). Therefore, the per capita figures take on added importance – they level the playing field to some degree.

Table 7.1
Income Per Capita³

<i>library</i>	<i>income</i>
Prescott	\$54.68
Cape Girardeau	\$43.16
Brookings	\$33.44
Logan	\$31.13
Emporia	\$27.03
Albany County	\$26.24
Bozeman	\$25.31

Expenditures

Salaries almost always account for the largest share of any service organization’s operating budget. It is no different for public libraries.

Prescott expended over \$1.27 million for salaries, Bozeman \$903,268. On the other hand Cedar Falls spent just over \$407,000 and Emporia \$423,438. Albany County’s salary budget was \$467,905.

Of the three libraries for which expenditures for employee benefits was available, Logan had an expense line of \$196,368, Emporia \$79,448, and Albany County \$101,436.

As for averages, \$648,548 was the figure for salaries and \$125,751 for benefits.

³ The eight libraries used for these comparisons did not always report the same data to the two publications we used for this Chapter. Therefore, there are tables that includes only the data that was reported.

For library materials (all formats) the range from high to low was slightly less than \$222,000 for Logan to not quite \$76,500 for Albany County. The average of the seven libraries for which data was available was \$139,104.

Because other expenditures were available for only three of the nine libraries, the per capita expenditure data is of minimal value. Nevertheless:

Table 7.2
Expenditures Per Capita

<i>library</i>	<i>expenditures</i>
Logan	\$29.13
Albany County	\$25.49
Brookings	\$24.60

For purposes of the following two comparative evaluations, the consultant studied the collection holdings and the staff.

LIBRARY COLLECTION HOLDINGS

The collection sizes include all formats. The average collection size of the libraries is 127,401. Logan’s collection is the largest of nine – 174,080, followed by Prescott with 162,045 items. The smaller of the nine are Emporia (99,974) and Cape Girardeau (111,537). Albany County’s collection total is 117,257 items.

On a per capita basis Table 3 shows how the libraries rank.

Table 7.3
Central Library Holdings Per Capita

<i>library</i>	<i>holdings</i>
Brookings	4.05
Prescott	3.97
Logan	3.65
Albany County	3.63
Cape Girardeau	3.24
Emporia	3.08
Bozeman	2.71
Joplin	2.52

The average per capita figure is 3.32.

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 usually 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 nine libraries – when factoring the total collection size with the annual circulation – produced an average rate of 3.04. That is, the public, in the course of one year, used every item held by the nine libraries just over three times each.

The library with the highest rate was Prescott with 4.68, followed by Logan, Joplin, and Bozeman each with a turnover rate in excess of 4.00. At the other end of the scale the lowest rate was Emporia with 1.79, followed by Albany County with 1.83. The other three libraries were in the low 2.0s. Table 4 provides the information for all nine libraries.

Table 7.4
Collection Turnover Rate

<i>library</i>	<i>turnover rate</i>
Prescott	4.68
Logan	4.40
Joplin	4.14
Bozeman	4.04
Brookings	2.23
Cedar Falls	2.19
Cape Girardeau	2.06
Albany County	1.83
Emporia	1.79

Library Staff

For this study the staffs of the libraries have been divided between Professional and Other. Staff for the two branch libraries operated by Albany County has not been included in the numbers.

Logan has the largest professional staff (9.00 FTE). Cape Girardeau, with 3.00 FTE, has the smallest professional staff. Albany County's professional FTE is 4.35. The average is 5.31 FTE.

Other staff (FTE) ranges from 6.00 at Prescott (lowest) to 26.50 at Joplin (highest). The average is 14.89. Albany County has 20.25 FTE. Table 5 provides the total staff counts for all nine libraries.

Table 7.5
Total FTE Staff

<i>library</i>	<i>FTE staff</i>
Joplin	32.50
Bozeman	20.00
Cape Girardeau	19.00
Logan	18.30
Cedar Falls	18.00
Brookings	18.00
Emporia	18.00
Albany County	17.17
Prescott	13.40

Library Resources Conclusions

The size of the collections, especially the book collections, was considered for many years to be the true measure of quality library service. General consensus said 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 the most popular library collection materials format in many public libraries.

Another formerly held “sacred” measure was 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. 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 a good measure is the number of staff per 1,000 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 1,747. That means that for every 1,747 people in the service area there is one FTE staff member to assist them. The 1,747 figure is one of the “best” ratio of the nine libraries if one is of the opinion that more staff per persons served equals better service. The “worst” number is 3,043, which is for the Prescott Library. The average of the nine libraries is 1,993.

It is logical to ask if Prescott’s staff–to–persons served ratio is the “worst” then why are their turnover rate and circulation per capita (18.61) the highest of the nine libraries? There can be several reasons for that. More about usage comes next in this report.

LIBRARY USAGE

Usage of a public library is typically measured by the following statistics:

- 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 statistical complications gives us what we at Godfrey’s Associates call contacts. That is, contacts is the sum of circulation + reference transactions + program attendance + visits.

Table 6 is a summary of the five measurements on a per capita basis. It must be noted that Circulation is the only one of the five measurements that data was available for all nine libraries.

In terms of total Circulation, Logan, followed by Prescott, were highest with 765,256 and 758,787, respectively. The lowest totals were Emporia with 178,749 and Albany County with 214,257.

Logan had, by far, the greater number of Reference Transactions – 42,632 and Albany County the least number with 2,985.

Table 7.6
Library Usage Measurements Per Capita

<i>library</i>	<i>circulation</i>	<i>reference transactions</i>	<i>program attendance</i>	<i>visits⁴</i>	<i>contacts</i>
Logan	16.06	0.89	0.10	5.25	22.30
Bozeman	10.96				
Joplin	10.42				
Prescott	18.61				
Cedar Falls	7.46				
Cape Girardeau	6.67				
Emporia	5.51	0.78	0.77	6.77	13.83
Albany County	6.63	0.09	0.65	2.61	9.98
Brookings	9.02				

As for Program Attendance, Emporia’s 25,000 was a bit higher than Albany County’s 21,032. Logan had but 4,967.

Logan and Emporia were the leaders in visits to the library with, respectively, 250,191 and 219,504. Albany County’s number was 84,324.

Logan had over one million total Contacts (1,063,046), Emporia 448,681, and Albany County 322,598.

Library Usage Conclusions

Aside from Circulation data in Table 6, the balance of the other four comparisons is of minimal comparative value given the absence of reported data. Thus, our conclusions consider the “whys” of Circulation.

⁴ The number of branch libraries, their size, and the hours open will have an impact on the Visits count.

Circulation data is generally considered to be the most accurate measurement of all of the library usage data because for most libraries one item borrowed by a user equals one circulation. And, today, the vast majority of libraries have an automated circulation system that renders the data more reliable and less prone to clerical error in tabulations.

It has been the experience of the consultants 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
- Limiting the loan period to seven days for the most popular books
- Emphasis on acquiring and maintaining a comparatively large collection of DVDs, especially popular movies, and new books-on-CD
- Effective 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
- Emphasis on re-shelving recently returned materials to the shelves as rapidly as possible
- Not maintaining a large reference collection of print-on-paper materials
- Not allowing 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 this 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
- Central Library holdings
- Registrants as a percentage of the population
- Central Library circulation, reference transactions, visits, and total contacts
- Professional 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 over to many responsibilities and have inadequate working conditions
- Access to the building may be difficult for some and parking may be limited.

Certainly budget reductions have had an impact on collection development and staffing.