

“BUT WHY CAN’T I SEE THAT?”

EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF ACCESS RESTRICTIONS ON RESEARCHERS

Katrina Windon, Collections Management & Processing Unit Head, University of Arkansas Special Collections

DiAnna Hemsath, Archivist, University of Nebraska Medical Center McGoogan Health Sciences Library

Elizabeth Russell, Senior Archivist, Sisters of Providence/Providence Health

Ashlyn Velte, Senior Processing Archivist, CU Boulder Libraries

Veronica Denison, Digital Archivist & Special Collections Librarian, Rhode Island College

SAA P&C Steering Committee, 2021-2024



RESEARCH CONTEXT/PROBLEM STATEMENT

- Follow up from [Winton and Tang article](#) from 2019
 - Need to understand the impact of archival access restrictions on researchers in the United States
 - Fill in gap in literature
 - Case studies on access restrictions (nothing across multiple repositories)
 - User studies on finding aids
 - User studies on single user groups (historians)
- Research question:
How are researchers impacted by access restrictions and what strategies can archives use to mitigate any negative impacts?



RESEARCH METHODS: SURVEY AND INTERVIEWS

SURVEY

Distribution

- Professional listservs and newsletters
- Personal networks (LinkedIn)
- Snowball method- encouraged anyone to share the survey

Survey Design

- Qualtrics
- Primarily optional questions
- 10-30 minutes
- 60 days total

INTERVIEWS

- Selection
- Interview design
 - Scripted, with room to improvise
 - Two-person interview teams
 - Not recorded
- Coding
- Anonymization

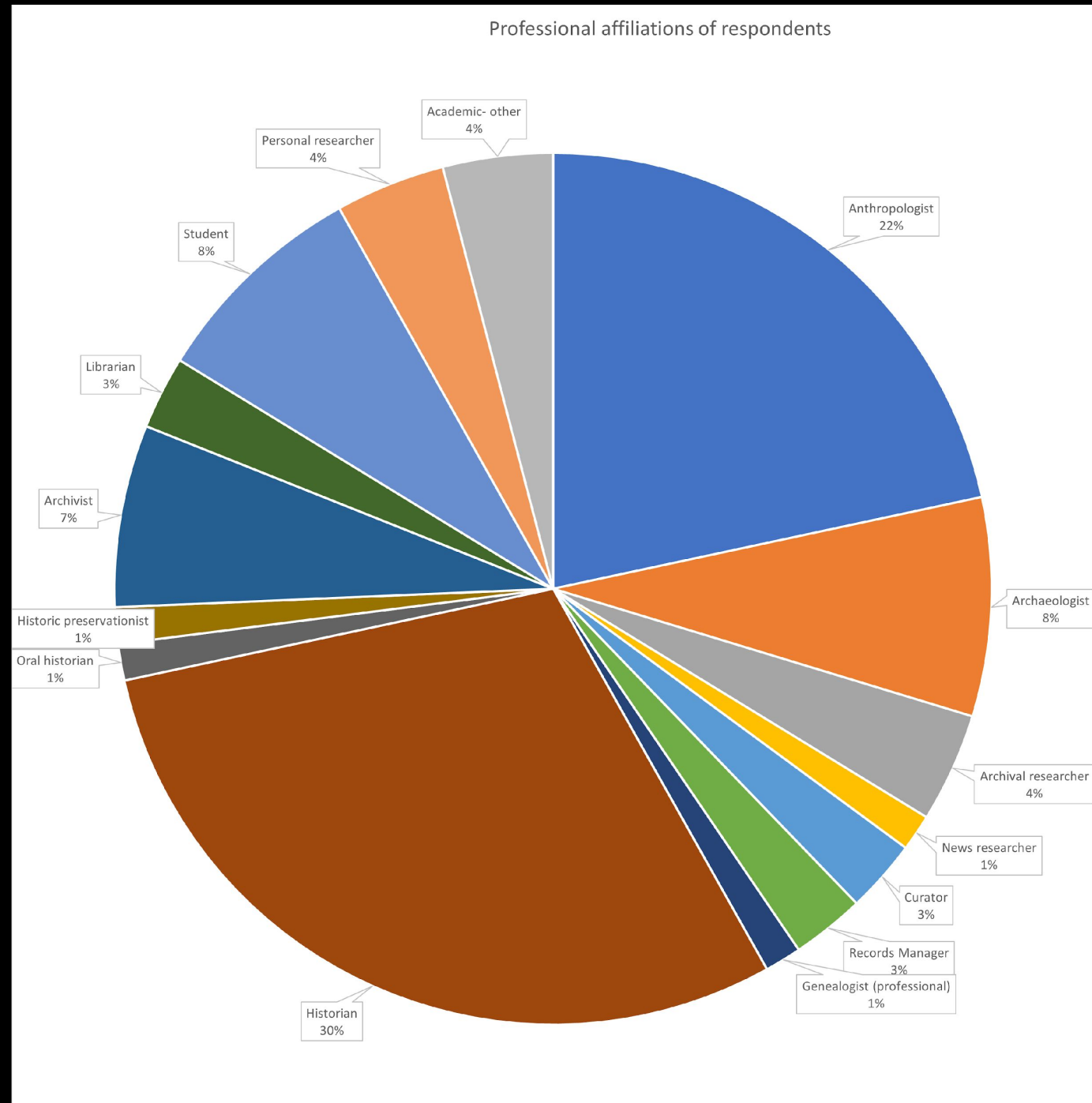
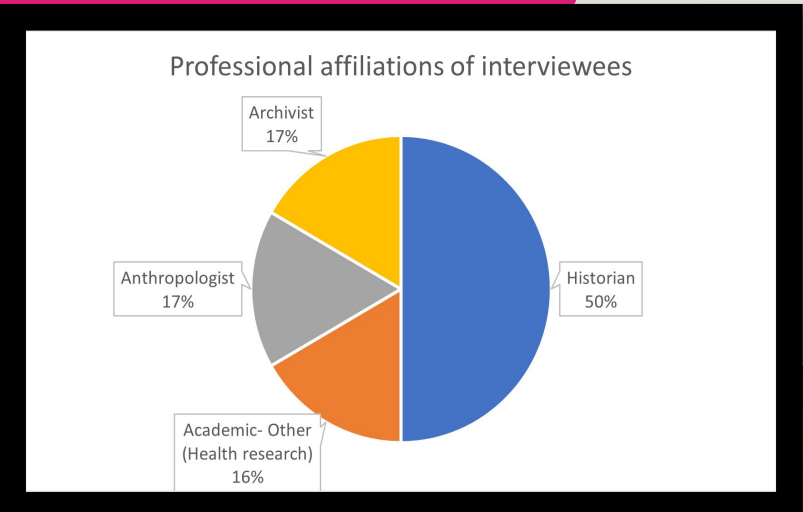
SURVEY AND INTERVIEW RESPONSES

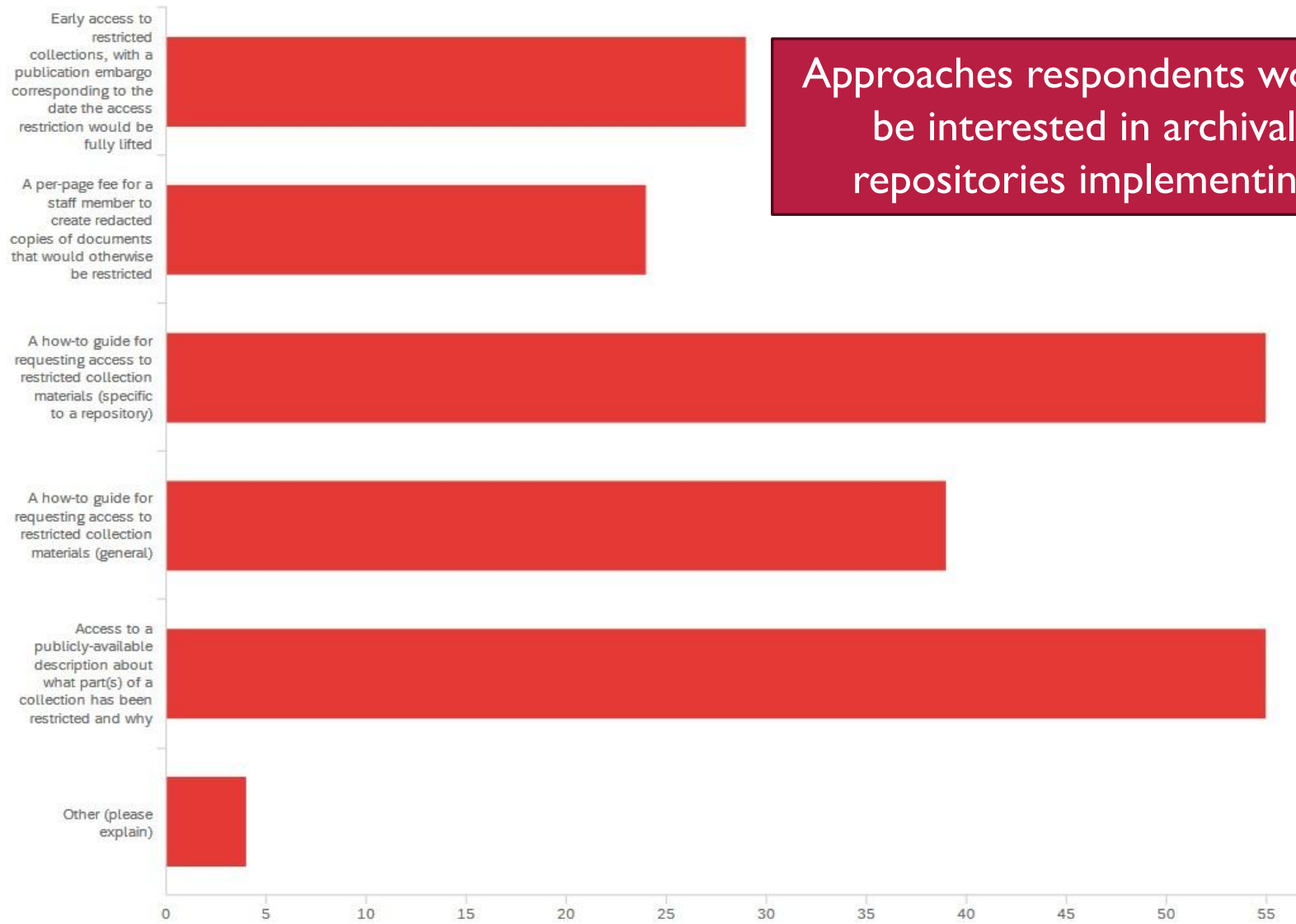
Survey

- 74 usable responses

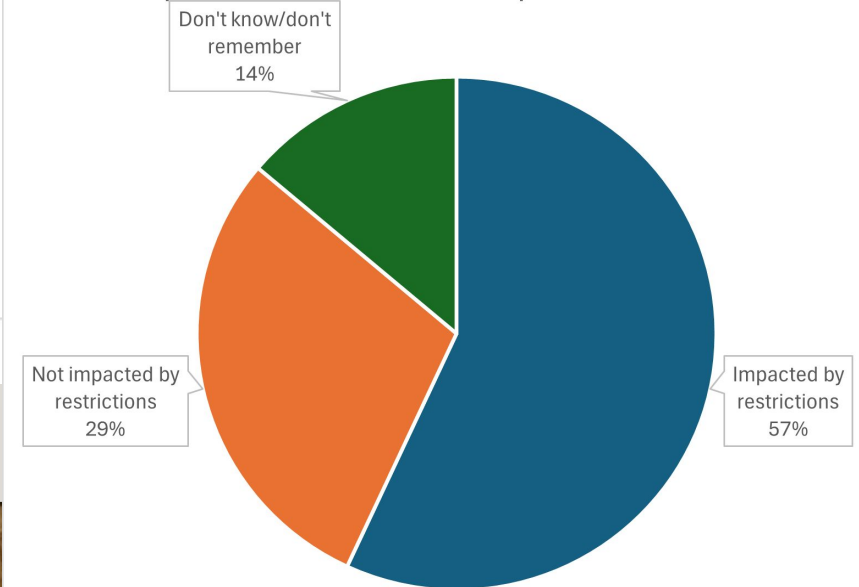
Interviews

- 6 total





Impact of restrictions on respondents' research



FINDINGS: SUMMARY

FINDINGS: THEMES



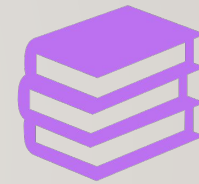
Transparency

Archival description
Archivist and institutional
communications
Policies



Consistency

Decisions that follow policies
Restriction exemptions applied
equally
All staff members on the same
page



Impacts on research

Time conducting research
Changes in behavior based on
experience
Self-censorship
Finding information elsewhere

CONCLUSION: ARCHIVIST ACTIONS

- Explain access restrictions in finding aids
- Explain access restriction procedures on website and in communication
- Where possible, apply restrictions consistently
- Pay attention to restrictions at other repositories
- Re-examine restrictions to apply current best practices and privacy law