

Library Assessment

More than Numbers

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A century of library assessment?

- ▶ “No questions arise more frequently in the mind of the progressive librarian than these:
 - ▶ Is this method the best?
 - ▶ Are we up to the standard of similar institutions of our class?”
 - ▶ --J.T. Gerould, 1906
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In days gone by...

- ▶ Library held the knowledge of the university
 - ▶ Librarians had the codes to retrieve the knowledge
 - ▶ No need to justify the library's existence
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The way it was

I have often thought that nothing would do more extensive good at small expense than the establishment of a small circulating library in every county, to consist of a few well-chosen books, to be lent to the people of the county under regulations as would secure their safe return in due time.

- Thomas Jefferson to John Wyche, May 19, 1809

Easy comparisons

- ▶ All collections were local
 - ▶ Count the volumes
 - ▶ The biggest must be the best
 - ▶ More is more!
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Changing times

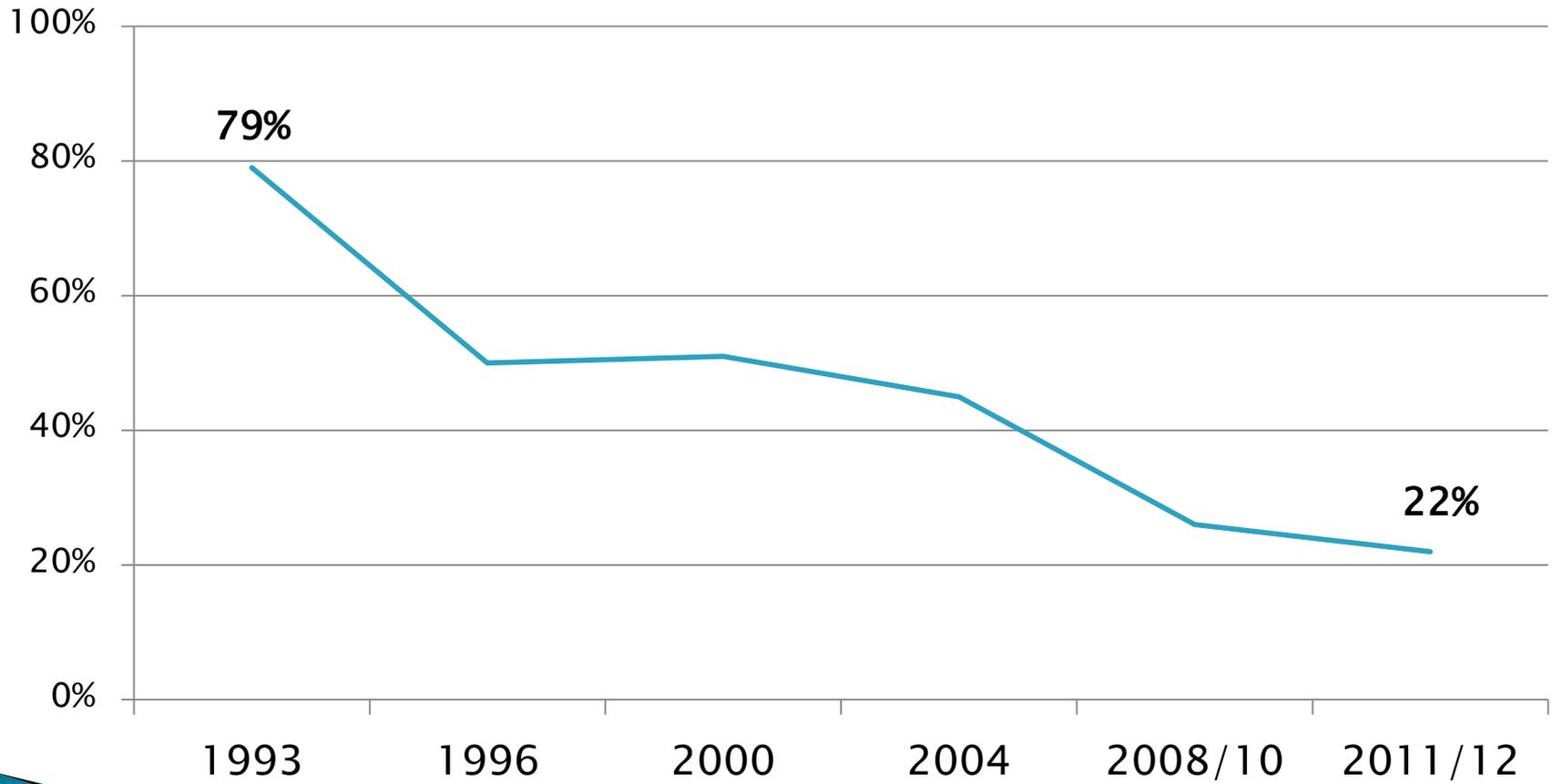
- ▶ A shift in the 1990s
 - ▶ Bigger is not necessarily better
 - ▶ Focus on the 'user-centered' library
 - ▶ Just as the library world was changing...
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...as the focus turned to users..

- ▶ Some of the users were leaving the building

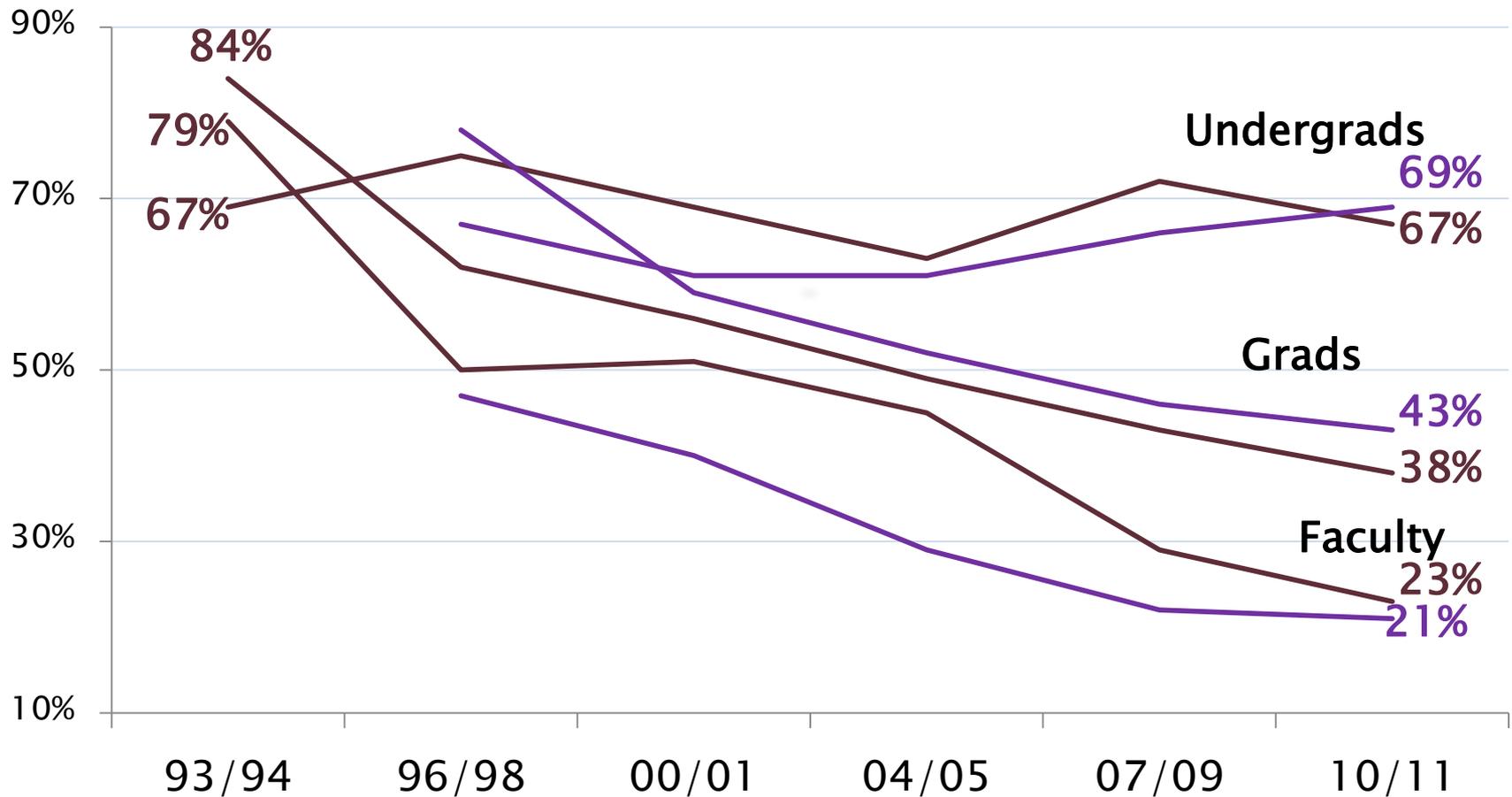
Weekly Visits to a Physical Library

University of Virginia Faculty

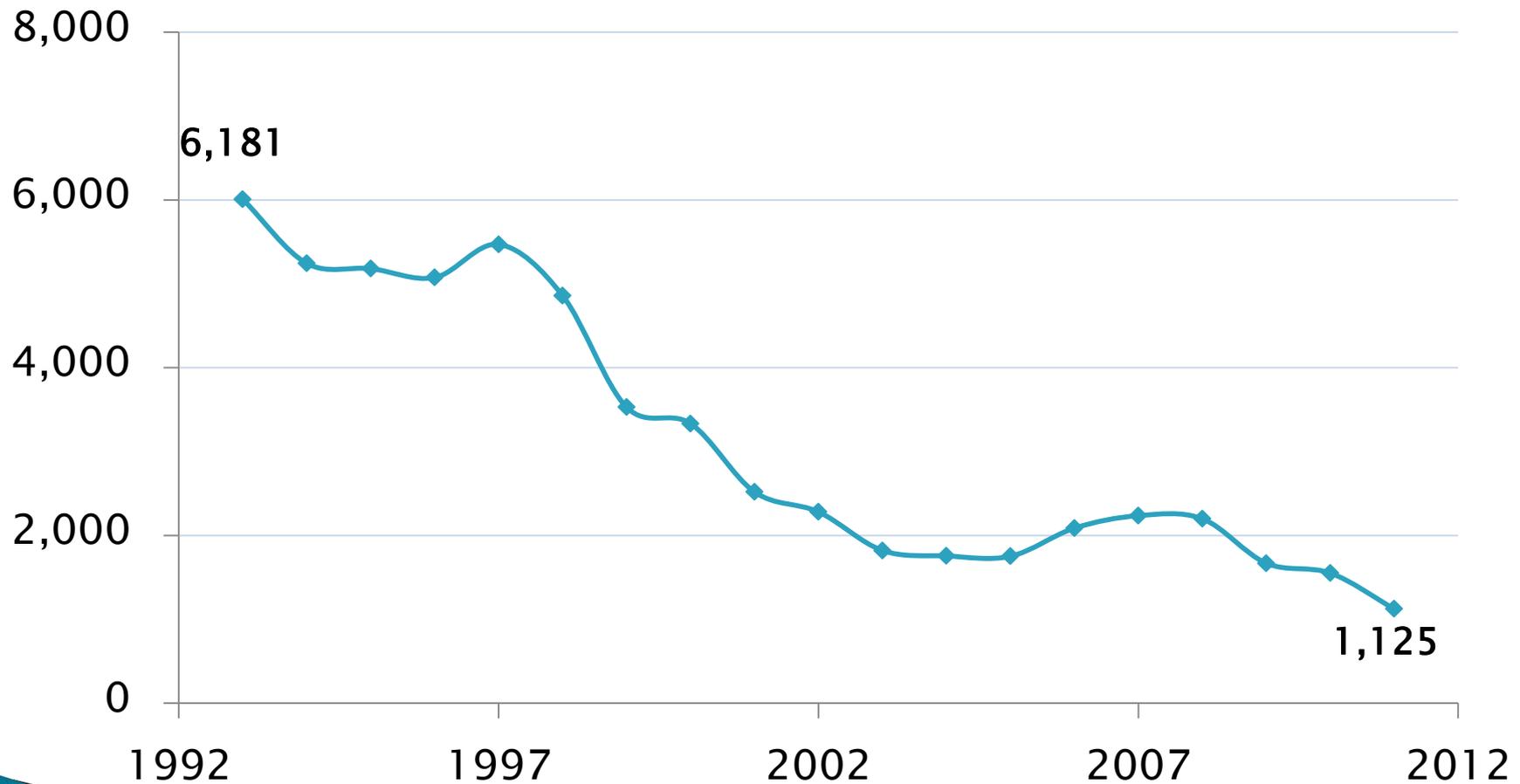


Weekly Visits to a Physical Library

U.Va. and UW, 1993–2011



Reference Questions per Week University of Virginia Library



In the 21st century....

- ▶ Resources are online and shared.
- ▶ Counting pieces is not so meaningful.
- ▶ Tallies of traditional activities are declining.
- ▶ Libraries need better evidence
.....of their worthiness.

Looking for the evidence

- ▶ LibQUAL+[®] and other customer surveys
 - ▶ Usability testing
 - ▶ Wayfinding, evaluation of facilities
 - ▶ Ethnographic studies
 - ▶ Quantitative performance measures
 - ▶ MINES, COUNTER, and e-resource use
 - ▶ Staff surveys
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An explosion of assessment

- ▶ New positions with *assessment* in the title
- ▶ Attendance at this conference
 - 217 to 377 to 460 to 565
- ▶ Sessions at ALA, ACRL et al

Found on the road

...the big picture

- ▶ Acceptance of assessment as a core activity
 - But sustainability is still an issue
 - ▶ More collaboration on and off campus
 - ▶ More use of qualitative data and narrative
 - ▶ UX in the mix
 - ▶ Changing views of data comparisons
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Found on the road

... local stories

- ▶ Political benefit of assessment programs
 - ▶ Appreciative inquiry
 - ▶ Postcard surveys
 - ▶ Formalized business plans for each unit
 - ▶ Creating a 'punch list'
 - ▶ Improving 'access to known items'
 - ▶ Focus on under-served clientele
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New stories at the LAC

- ▶ Secret shoppers
 - ▶ Special collections, repository assessment
 - ▶ Cross campus collaborations
 - ▶ Narratives and data for institutional support
 - ▶ Scorecards for consortia
 - ▶ Changes in the ARL index
 - ▶ More R&D, less assessment
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Still needed...

- ▶ Common measures and information sharing
 - Counting journals
 - Counting e-holdings
 - Counting e-usage
 - Costs of e-resources
 - Learning outcomes
 - Value, ROI
- ▶ Survey templates and metrics

Natural Limits

- ▶ Assessment looks at past and present, but tries to take us into the future
 - ▶ Creation and innovation do not necessary spring from the trends of today
 - ▶ The world around us may change drastically
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Prediction is tricky

- ▶ *The performance data quoted represents past performance, and is no guarantee of future results.*
 - www.tiaa-cref.org

Local Barriers

- ▶ Complacency
 - ▶ Fear
 - ▶ Arrogance
 - ▶ Inertia
 - ▶ Operations mindset
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The purpose of assessment

- ▶ A search for truth?
- ▶ *For here we are not afraid to follow truth wherever it may lead,*
 - Thomas Jefferson to William Roscoe, December 27, 1820

The POV of Library Assessment

- ▶ Neutral, unbiased?
 - ▶ Would it ever recommend a lesser library?
 - ▶ How does it differ from advocacy?
 - ▶ From marketing?
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Salvation by assessment

- ▶ University libraries that wonder what they must do to be saved will not find the answer in a data table...
- ▶ They must look for and measure what is necessary to give users what they need when they need it.

- Kendon Stubbs, 1981