How Catalogers Learn: Illuminating the Esoteric

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Learning outcomes

- Audience will learn general trends in cataloging training throughout the years

- Potential catalogers will learn common expectations from employers in terms of prior experience as well as what they may expect in their training

- Administrators and those responsible for training catalogers will learn common issues catalogers have experienced during their training
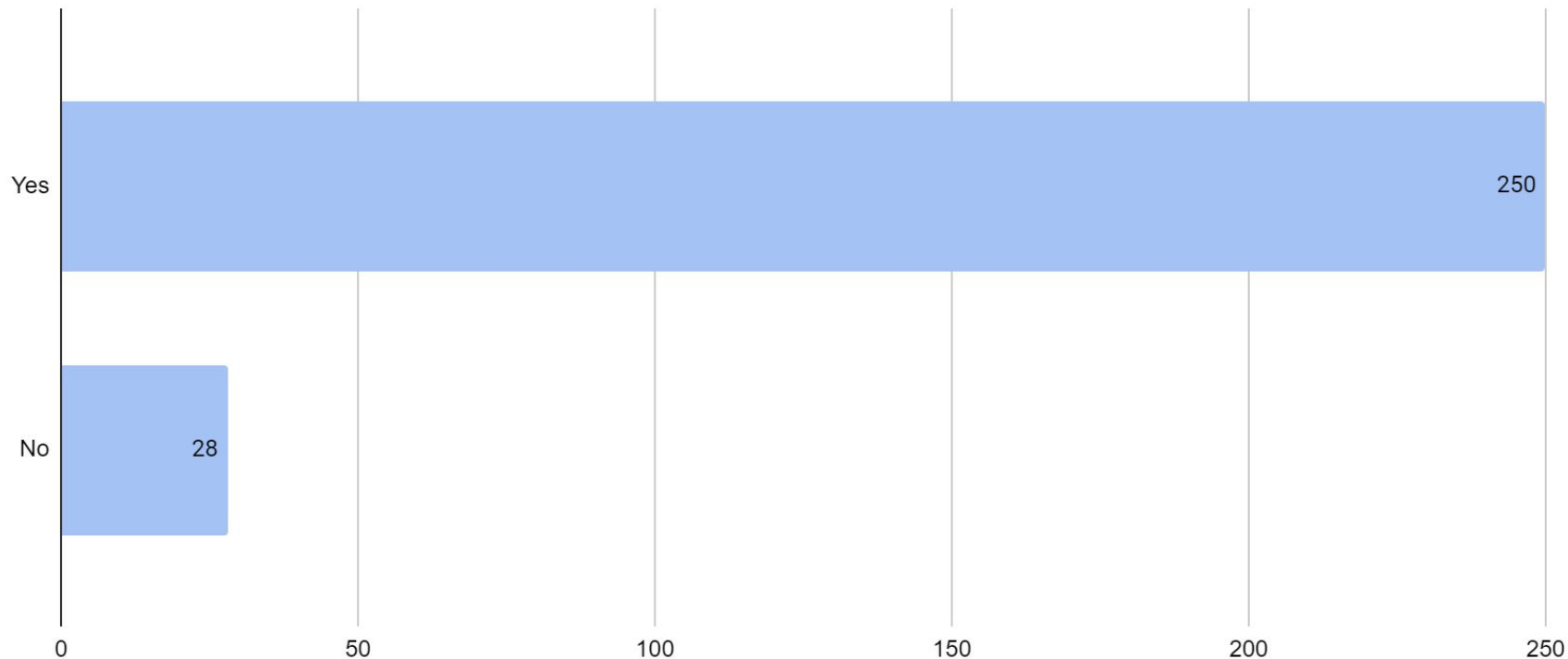
Origins of the project

- Conversations with colleagues revealed differences in training methods for cataloging

- Colleagues with 30+ years in cataloging observed various training methods throughout the years at Binghamton University

- What does the cataloging community have to say about these matters?

Method:

- Developed a survey of 13 questions

- Posted on Autocat, MOUG, and ALA connect

- The questions collected data from professionals who devote at least 50% of their time to cataloging.

- At the beginning of the survey, I defined the terms "cataloging" and "original cataloging" as meaning the creation of original bibliographic records in MARC21 format.

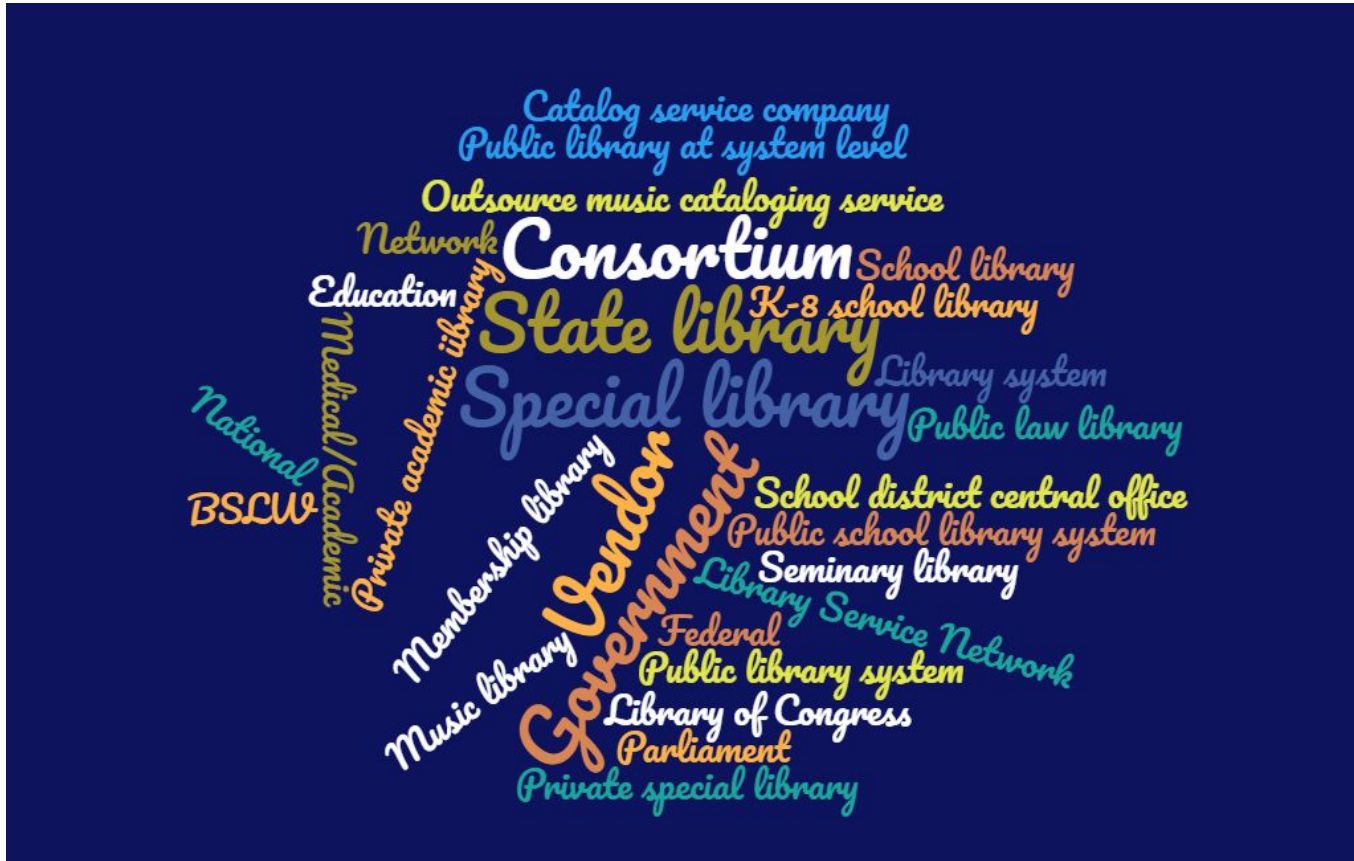- Received 349 responses at varying degrees of completion
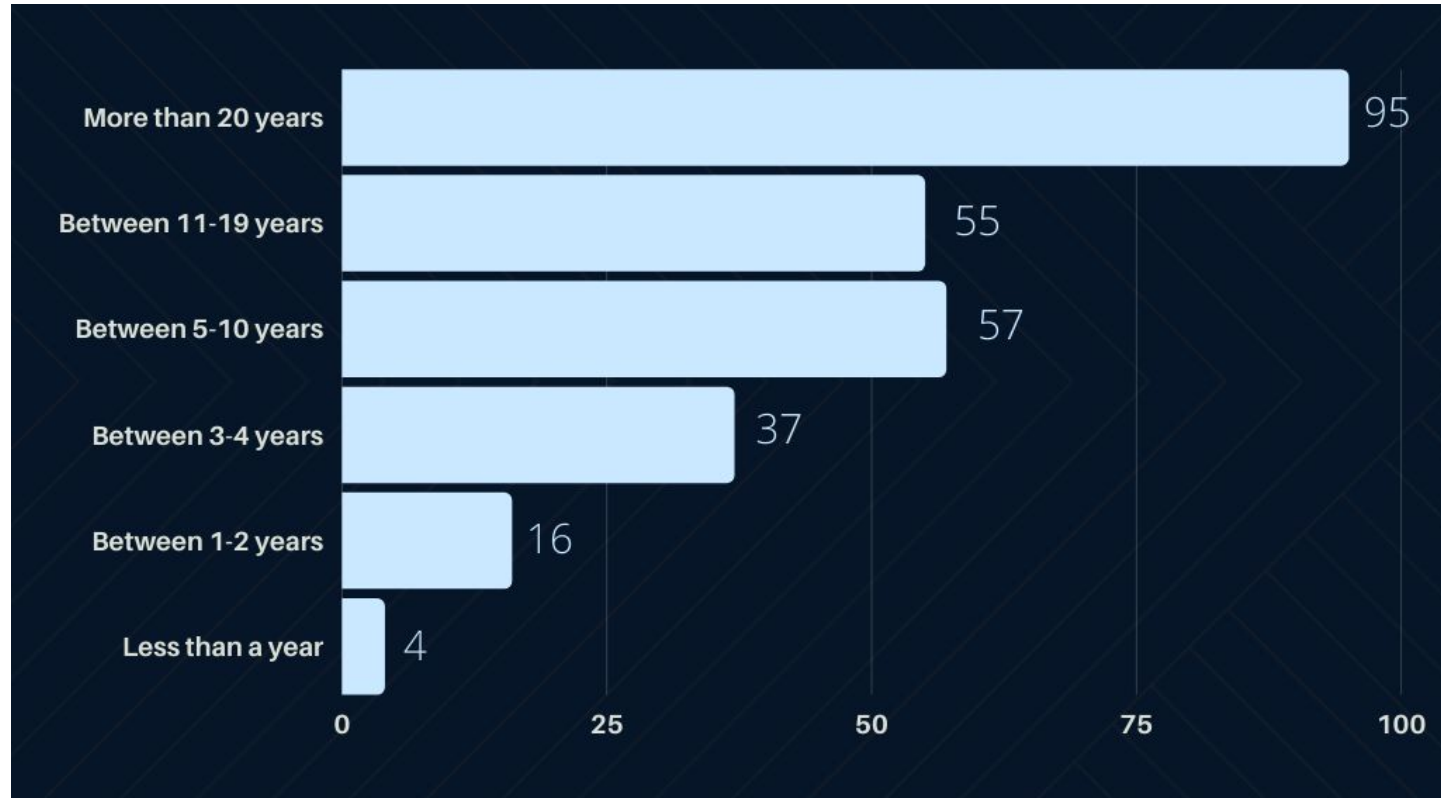
Do you have a Master's in Library Science?

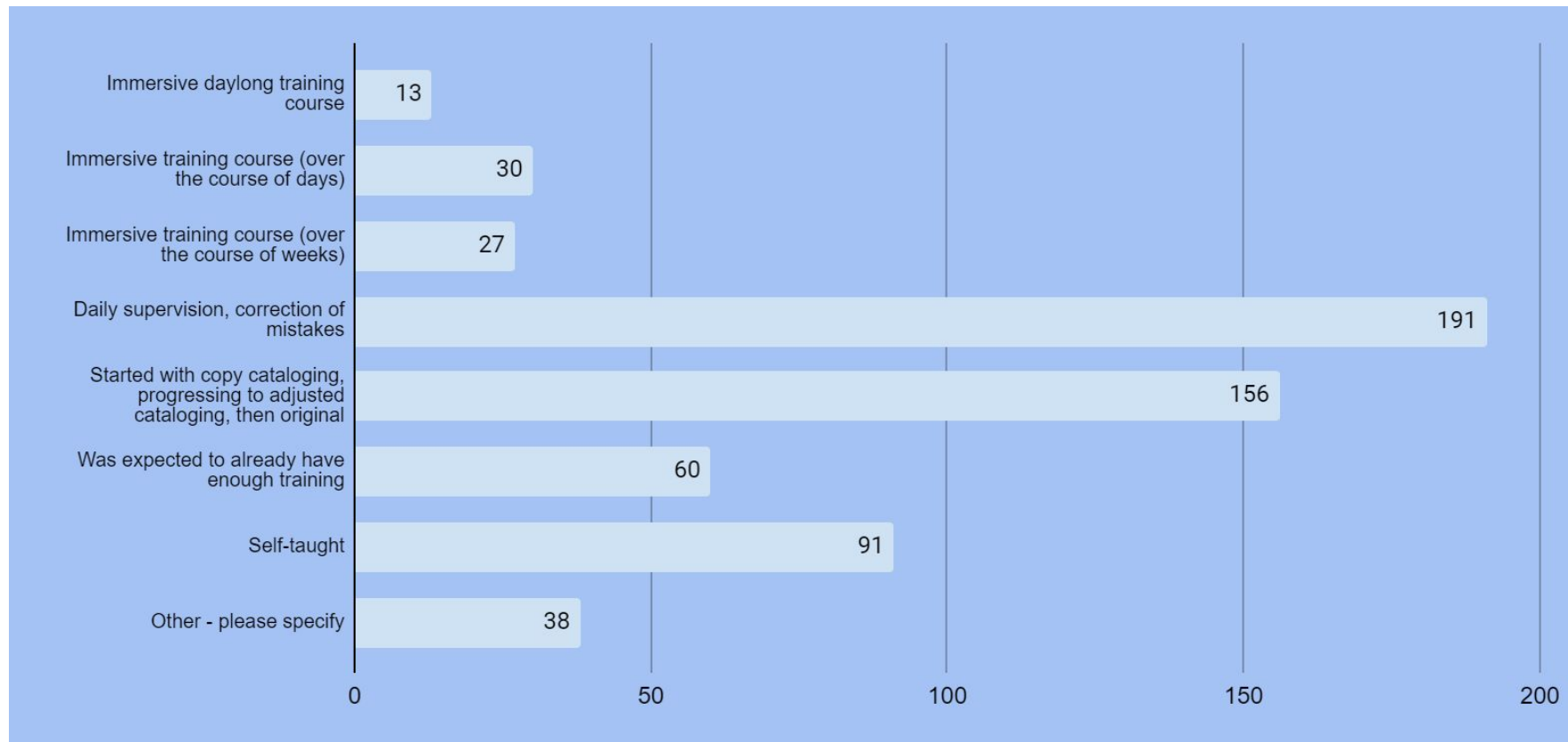# What type of environment do you work in?

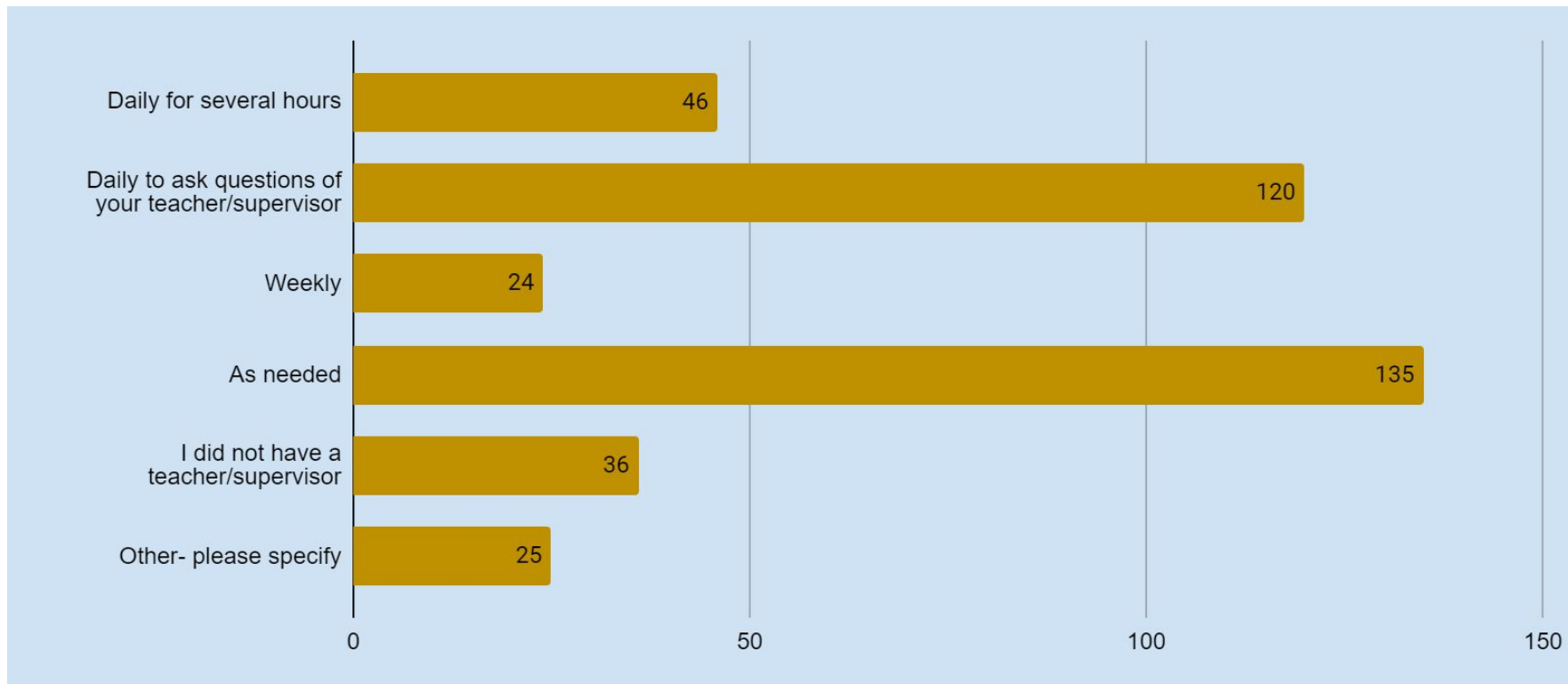# What type of environment do you work in? "Other"

How long have you been involved in the field of cataloging?

In your first cataloging position, how did you begin your local training in cataloging and classification? Select all that apply.

Category	Value
Immersive daylong training course	13
Immersive training course (over the course of days)	30
Immersive training course (over the course of weeks)	27
Daily supervision, correction of mistakes	191
Started with copy cataloging, progressing to adjusted cataloging, then original	156
Was expected to already have enough training	60
Self-taught	91
Other - please specify	38

In the first few months of your first cataloging position, how often did/do you work one-on-one with your teacher/supervisor? Select all that apply.
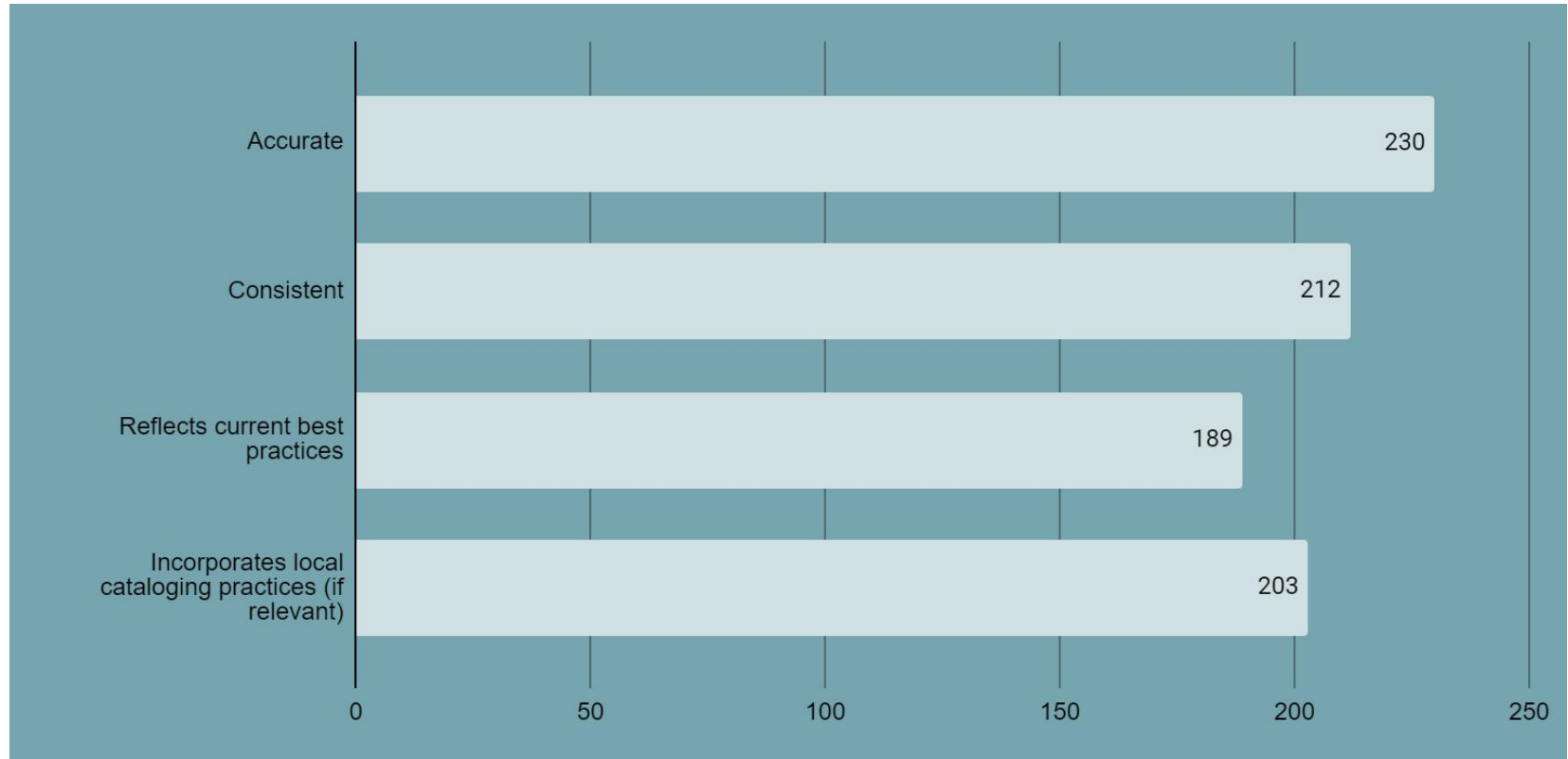

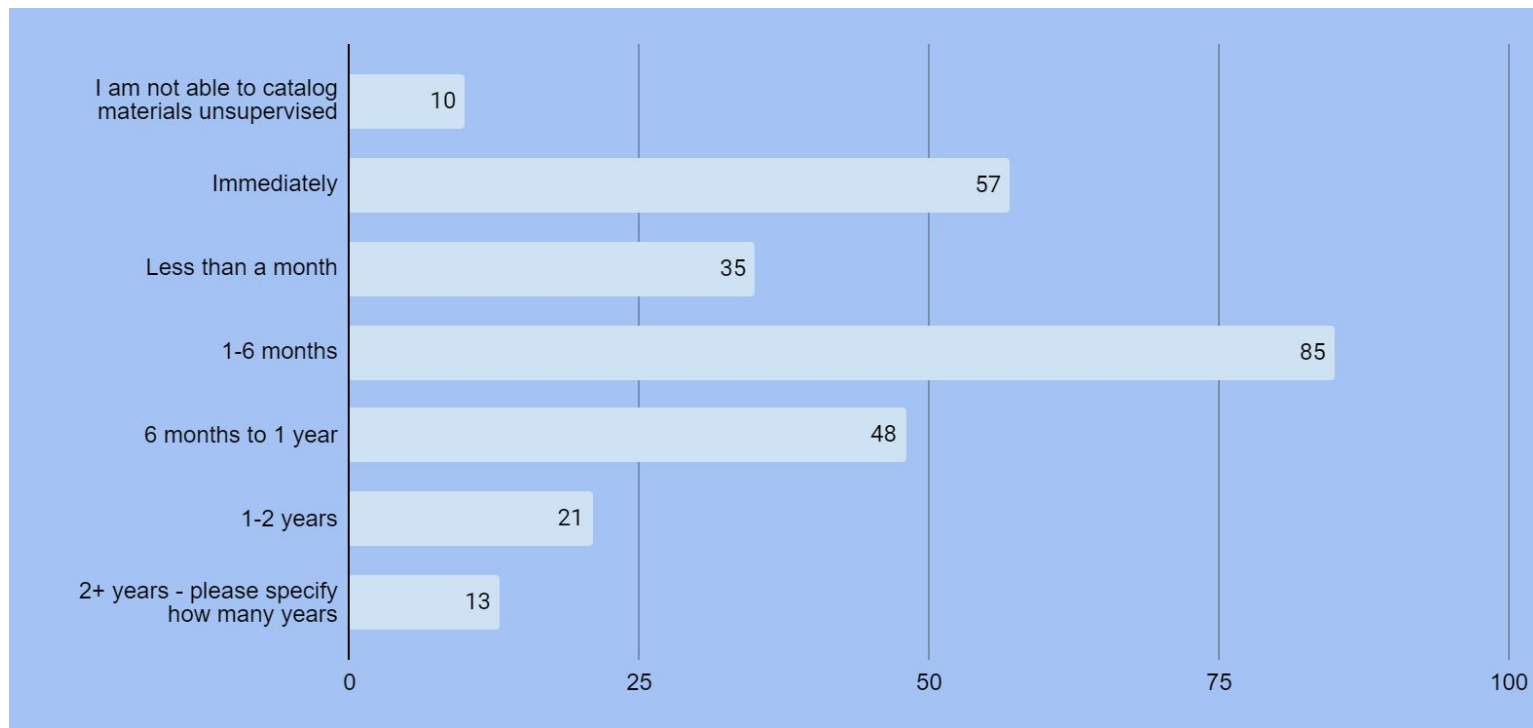| Category	Value
Daily for several hours	46
Daily to ask questions of your teacher/supervisor	120
Weekly	24
As needed	135
I did not have a teacher/supervisor	36
Other- please specify	25

How was your training progress monitored? Select all that apply.

Have you received feedback from others that your cataloging was...

At what point in your first cataloging position were you considered able to create original catalog records unsupervised?

Onboarding for cataloging positions can include unforeseen obstacles. When starting your career as a cataloger, what difficulties were most prevalent for you?

Most common issue:

57 out of 242 responded that a lack of training, supervision, or support in cataloging was the most prevalent issue in their onboarding.

15 responded that they had no guidance or training at all.

Some key responses:

"Maybe just having a consistent mentor to learn from since a cataloger can't learn everything in library school."

"The significant difference between academic coursework and day-to-day cataloging, combined with an (unintended) lack of mentorship or formal onboarding."

6 out of 242 reported lack of available positions to be the most prevalent onboarding issue.

"I found it extremely difficult to be hired anywhere as a cataloger at all. Positions all seemed to either require an extremely entry-level clerk with no room for growth, or a person with several years' worth of training including a Master's, and copy + complex + original experience."

Options for prior experience:

**paraprofessional experience,
a cataloging and/or metadata class,
copy-cataloging experience,
a graduate assistantship,
adjusted cataloging experience.**

What percentage had no experience? 37, or 13% out of 275 had no experience.

What percentage had two or more of these aspects of prior experience? 165 out of 275, or 60% had two or more of these experiences.

What percentage had three or more of these aspects of prior experience? 84 out of 275, or 30% had three or more of these experiences.

What percentage had four or more of these? 28 out of 275, or 10% had four or more of these experiences.

Most common onboarding issues for those with over 30 years in cataloging (started in 1990 or earlier)

8- learning specific standards like AACR2 and MARC.

5- limited access to resources including OCLC, cataloging manuals, and reference resources.

4- lack of training

2- Lack of respect or trust in their abilities

Most common onboarding issues for those with 20-29 years in cataloging (started between 1991-2000)

11- lack of training

4- abundance of sources to look through

4- technology issues

4- lack of available positions

3- lack of access to cataloging tools

Most common onboarding issues for those with 11-19 years in cataloging (started between 2001-2009)

13- lack of training

7- learning local practices

5- having enough time / balancing with other duties

Most common onboarding issues for those with 10 years or less in cataloging (started in 2010 or later)

24- Lack of training

23- Learning specific standards

14- learning local practices

Analysis:

- Lack of institutional support or access to a supervisor was less of an issue for those who started in 1990 or earlier.

- Loss of technical services positions, particularly cataloging

- Shrinking budgets

- "As our profession evolves, many of us have experienced being asked to take on additional responsibilities." -Sudden Position Guide to Cataloging and Metadata
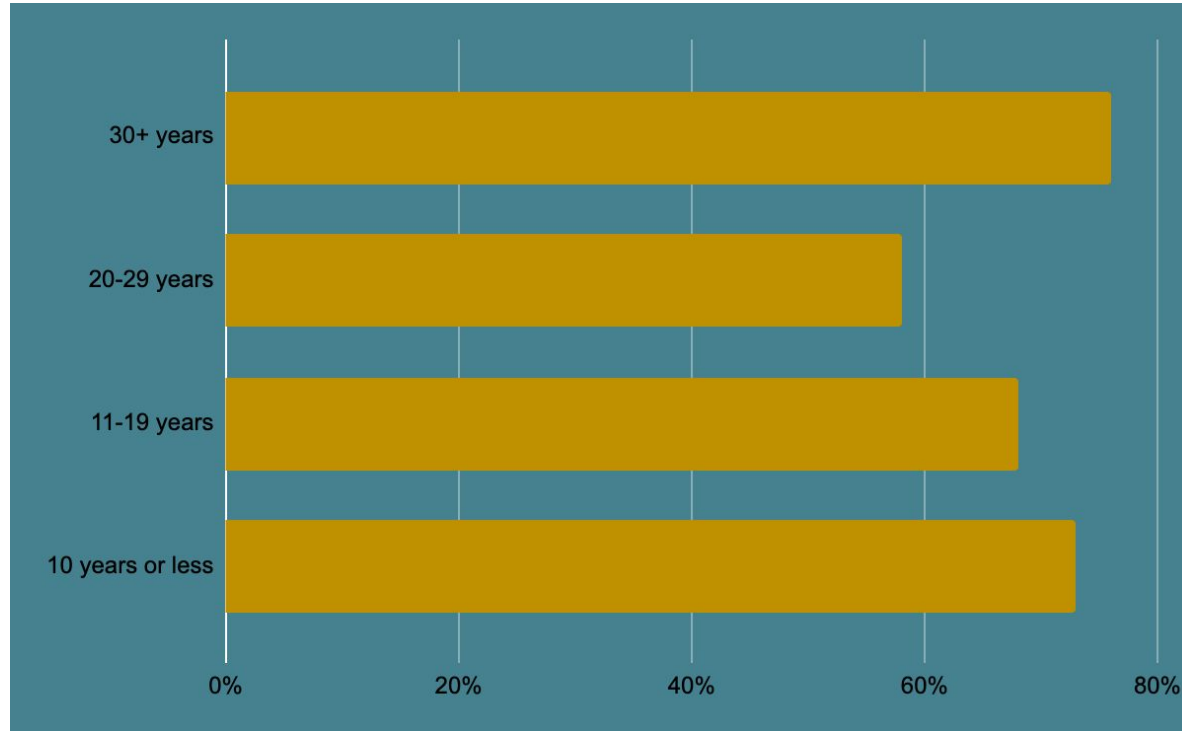
Are catalogers frequently expected to already have enough training after only having coursework in cataloging?

- "...unless more credits are required to graduate or unless students can acquire some of the more basic coursework at the undergraduate level through a recognized major or minor concentration in at least half of the colleges and universities across the country, education for cataloging in the graduate LIS programs is likely to become even more general, leaving entry level catalogers increasingly lost at sea and requiring more training on the job." -Janet Swan Hill

Are catalogers frequently expected to already have enough training after only having coursework in cataloging?
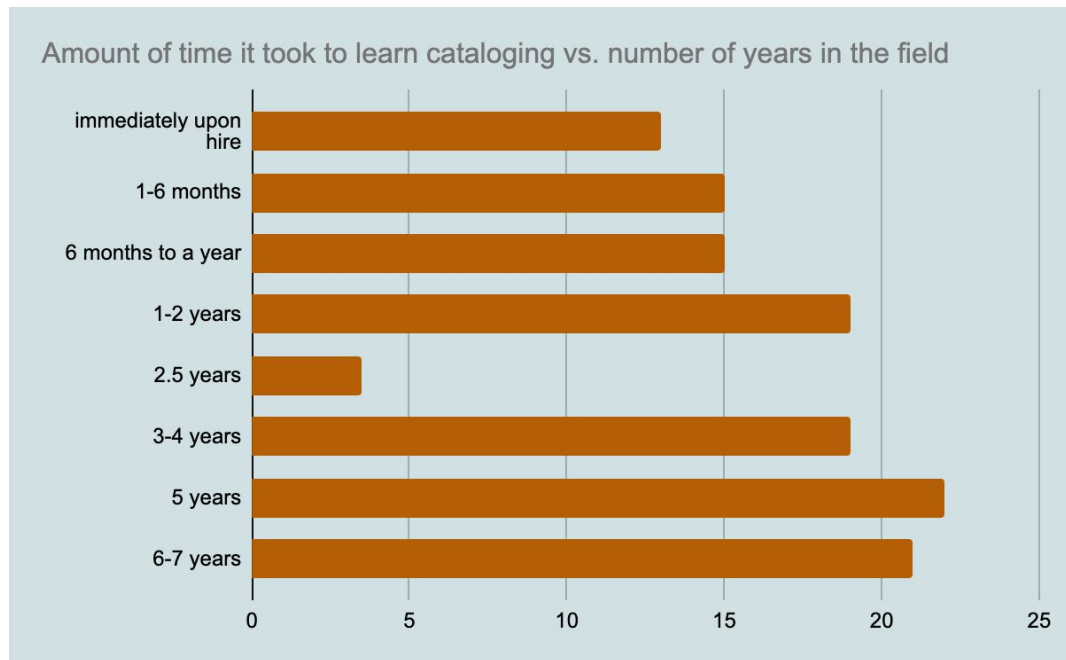
- 186 survey respondents reported that they had coursework in cataloging and metadata prior to beginning their first cataloging position.

- Out of 62 answers where respondents stated they were expected to have enough training when beginning, 7 responded with having merely "coursework in cataloging/metadata".

- 42 out of 62 who were expected to have enough training had both coursework in cataloging/metadata and other experiences such as a graduate assistantship, paraprofessional experience, and copy-cataloging experience.

Does reduction of cataloging courses mean that less catalogers have had coursework in cataloging and metadata?

Are catalogers learning to catalog faster given several factors, including the availability of online resources?

- Two sources described the amount of time spent learning cataloging to take 2 years. One source was in the time of card catalogs. One source was from 2005. What do the survey numbers say?

Amount of time it took to learn cataloging vs. number of years in the field

Category	Value
immediately upon hire	13
1-6 months	15
6 months to a year	15
1-2 years	19
2.5 years	3.5
3-4 years	19
5 years	22
6-7 years	21

Conclusion - some common themes

- Lack of training

- Budget cuts

- Cataloging positions generally require a great deal of prior experience

- Cataloging courses are generally taken prior to a cataloging position, which has remained consistent despite reduction in cataloging courses

- Catalogers generally require on the job training even after prior graduate coursework

- Learning standards is a great obstacle ; so is the sheer amount of resources to navigate

- "A well-prepared cataloging librarian needs a tripartite education. First, he or she should have both beginning and advanced level coursework, including laboratories, taken in an academic program. Second, once graduated, academic coursework should be followed by on-the-job training- training that is extensive if her or his employer has complex cataloging operations and systems, or less so if in-house cataloging is limited and uncomplicated. Third, on-the-job training should be augmented on a regular basis by continuing education offerings that suit the libraries' and the catalogers' needs and interests, and keep their knowledge up-to-date." Sheila Intner, Persistent Issues in Cataloging Education

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