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This study examines the availability of community information at public libraries through programming. The study analyzed the websites of nine public library systems in North Carolina to determine what, if any, programs were offered that provided community information. Programming information on the websites was examined to find programs containing five types of community information: adult education, business and professional information, government services information, health information, and job and career information. The study findings show that while population size and operating income have a small impact on the amount of community information programming, the amount and type of community information programming present is largely dependent on the interest of the particular library system studied.

Headings:

     Public Libraries

     Community Information Services

THE AVAILABILITY OF COMMUNITY INFORMATION AT PUBLIC LIBRARIES
THROUGH PROGRAMMING

by
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Introduction

In everyday life, people often encounter a need for information about their community and its resources. This information, however, is often dispersed among the different government agencies and non-governmental organizations that offer services to a particular community. Public libraries have the ability to aggregate and present this information in a meaningful way. Also, as noted by Durrance and Schneider (1996), "the public library is one of a few institutions in every community which welcomes all citizens" (paragraph 18). As providers and organizers of information, and as organizations charged with serving their entire community, public libraries are in a unique position to connect their patrons with community information.

The term "community information" has been defined in various ways, and usually quite broadly. The idea of providing community information through the public library is not a new one. In 1924, William S. Learned proposed that the public library should function as a "community intelligence service" (p. 12). He felt the public library could fill an immense range of information needs, serving more than recreational needs. Instead, the public library would be premier source for information within a community, offering everything from guides to local events to resources for various professionals.

Pettigrew, Durrance, and Unruh (2002) describe community information as "information about local resources [that] can help people deal with the myriad situations that arise through everyday living" (p. 894). A similar concept was termed "citizenship information" by Marcella and Baxter (2000): "citizenship information is information produced by or about national and local government, government departments and public sector organizations which may be of value to the citizen either as part of everyday life or in the participation by the citizen in government and policy formulation" (p. 9). Services offered by local governments, social service agencies and recreational clubs are often needed and desired by the public, but may be difficult to locate. Public libraries use community information to provide awareness of these services and connect patrons with the information they need.

For the purpose of this paper, community information will be defined as information that helps individuals negotiate their everyday lives and connect with resources and organizations within their community.

Most research and literature concerning community information has focused on two methods public libraries have employed to disperse the information: Information and Referral Services (I&R) and community networks. Childers (1976) defines I&R as "a service or services that help bring an individual into contact with resources (services, activities, information, advice, etc.) that will satisfy his needs" (p. 271). According to Durrance and Schneider (1996) I&R is a way for public libraries to expand their services by "facilitating the link between a person with a need and the resources *in the*

community, but outside the library which would meet that need" (emphasis in original).

The nature of I&R services changes dramatically depending on the library which houses

them. According to Childers (1976), some I&R services focus on specific population

groups or specific types of information, while others provide more general information.

An I&R service may simply refer patrons to other agencies for information, while others

may actually offer counseling or call another agency on a patron's behalf. To fulfill their

mission, I&R services "revolve around a *resource file*—a directory of agencies,

organizations, or individuals who can provide the resources that clients need" (Childers,

1976, p. 271, emphasis in original).

A more recent development in community information at public libraries is the

community network. Community networks are "electronic (or 'virtual') communities for

sharing critical information, communication, and entertainment" (Durrance and

Schneider, 1996). Essentially, they take community information and put it online in one

centralized location. Users access community networks for government information,

job postings, and health information, among other topics (Pettigrew, Durrance, and

Unruh, 2002, pp. 895-6).

This research will focus on the availability of community information at public

libraries. Existing literature evaluates and analyzes formal methods for sharing

community information. Most public libraries provide community information to their

patrons, but not always in a systematic way. If a public library is not part of a

community network and does not have an I&R service, how does it share community

information with citizens? How do programming, collection development, websites,

and other library services affect the availability of community information?

This research will evaluate the availability of community information at public

libraries: What types of community information are available at public libraries? How

much community information is disseminated through public libraries? How is

community information provided beyond community networks and I&R services?

Literature Review

Some research concerning community information has addressed the types of

community information sought by users. These studies have sought to examine what

various users identify as their community information needs and where they typically

seek this information. Other studies have focused on specific methods public libraries

have employed to provide centralized community information to their patrons. In

addition, literature has addressed the history of community information in public

libraries and the evaluation of community information services. Much of this research

examines Information and Referral services and online community information

networks. Information and Referral services "[maintain] an inventory of their

community's human services and [disseminate] that information to the public,"

(Pettigrew and Wilkinson, 1996, p. 374) while community information networks, or

community networks, "are electronic (or 'virtual') communities for sharing critical

information, communication, and entertainment" (Durrance and Schneider, 1996,

paragraph 2). This review establishes that there is a need for a generalized assessment of how community information is currently provided by public libraries.

In 1999, Durrance and Schneider wrote a piece on the history of community information in public libraries, to put emerging community networks in context and describe "what librarians can bring to [community networks]" (paragraph 4). They linked the arrival of community information services in libraries to social unrest and urban poverty in the 1960s. Both the development of Information and Referral services and the development of community information services were described. In addition, Durrance and Schneider (1999) discussed how libraries can make community information more accessible to patrons by "adding value" (paragraph 17). They asserted that "bringing [community] information together…needs to be complemented by personal assistance in making sense of it" (paragraph 17).

The evaluation of specific community information programs has been a frequent approach to studying community information in public libraries. In 1976, Childers published one such study. Childers' research addressed the Neighborhood Information Center Project, partially funded by the federal government in the early 1970s. The project's aim was to "demonstrate the feasibility of I&R in public libraries" (p. 274). Five city library systems participated. Information and Referral (I&R) is one method of providing community information, and is defined by Childers (1976) as "a service or services that help bring an individual into contact with resources (services, activities, information, advice, etc.) that will satisfy his needs" (p. 271). Childers's study aimed to

determine the success and implications of the Neighborhood Information Center

Project. The research consisted of visits to the participating libraries, interviews of

library staff and library users, and an examination statistics and reports generated by

the various libraries. The study author noted that each library provided a different set

of services and had different attitudes about how the I&R service related to other library

functions. Childers (1976) suggested that the success of I&R services depended on the

amount of publicity devoted to the project. In conclusion, the researcher argued that

"the practice of I&R in libraries would be considerably enhanced by a usable body of

empirical data" (p. 287), including "simple descriptions of I&R operations in numerical

form" (p. 287).

Beagle's (1985) study addressed a telephone-based Information and Referral

service in Cumberland County, NC. ACCESS Information Line received a grant to

increase the use of its service by low-income community members. A number of

outreach initiatives were implemented with this goal in mind. Beagle (1985) monitored

statistics regarding the types of questions ACCESS received and where the callers

learned about ACCESS. Statistics taken both before and after the outreach program

began were analyzed. Based on these statistics, Beagle (1985) argued that outreach did

increase the number of low-income callers to ACCESS. Furthermore, Beagle (1985)

asserted that advertising in mass media was much less effective than personal outreach

in attracting low-income users to ACCESS. The study argued that "the key to outreach is

personal contact with agencies and organizations serving the target populations" (p. 45).

Pettigrew, Durrance and Unruh (2002) also researched community information in public libraries by studying specific programs, through the use of case studies of three community networks. The authors define community networks as a form of "digital CI [community information]" (p. 895). Digital CI is hosted online, and "link[s] information files created not only by single organizations such as libraries, buy by agencies, organizations, and individuals throughout the community" (p. 895). Their research goal was to evaluate the helpfulness of the three community networks to citizens and communities. The researchers conducted surveys, focus groups, field observation and interviews of citizens, library staff and service organizations. They argued that making community information digital made it more accessible to members of the public. In addition, they asserted that community networks allowed more information from more groups to be available than with a traditional I&R service.

They took a more general approach to studying community information in public libraries; instead of focusing on specific programs, their research addressed how the provision of community information should be evaluated. In particular, they discussed the evaluation of digital community information systems, or "organized collections of CI [community information] in the hypertext environment" (p. 250). The article argues that a formal method is needed for studying digital community information systems, and proposes an "evaluation framework" (p. 256).

Another approach to studying community information has been the evaluation of community information needs within a specific community. In 1999, Bishop, Tidline,

Shoemaker and Salela studied low-income residents within an area served by a

community network called Prairienet. Their research was part of an overarching goal to

increase use of Prairienet by low-income community members. The study aimed to

discover the types of community information sought by this group and this group's

attitude toward computer technology. To determine this, the researchers conducted

surveys, interviews, and focus groups in a number of low-income neighborhoods. In the

paper, the researchers argued that while many study participants lacked regular

computer access or extensive computer skills, they expressed a desire for increased

technological knowledge and the availability of community information online. The

results stated that many community members studied currently found community

information through local organizations and by word of mouth. With this in mind, the

researchers asserted that a successful community network would try to harness this

information and cooperate with local organizations. They conclude with a list of

recommendations for creating community networks to serve low-income populations.

In 2000, Marcella and Baxter did an extensive study of community information in

the United Kingdom. The study aimed to address the amount and types of community

information needed by UK citizens and the ways they choose to access this information.

In addition, the research looked at how well this information is provided. To discover

this, the researchers visited public libraries and Citizens Advice Bureaus throughout the

United Kingdom. They took tours, interviewed staff members, examined collections and

reviewed statistics. Based on their findings, they asserted that community information

needs have some variation according to geography. They also found that public libraries

did not have much statistical information regarding community information inquiries. In

addition, they suggested that "face-to-face contact was indeed the public's preferred

method of obtaining information" (p. 61). The researchers recommended that more

studies are needed to understand "user needs and preferred patterns of information

seeking" (p. 24).

Pettigrew and Wilkinson (1996) examined the roles of Information and Referral

services and community information networks in Ontario, Canada. They looked at

policy documents from both I&R services and community networks (focusing on one of

each) in order to understand the role each type of organization plays in providing

community information to the public. The researchers asserted major differences

between the two types of service. Although both exist to provide community

information to users, they vary in terms of scope, access and quality of information. For

instance, users can only receive information from an I&R service during its operating

hours, while a community network's information is available at all times. An I&R service

has complete control over the quality of the information it provides, but a community

network (where community organizations can post their own information) has little

control. The authors argued that an I&R service is "an active intermediary between

direct service providers and the user," while a community network "is merely a conduit

or channel" (p. 402). Pettigrew and Wilkinson concluded that both ways of providing

community information are useful and distinct. The study demonstrates the importance

of a broad view when studying community information. The transfer of community information can occur through many different channels.

Several observations can be drawn from the literature on community information in public libraries. First, research regarding the ways public libraries share community information has been limited to a discussion of Information and Referral services and community networks (Beagle, 1985; Childers, 1976; Pettigrew and Wilkinson, 1996; Pettigrew et al., 2002). Other methods of providing community information, whether through specific collections or programming, have not been subject to extensive research. Second, there is a lack of statistical data regarding how often and what types of community information are requested by public library patrons, and therefore what is provided to them (Childers, 1976; Marcella and Baxter, 2000). Third, personal contact is an effective way to provide community information and is valued by individuals seeking community information. Both Marcella and Baxter (2000) and Bishop et al. (1999) described community information seekers who received community information through personal contact. Furthermore, Beagle and Lacy (1983) asserted personal contact is needed to keep citizens informed about community information services, while Durrance and Schneider (1996) argued it is necessary for helping patrons understand and make use of community information.

Since previous studies have focused on Information and Referral and online community networks, this research will address another method public libraries use to provide community information. Much of the literature notes that community

information is often effectively distributed through personal contact. With this in mind, the research will study how libraries disseminate community information in person, specifically through programming.

Method

This study looked at how and how often library systems provide community information through programming. To find this information, the researcher reviewed publicly available information on library websites. The websites of different library systems in North Carolina were chosen to be reviewed based on geography and population size. Four county library systems along the I-40 corridor were chosen: Wake, Durham, Greensboro (Guilford County) and Forsyth. Each of these systems serves a population above 250,000 citizens. Three smaller library systems with populations between 90,000 and 175,000 were also chosen: Cabarrus County, Nash County, Randolph County. Finally, two regional systems in the eastern-most and western-most area of the state were chosen: Nantahala, with a population of 45,955, and Albemarle, with a population of 76, 956 (State Library of North Carolina, 2010). The table below shows each system's population size and operating income.

Table 1: Library Systems

Library System	Population	Operating Income ($)
Wake County	892,409	18,316,102
Greensboro	375,990	8,293,790
Forsyth	355,575	7,991,110
Durham	263, 785	9,318,016
Cabarrus	174,255	2,900,969
Randolph	142,443	2,349,130
Nash	90,775	2,557,798
Albemarle	76,956	1,208,743
Nantahala	45,955	1,023,372

To begin data collection, the researcher first determined if a library system had a website. Next, it was recorded whether the website contained information about programming and how that information was presented—through a library calendar or descriptive text. The researcher then looked at the programs offered to see how many programs provided community information and what types of community information were provided. The researcher focused on five types of community information: information about jobs and careers, information about government services, information for businesses and professionals, adult education, and health information.

This study examined programming information available library system websites because websites hold a library's most public information. Patrons both inside and

outside the physical library have access to this information. In the 21st Century, people

expect all current and relevant information about an organization to be present on its

website. Therefore, if a library offers programs and expects those programs to be

visible to their community, those programs must be present on the library website.

The study examined programs that took place in August, September and October

of 2011. Each program instance was analyzed to see if it provided one of the five types

of community information in question. If it did provide community information, the

name of the program and a description of the program were recorded, along with the

number of times that program occurred throughout the established timeframe. The

following matrix was used to code each program:

Table 2: Service Options

Library Name	Program	Type of Community Information	Number of Instances	Description

A separate matrix was created for each library system.

Results

Each of the nine library system studied had a website.[1] Eight of the library

systems had calendars advertising their events; the ninth, Albemarle Regional Library

System, had text on their website describing library programs.

[1] Links to library websites may be found in the appendix.

Table 3: Type of Website Display

Library System	Calendar or Text?
Wake County	Calendar
Greensboro	Calendar
Forsyth	Calendar
Durham	Calendar
Cabarrus	Calendar
Randolph	Calendar
Nash	Calendar
Albemarle	Text
Nantahala	Calendar

Amount of community information programs

Figure 1: Total Community Information Programs
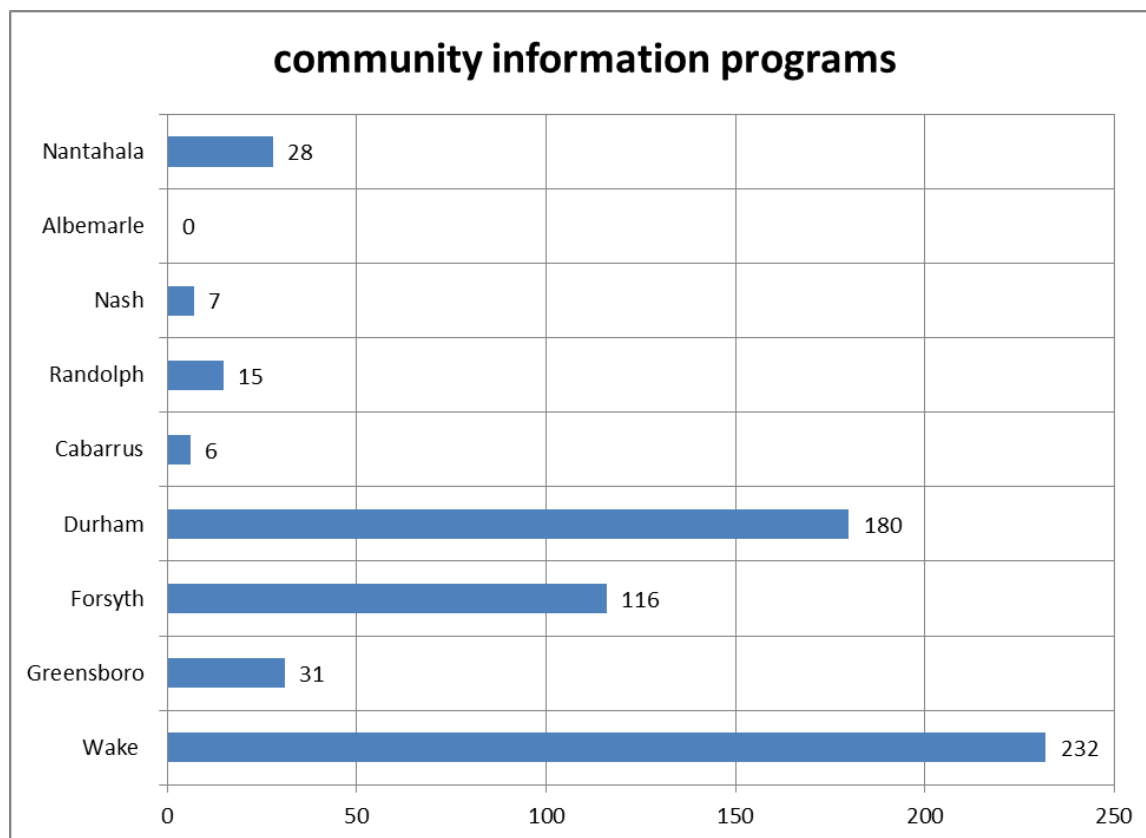
Types of community information programs

Figure 2: number of community information program types
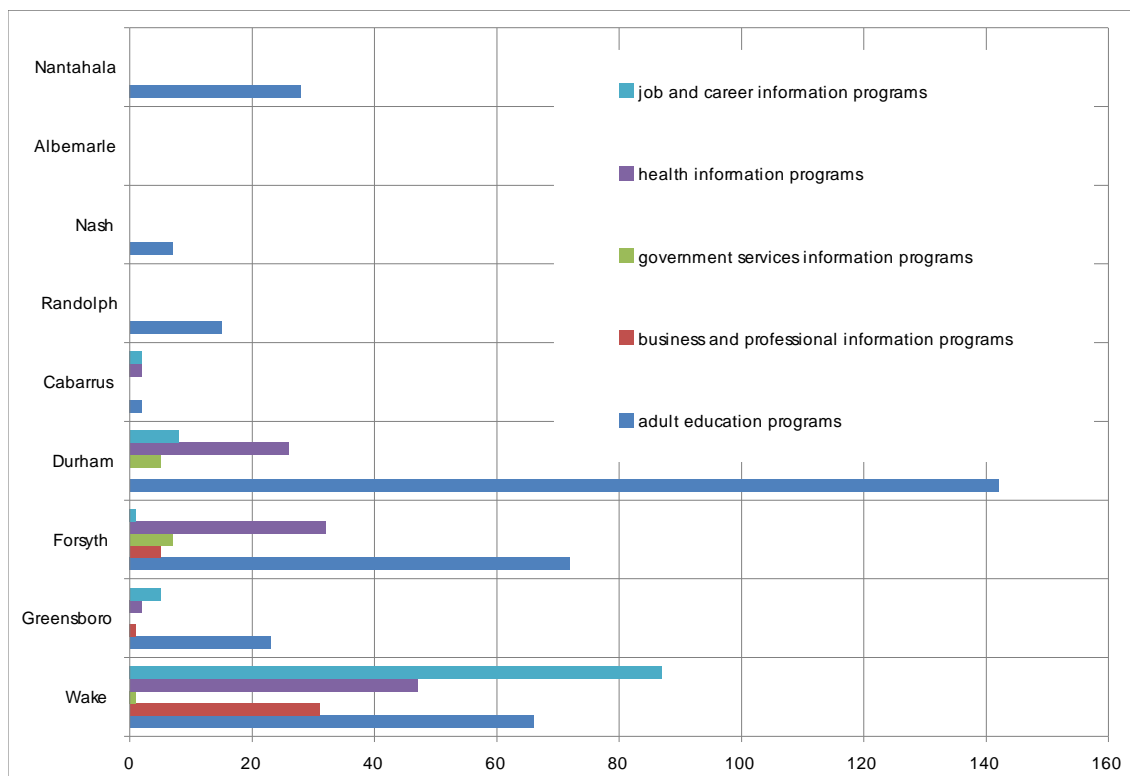
The review of Wake County Public Library's website found a total of 232 programs that provided community information during August-October 2011. Of the 232 programs, 87 addressed job and career information, 31 addressed business and professional information, 66 addressed adult education, 1 addressed information about government services, and 47 addressed health information.

Adult education programs in Wake County were divided between programs about applying to college and computer classes. There were 21 programs that dealt with the college admissions process. These programs discussed standardized testing,

admissions essays and financial aid. 44 programs were basic computer classes. Finally, there was one program that provided instruction on using library databases.

The majority of Wake County Public Library's programs on business and professional information (25 out of 31) were business counseling programs. The remaining programs on business and professional information were one-time events featuring various topics, such as marketing and organization.

The single program at Wake County Public Library that featured information about government services was called "Savvy Social Security Planning". This program provided attendees with advice and information on collecting Social Security payments.

Health information programs at Wake County Public Library were divided between one-time informational programs about specific health topics and exercise classes. 36 exercise classes were held; the remaining 11 health programs included a blood drive, information about Chinese medicine, and a free depression screening.

The job and career information programs at Wake County Public Library were a mixture of one-on-one counseling sessions and workshops. For example, the program "Resume and Employment Help," held twice, consisted of drop-in sessions with an employment counselor. The program "Make Your Resume Work For You," held six times, was a workshop aimed at improving resumes.

The Greensboro Public Library advertised 31 programs offering community information. Twenty-three of these programs offered adult education. Each of the 23 programs was a computer class. One program was held on Business and Professional information. This program, called "Working for Yourself", discussed how to start a small business. No programs about government services were offered. There were two classes featuring health information. One presented healthy recipes while the other was a health fair for seniors. Greensboro Public Library held five classes on job and career information. These programs focused on strategies for gaining employment.

At Forsyth County Public Library, 116 programs held during the study period featured community information. 72 of these programs provided adult education. All but five of the programs offering adult education did so through computer classes. One program was a test preparation class for the SAT and ACT exams and the remaining four programs were classes on using the library's digital resources.

Forsyth County Public Library offered five programs dealing with business and professional information. They were investing seminars for people at or near retirement age. Thirty-two programs dealing with health information were held at Forsyth County Public Library. Twenty-six health information programs were exercise classes. Other health information programs offered were centered on specific topics such as end of life care and dental health. One health information program also provided information about government services. This program was called "Welcome to Medicare," and shared information about how Medicare works.

In addition to "Welcome to Medicare," six other programs at Forsyth County Public Library addressed information about Government services. Only one community information program addressed job and career information. This program was a job fair and interviews for Target Corporation.

During the study period, Durham County Library held 180 programs dealing with community information. The majority of these programs, 142, provided adult education. Many of the adult education classes dealt with language. 13 programs were Spanish language conversation sessions. 46 programs were ESOL classes. 1 program was a GED testing session. Two programs provided information about using library resources. Of the remainder of the adult education programs, 80 were computer and technology classes.

26 programs offered at Durham County Library featured health information. 10 health information programs were exercise classes. Other health programs discussed Alzheimer's, food choices and autism. One health program included information about government services: it provided information about Medicare enrollment. Five total programs addressed information about government services. Besides Medicare, these programs offered information about foster parenting and a program to help unemployed people pay their mortgages. Eight programs at Durham County Library offered job and career information. These programs featured résumé and job application assistance both on- and offline. No programs were offered featuring business and professional information.

On the Cabarrus County Public Library's website programming information was not available for programs in September and August. Instead, programs offered in October, November and December 2011 were recorded. Two programs (held in November and December) featured adult education. These programs were computer classes. Two programs provided health information. Two more programs offered job and career information. There were no programs listed offering business and professional information or information about government services.

Fifteen programs were held at Randolph County Public Library featuring community information. All 15 programs offered adult education in the form of computer classes. No programs featuring business and professional information, information and government services, health information, or job and career information were held.

At Nash County Public Library, seven programs provided community information. These seven programs provided adult education through computer classes. No programs were offered that featuring business and professional information, information and government services, health information, or job and career information.

The Nantahala Regional Library system's website listed twenty-eight programs that provided community information. These programs all featured adult education. Twenty-one programs were GED classes, while seven programs were ESL classes.

Nantahala also lacked programs on business and professional information, information about government services, health information, or job and career information.

While the Albemarle Regional Library system listed programs on their website, none of the programs offered any type of community information.

Amount of effort per type of program

Figure 3: Amount of effort per type of program

Relative weights of community information programs by library system

- adult education programs
- business and professional information programs
- government services information programs
- health information programs
- job and career information programs
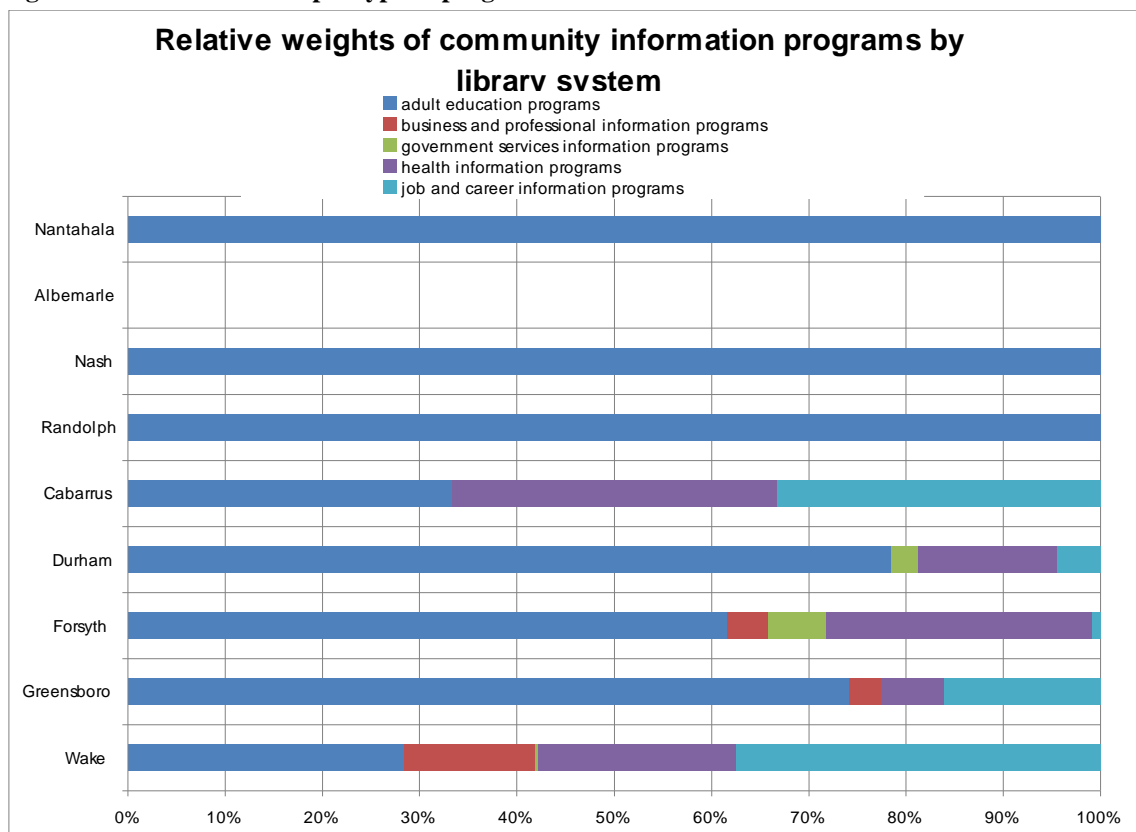
By far, the most represented form of community information was adult education. Besides Albemarle Regional Library system, every library system offered adult education programs. For three library systems, adult education was the extent of their community information programming. The most prevalent type of adult education

was basic computer classes. At Greensboro, Cabarrus, Randolph, and Nash, computer classes were the only type of adult education offered.

Another form of adult education found in some library systems was GED classes. Nantahala Regional Library system held 21 GED classes. Durham County Library had one program offering GED testing. The final form of adult education found was programs that taught patrons how to use library resources.

Programs featuring business and professional information were fairly scarce. Only three of the library systems studied offered this type of program. Wake County Public Library was the only system with a significant amount of business and professional information programming. Thirteen percent of their community information programs featured business and professional information. Of these 31 programs, 25 were business counseling sessions held by a nonprofit called SCORE. Greensboro and Forsyth were the only other systems that featured any business and professional information programming.

Programs about government services were extremely scarce. Wake offered one program about Social Security. Forsyth had seven programs about government services, accounting for 6% of their community information programming. Three percent, or five programs, of Durham's community information programming, was devoted to government services. Both Forsyth and Durham had programs about Medicare, but otherwise their government services topics did not overlap.

Health information was a fairly common form of community programs. Five of the library systems studied provided health information, mostly through exercise classes. For instance, 36 of Wake's 47 health information programs, or 77%, were exercise classes. Similarly, in Forsyth, 26 of 32 health programs, or 61%, were exercise classes.

Job and career information programs were plentiful in some locations and scarce in others. Wake and Cabarrus each devoted over thirty percent of their community information programming to job and career information. Randolph, Nash, Albemarle and Nantahala, on the other hand, had no programming about job and career information.   Greensboro, Forsyth, Durham and Cabarrus had only a few programs each relating to job and career information.

Generally, the larger systems in this study offered more programs than the smaller systems. The larger systems also offered more types of community information programs. The four smallest systems in the study had either one or no type of community information; where there was community information, it was present in adult education. It was not always true, however, that a larger library system had more community information programming. Cabarrus, for example, offer fewer programs than Randolph, Nash and Nantahala, although it is bigger than any of those systems.

The size of a library system's operating income appears to have a relationship to the amount of its community programming, but a weak one. In some cases, a larger

operating income meant more community programming. Of the library systems in this study, Wake County has the largest operating income. They also have the highest number of community information programming. On the other hand, Ablemarle and Nantahala have similar operating incomes, but their level of community information programming is quite different. Ablemarle held no community information programs, while Nantahala held 28.

Conclusion

This study shows that the amount of community information programming at a particular library system is mostly the result of that library's interest in community information programming. Neither the size of a library nor the size of its operating income reliably indicate how many programs a library system will have featuring community information.

The library systems studied also varied greatly in the types of community information they offered in library programs. This suggests different library systems value providing certain types of community information over others. According to the study results, library systems as most interested in provided adult education to their patrons. Many library systems were also interested in providing health information and job and career information, but the amounts varied greatly.

More research should be done to determine what motivates a public library system to provide community information programs. A survey of librarians could be

conducted to understand their motivations for offering specific programs. Additional

research could also evaluate current community information programs.

Appendix

Library System	Website
Wake County	http://www.wakegov.com/libraries/default.htm
Greensboro	http://greensboro-nc.gov/index.aspx?page=780
Forsyth	http://www.forsyth.cc/library/
Durham	http://www.durhamcountylibrary.org/
Cabarrus	http://www.cabarruscounty.us/government/departments/library/Pages/default.aspx
Randolph	http://www.randolphlibrary.org/
Nash	http://www.braswell-library.org/
Albemarle	http://www.arlnc.org/
Nantahala	http://www.youseemore.com/nantahala/default.asp

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