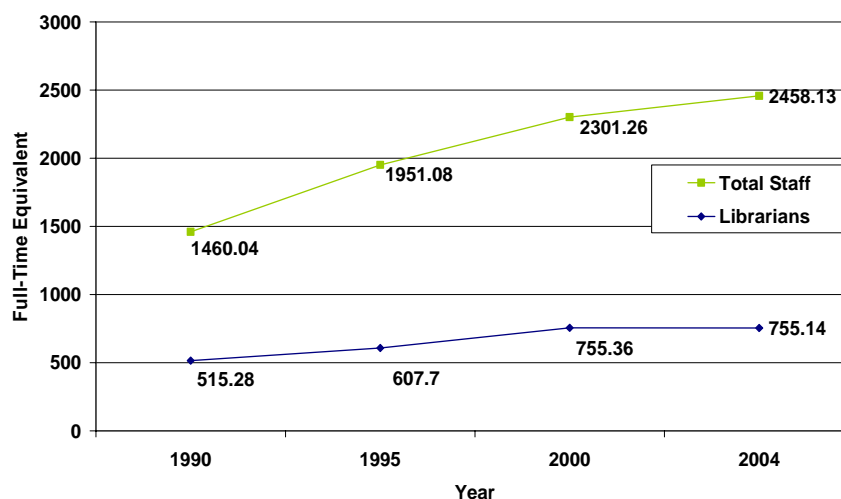


Is there a librarian shortage or surplus? This is a debatable question. Studies such as the LRS's *Retirement, Retention, and Recruitment: The Future of Librarianship in Colorado* describe the high number of librarians who are expected to retire in the next five years. In regard to the profession of librarianship, the Bureau of Labor Statistics states that "Employment of librarians is expected to grow about as fast as the average for all occupations over the 2002–12 period. However, job opportunities are expected to be very good because a large number of librarians are expected to retire in the coming decade, creating many job openings. Also, the number of people going into this profession has fallen in recent years, resulting in more jobs than applicants in some cases."

Ask a graduating LIS student and you might hear a different story. An article written by Rachel Holt and Adrienne Stock for *Library Journal* examines what they call the "Entry Level Gap." They mention the relative scarcity of entry level jobs for new graduates. Additionally, they point to a more disturbing trend in the field – the "growing tendency of libraries to hire individuals for staff positions who are not MLS librarians at all."

**Chart 1: Total FTE Staff and Librarians in Colorado Public Libraries, 1990-2004**



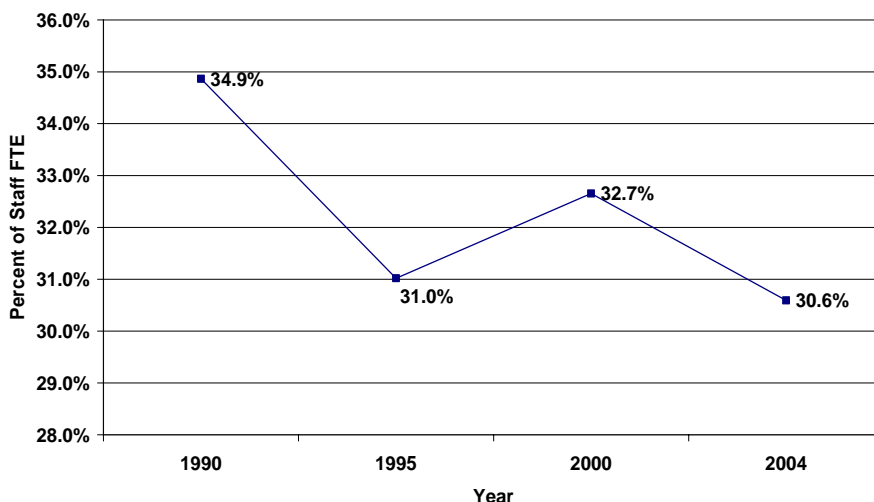
While further research might be needed to better address the question of whether today's library students will find it easy or difficult to obtain a position, we have plenty of data that look at how "librarians" (both MLS and non-MLS) have fared in Colorado's public libraries over the past fourteen years.

Chart 1 shows the total number of FTE (full-time equivalent) staff at Colorado's public libraries for the 100 libraries for which data are available as far back as 1990. While the number of FTE staff has increased by nearly one thousand in the past fourteen years – an increase of over 68 percent – the number of FTE librarians has only increased by around 240, or 47 percent.



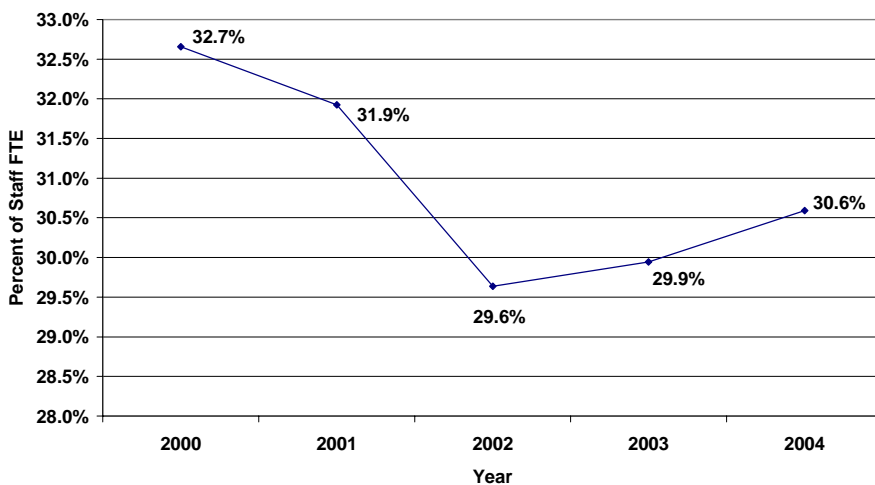
Chart 2 looks at this information another way, by examining the number of FTE librarians as a percent of total staff FTE. In 1990, 34.9 percent of staff time in Colorado's public libraries was provided by librarians. Last year, the portion of librarian time in the same libraries was down to 30.6 percent, a twelve percent decrease for this ratio, and a

**Chart 2: Librarian FTE as Percent of Total Staff FTE, 1990-2004**



disconcerting trend. In an era when technology is being used in libraries in large part to eliminate or decrease the number of repetitive tasks normally done by paraprofessionals, the expectation might be the opposite. As these tasks are more quickly done with the aid of technology, fewer non-professional employees should be needed for these tasks. By extension, the ratio of professionals to total staff should increase. The opposite appears to be happening. More staff members are being hired, but they are less likely to be librarians than they were in 1990, before most of this time-saving technology was available.

**Chart 3: Librarian FTE as Percent of Total Staff FTE, 2000-2004**



There is a silver lining to this apparent cloud of discouraging data. When viewing only the last five years' worth of data, things appear to be on the upswing for librarians. In 2000, 32.7 percent of staff time in Colorado's public libraries was provided by librarians. Last year's number, 30.6 percent, is significantly lower than that, but it is

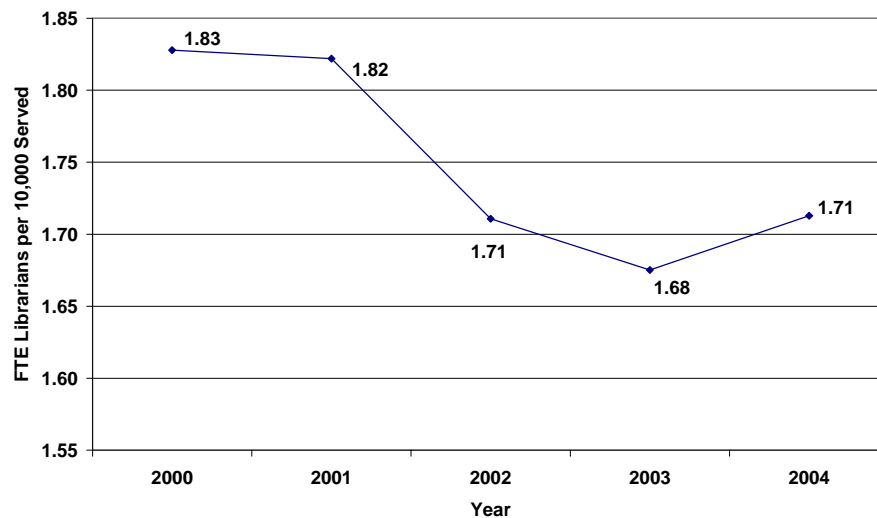


higher than 2003's number, which in turn was higher than that for 2002 (see Chart 3). In 2002, when budget cuts swept the state's libraries, only 29.6% of staff time in Colorado's public libraries was served by librarians – the lowest such ratio since 1987. Colorado's public libraries are far from economically flourishing today, but they seem to be recovering, at least in terms of librarian time.

Another way to approach this is by looking at the number of librarians per 10,000 served – how many public librarians are out there for every ten thousand people (See Chart 4)? In 2000, there were 1.83 librarians for every 10,000 people in the state – in other words, one librarian for every 5,471 people. Last year, this ratio was down to 1.71 – one librarian for every 5,838 people. Again, there is improvement over the last year, but there is still a long way to go to catch up to 2000 levels.

Only time, and further studies, will tell whether we are currently experiencing a librarian shortage or a surplus, but existing data have a story to tell. Librarians currently make up a smaller percentage of library staff than they did in 1990 or 2000, and there are fewer librarians per capita than there were in 2000. While the situation may be getting better, there is still considerable room for improvement.

**Chart 4: FTE Librarians per 10,000 Served, 2000-2004**



**Sources:**

Retirement, Retention, and Recruitment: The Future of Librarianship in Colorado.

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Colorado Public Library Statistics available at <http://www.lrs.org/pubstats.asp>.

Note: 2004 data is preliminary and hasn't gone through the Federal data submission process/edit checks.

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