# Music Libraries: Centralization versus Decentralization

## Lois Kuyper-Rushing

Branch libraries, in general, and music libraries, in particular, have struggled with the decision concerning centralization for more than a hundred years. Decentralized collections, those located in the music school or department, are favored by some because of their proximity to the classroom and the private lesson studio. However, proponents of a centralized location (where the collection is held in the main library facility) point out that the collection can be cared for more effectively if it is located in the main library. For this study, the Association of Research Libraries was surveyed concerning the location of their music libraries. Possible motivations for choosing one location or the other were explored, including degrees offered, size of the music collection, and overall budget of the music library.

In October 1998, the National Association of Schools of Music (NASM) accreditation team made a visit to the Louisiana State University (LSU) Libraries. The team's recommendations were welcome and apropos, and resulted in a renovation and an upgraded facility for music in the LSU Libraries. To fulfill the NASM accreditation team's recommendation list, information was needed on what kinds of facilities work at other universities. This need prompted the study of music library facilities and their locations on university campuses.

Because LSU is a member of the Association of Research Libraries (ARL), this organization provided a good study group. ARL is a not-for-profit membership organization comprising the leading research libraries in North America. It was ideal to use this group for study and comparison purposes.

The question that prompted the study was, How can a music library facility be designed that will best suit a certain set of users? For example, what characteristics make a music library located in the music school work well for one institution and a music library located in the main library work well for another institution?

### Literature Review

The centralization of library services, in general, has been discussed for more than a hundred years, and many articles in the general library literature examine the strengths and weaknesses of the branch library in an academic setting.[1] In 1991, Leon Shkolnik suggested that the reasons usually cited today for decentralization

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were formed as early as 1895, when Zella Allen Dixson of the University of Chicago said that "the major advantage of decentralization was that it would allow the student of a certain discipline to become familiar with the bibliography of that discipline."[2] Shkolnik stated that the primary positive aspect of decentralization is that the collection would have greater use because use of a collection is directly influenced by access to it, whereas the compelling reason to centralize is that books can be cared for more economically and efficiently, safeguarded from fire and theft, and used by a larger population.[3]

As user needs change and technology increases, librarians are forced to reconsider the wisdom of a decentralized branch library. In 1994, Olivia M. A. Madison, Sally A. Fry, and David Gregory presented a plan for evaluating an academic branch library.[4] They suggested six possible criteria that could be used in evaluating the need to retain or open a branch:

1. *Academic mission and strategic plans:* Does a branch library or an integrated collection support them?

2. *Geographic location:* Is the branch library and/or the department it serves remote from the main library?

3. *Budget:* Can the institution afford the establishment and/or the maintenance of a branch facility?

4. *Focus, accessibility, and utilization of collections and services:* Who are the primary users?

5. *Physical environment:* Is the branch large enough? Does it have enough light? Are the services and access to electronic equipment adequate?

6. *Impact on other library facilities:* If a branch were closed or opened, how would other facilities be affected?)

Charlotte Crockett suggested a completely new model for the branch library. She stated that the most important function of a departmental library is to serve as a meeting place for students and faculty studying a certain discipline and that perhaps even the books are unnecessary. She asserted that this plan could succeed if there were an adequate off-site storage

facility and a trustworthy retrieval system. Five components are necessary for this type of branch library: a comfortable environment, computers, network connections, fax machines to transmit documents, and group study rooms. The facility should be open twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.[5]

Articles concerning the music library's physical location per se are found in the literature as well. One of the earliest articles is an outgrowth of the "Sixième Congres International des Bibliothèques Musicales Stockholm-Uppsala" held in August 1962. Wolfgang M. Freitag read a paper for this symposium entitled, "On Planning a Music Library," which was subsequently published in the journal, *Fontes Artis Musicae*.[6] Freitag identified three types of music libraries (those in large research libraries, in universities, and in music departments in smaller institutions) and provided a typical description of each type. He also discussed the planning process for a new facility.

In the September 1970 issue of *Notes: The Quarterly Journal of the Music Library Association*, two articles addressed the subject of the music library as a physical facility. Ruth Watanabe began her article, "The Music Collection and the College Library," by saying,

> Within recent years there has been such an unprecedented growth of special collections in our colleges and universities that the question naturally arises whether the music collection should exist as an entity or become assimilated into the general collegiate library. Many institutions now find that they must assess their holdings in order to arrive at a definition of the music library and to outline its functions.[7]

She described the collection that is usually found in the music school, the one that is in the library, and the collection that is "split," usually with the book collection in the main library and the scores and sound recordings in the school of music.

An article by Mary Wallace entitled "Time-Space and the Music Library" followed Watanabe's article in the same issue of *Notes*.[8] Wallace described the careful process of planning for a new music library facility. She included directions for defining needs, finding a consultant, and planning for the future in terms of new technologies and additional space.

Preceding the February 1990 Music Library Association (MLA) conference in Tucson, Arizona, the MLA Administration Committee's Subcommittee on Music Library Facilities held a preconference on space utilization. The papers delivered at the preconference were published in an MLA Technical Report.[9] The report contains four sections entitled "Planning" (for a new facility), "Consultants," "Architects and Coordinators," and "Technical Issues and Special Issues." These papers stressed that facilities must be designed to serve a specific institution. They echoed Ruth Watanabe who wrote:

> In the final analysis, it becomes abundantly clear that no two music collections are alike simply because no two colleges are alike. It is also clear that no perfect library can exist and that compromise is necessary. Upon the happiest (or least abrasive) relationship between musicians and librarians rests the success to be enjoyed by all.[10]

This sentiment is expressed in many of the articles on branch libraries. Whether describing a music library or a branch in another discipline, the departmental library must respond to the needs of the users to be effective.

The location of the music library or music collection has been discussed on the MLA-L listserv. In 1992, Paul Emmons of West Chester University wrote that the music school dean was considering moving the library out of the music school and into the main library. Emmons pled with listserv members to help him "make his case" against the move.[11] Although most replies must have gone directly to the requestor, a few music librarians eloquently supported Emmons's status quo. Those responses reflected their belief that a music library that is housed in the music school has much more autonomy and gives better service than one in the main library.

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In 1996, Marjorie Travaline of Rowan University raised a similar question on MLA-L when faced with the same possibility as Emmons. In March 1997, she posted this summary of the discussion on MLA-L in a message to the listserv:

> I received responses supporting both branch and centralized arrangements, though the most detailed and emotional ones were those defending branch set-ups. I realize that every situation is unique, but I have noted that other branch librarians seem to express a common concern or regret about centralization—the damage to the "heart and soul" of the learning community nurtured in a branch setting.[12]

Travaline's comments echoed those of authors previously discussed concerning the branch library on the university campus. Shkolnik said that "[a]dvocates of decentralization … believe that branch libraries result in a closer librarian–faculty relationship, which leads to greater faculty support of the library."[13] Crockett wrote that "Historically, university libraries have favored the centralized model, but teaching faculty have preferred branch libraries with their strong ties and service to individual departments."[14]

## Methodology

It seems clear that branch libraries, in general, and music libraries, specifically, de-

**TABLE 1**
**Demographic Details**

| University Student Population | Universities with This Population | % of Universities with This Population |
|---|---|---|
| Fewer than 1,000 | 1 | 4 |
| 1,001–5,000 | 3 | 5 |
| 5,001–10,000 | 4 | 7 |
| 10,001–20,000 | 13 | 27 |
| 20,001–30,000 | 13 | 27 |
| 30,000–40,000 | 10 | 18 |
| More than 40,000 | 7 | 12 |
| Total | 51 | 100 |
| **Music Major Population** | | |
| Fewer than 100 | 11 | 21 |
| 101–200 | 8 | 16 |
| 201–300 | 10 | 20 |
| 301–500 | 7 | 14 |
| 501–1,000 | 13 | 25 |
| More than 1,000 | 2 | 4 |
| Total | 51 | 100 |
| **Undergraduate Population** | | |
| Fewer than 50 | 20 | 39 |
| 51–100 | 18 | 35 |
| 101–150 | 10 | 20 |
| 151–200 | 2 | 4 |
| 201–500 | 1 | 2 |
| Total | 51 | 100 |

veloped in response to the needs of the population they are serving whether they are found in the music school or in the main library. Questions arise concerning how many branch music collections there are among ARL libraries, and why centralization or decentralization was chosen for a specific institution. ARL libraries were chosen for this study in order to eliminate as many differences as possible in the universities being studied to determine factors for a location decision. Facts were gathered on demographic details of the institutions, monetary support given to libraries, location of the music materials, the administrative structure of the libraries, and librarians' opinions concerning the situation in which each worked.

The survey was distributed in the spring of 1998 to 108 ARL libraries. Ten libraries were excluded from the survey because they were not university or college libraries or because there was no music program at that university.

Thirty-one surveys were returned by the deadline given in the letter. After the deadline passed, e-mail messages were sent to librarians who had not responded. Nineteen librarians returned surveys following this appeal, bringing the total number of returned surveys to fifty-one libraries.

**Demographic Details**
The first group of questions on the survey dealt with the total number of students at the institution, the total number of music majors, the number of both un-

**TABLE 2**
**Collection Size**

| Collection size | Libraries | % of Libraries |
|---|---|---|
| 5001–10,000 | 1 | 0.02 |
| 10,001–50,000 | 3 | 0.06 |
| 50,001–100,000 | 22 | 0.43 |
| 100,001–500,000 | 21 | 0.41 |
| 500,001– | 2 | 0.04 |
| No answer | 2 | 0.04 |
| Total | 51 | 1.00 |

owned fifty to one hundred thousand scores. (See table 2.)

Table 3 shows that, according to this survey, ARL music library budgets range from $20,000 to $500,000 per year. Nine libraries (18%) had budgets of between $50,000 and $100,000 annually, twenty-three libraries (45%) had budgets of between $100,000 and $500,000 each year, and fifteen libraries (29%) had budgets of more than $500,000 per year for music materials alone. This wide range of budgetary allowances begins to explain why music libraries that are "similar" (i.e., all ARL libraries) differ so much in collection size and location.
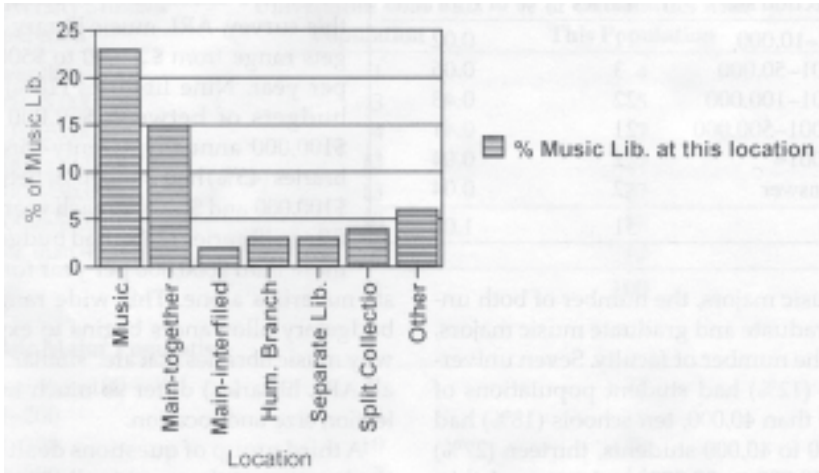
A third group of questions dealt with the location of the music collection, the size of the music library (when there was one), and where different materials are located. In more than 41 percent of the schools surveyed, the music library was in the Music Building. Twenty-seven percent of the schools surveyed had music libraries in the main library on campus, and 29 percent had other locations or combinations of locations. (See figure 1.)

In a fourth section, respondents were asked their opinion on the best location for the music library. Figure 2 shows that the majority of the librarians responding to the question (62%) said that the best location for the music library would be in the "music school."

dergraduate and graduate music majors, and the number of faculty. Seven universities (12%) had student populations of more than 40,000, ten schools (18%) had 30,000 to 40,000 students, thirteen (27%) had 20,000 to 30,000 students, and thirteen (27%) had 10,000 to 20,000 students. The remaining eight schools enrolled fewer than 10,000 students.

Eleven schools reported one hundred or fewer music majors. Eight schools had two hundred majors, ten schools had two to three hundred majors, and seven schools had three to five hundred music majors. Thirteen schools, or 25 percent of the ARL universities responding to the study, claimed between five hundred and one thousand music majors. Finally, two schools reported having more than a thousand music majors.

Twenty music librarians in this group work with music faculties of fewer than twenty-five people. Eighteen schools had twenty-five to fifty music faculty members, and ten schools had fifty to one hundred music faculty members. Three music faculties among those included in the survey reported having more than one hundred full-time members. (See table 1.)

The second group of questions dealt with collection size and annual materials budget. Twenty-two libraries (43%) had total music holdings of fifty to a hundred thousand items, and twenty-one libraries (41%) claimed to have one to five hundred thousand items. In terms of musical scores, the largest majority of schools (43%)

**TABLE 3**
**Annual Budget for Music Materials**

| Annual Budget | Universities | % of Universities |
|---|---|---|
| $5,000–10,000 | 1 | 2 |
| $10,001–20,000 | 0 | 0 |
| $20,001–50,000 | 1 | 2 |
| $50,001–100,000 | 9 | 18 |
| $100,001–500,000 | 23 | 45 |
| $500,000 or more | 15 | 29 |
| No answer | 2 | 4 |
| Total | 51 | 100 |

**FIGURE 1**
**Music Library Locations**



The final group of questions dealt with the staffing and administration of the music library or collection. Questions asked about the number of librarians, their level within the library structure, and how well their situation works. Thirty-six percent of the schools (n = 20) surveyed had two professional librarians, 37 percent had

one, 20 percent had three to five, and 5 percent (n = 3) had five. (See table 4.)

Table 5 provides demographic details for each category corresponding to what the largest percentage of librarians answered. In other words, the ARL music library that is "defined" by this survey is described below.[15]

**FIGURE 2**
**Best Location**
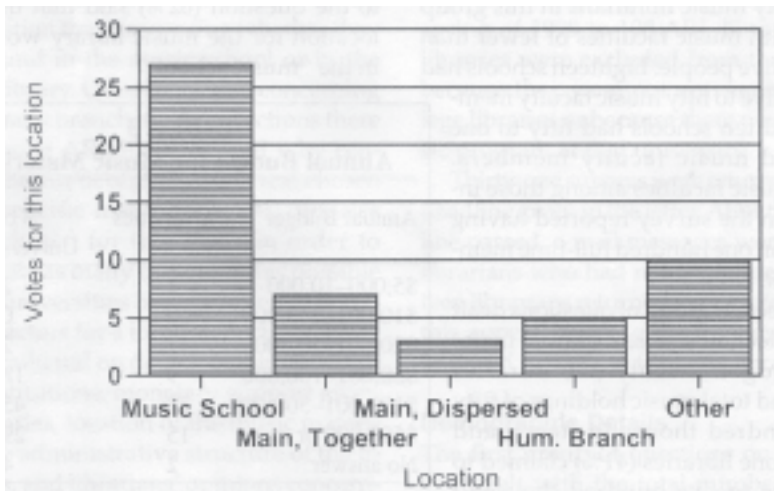
## Comparisons

The survey respondents were then asked to rate the efficacy of the location of their music collection on a Likert-type five-point scale. The expectation that the School of Music location would get the highest ranking was not met with these answers. Of the twenty-one schools with music libraries in the music school or department, ten of the librarians (or 48% of all music libraries located in the music school) gave this location the highest marking. The music collection in sixteen libraries was located somewhere in the main library, and the librarians at five of these institutions (29%) gave this location the highest marking. Table 6 shows how librarians rated the location of their music collection at their institution.

This question arises: What factors influence the placement of the music library on a given campus? Could it be that music schools of a certain number of music majors, or a certain collection size, are more likely to have music libraries in the music school? Or perhaps schools that offer certain degrees tend to have the music library in the music school.

When the survey results were examined in this context, no correlation was found between the number of music majors and the location of the music library. (See figure 3.) The size of the collection also did not predict the location of the music library, as illustrated in figure 4. However, when comparing the highest degree offered to the location of the music library, it becomes clear that in most of the music schools that offer a doctorate degree, the music library is in the

| TABLE 4 Staffing | | |
|---|---|---|
| FTE | Coll/Univ. w/ This Staffing | % of Total |
| 0 | 1 | 2 |
| 1 | 21 | 37 |
| 2 | 20 | 36 |
| 3–5 | 11 | 20 |
| 6–8 | 3 | 5 |
| More than 9 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 56 | 100 |

music school, as shown in figure 5. Because the primary users of the music library at a school offering the doctorate (as well as the master's and undergraduate degree in music) are from the School of Music, it is logical that this location would appear to be most beneficial. This is confirmed by these survey results, in that 53 percent (21 out of 39) of the schools offering the doctorate had the music library in the music school. In schools offering a master's degree as the highest degree offered, only 5 percent of the music collections were found in the music library, and the same percentage is found for schools offering only the undergraduate degree.

In looking at music libraries in the main library, the percentages in each category became less extreme. That is, the percentage moves toward 50 percent in that 49 percent of the doctoral-degree-granting universities have a music library in the main library and, at 19 percent each, both the master's- and the undergraduate-degree-granting institutions located the music library in the main library.

| TABLE 5 "Average" ARL Music Library | | |
|---|---|---|
| Students | 10,000–20,000 | 27% |
| Music majors | 501–1,000 | 25% |
| Full-time faculty | Fewer than 25 | 39% |
| Size of music collection | 50,000–100,000 | 43% |
| Annual budget | $100,000–$500,000 | 45% |
| Location of music collection | In the music school or building | 40% |
| Personnel | 1–2 professional music librarians | 37% |

**TABLE 6**
**Rating Given Collection's Current Location (5 = Great Location)**

| Location | Rating 5 | Rating 4 | Rating 3 | Rating 2 | Rating 1 | No answer | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Music building | 10 | 6 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 22 |
| Main-together | 5 | 2 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 15 |
| Main-interfiled | | | 2 | | | | 2 |
| Humanities branch | | 2 | | | | 1 | 3 |
| Separate building | | | 1 | 1 | | | 2 |
| Split collection | | | 2 | 1 | | 1 | 4 |
| Other | | 1 | | | | 2 | 3 |
| TOTAL | 15 | 11 | 12 | 3 | 2 | 8 | 51 |

As noted earlier, the findings for librar-
ies with the music library in a separate
humanities library are not meaningful.
When the music library is found in a sepa-
rate branch, or when the collection is split,
the percentages of libraries in each loca-
tion is nearer the center, anywhere from
33 to 67 percent.

To investigate this trend further, a
simple four-question survey was posted
to the MLA-L listserv. These questions
were asked:

1. How many music majors does your
institution have?

2. What is the total collection size of
the MUSIC collection?

3. What is the highest degree that
your school offers in music?

4. Which best describes the LOCA-
TION of your music library/music col-
lection:

a. In the Music Building/Music
School or in the same building as the
music department

b. In the main library, in an area
devoted just to music materials

c. In the main library, interfiled
with all other materials

d. In a Humanities Branch Library

e. In its own, separate building

f. It is a split collection (parts of it
in one location, parts in another)

**FIGURE 3**
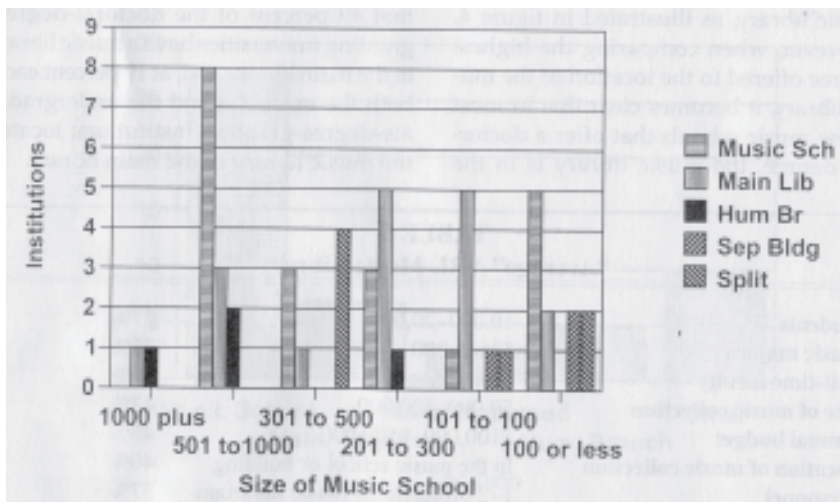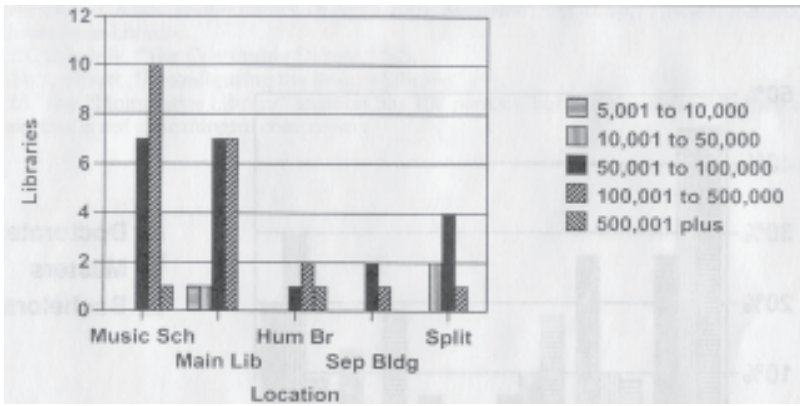**Music Majors versus Location of Music Library**

**FIGURE 4**
**Collection Size versus Location of Music Library**



g. Other (describe please)

Forty-six librarians from a wide variety of schools (none ARL) responded. As with the ARL libraries, there was no correlation between the location of the music collection and the number of music majors, or the location compared to the collection size. However, it can be seen that schools offering higher degrees in music are more likely to have the music collection in a departmental library in the music building or music school. The percentage of libraries at universities where the master's is the highest degree granted in music is the same as the percentage of libraries at universities where the doctor-

ate is the highest degree granted in music (45%), whereas the percentage of libraries that grant only the bachelor's degree with the music collection in the music school, building, or department drops to 27 percent. This survey was informal and the libraries responding were random, but the basic conclusion that institutions offering higher degrees are more likely to house the music collection in the music school is supported. (See figure 6.)

**Conclusion**

As library systems struggle with the age-old question of whether to centralize music library services, they must consider

**FIGURE 5**
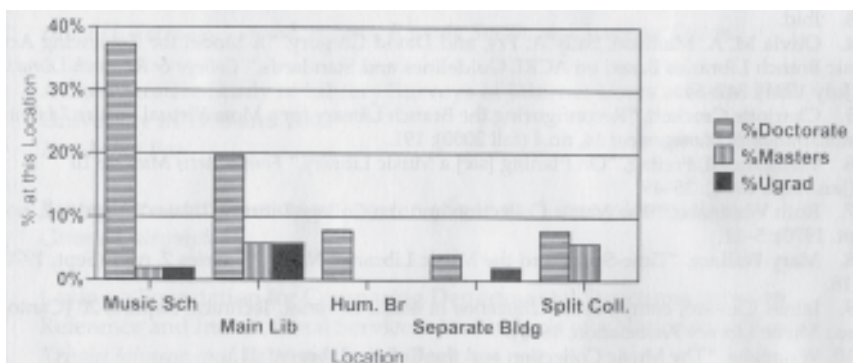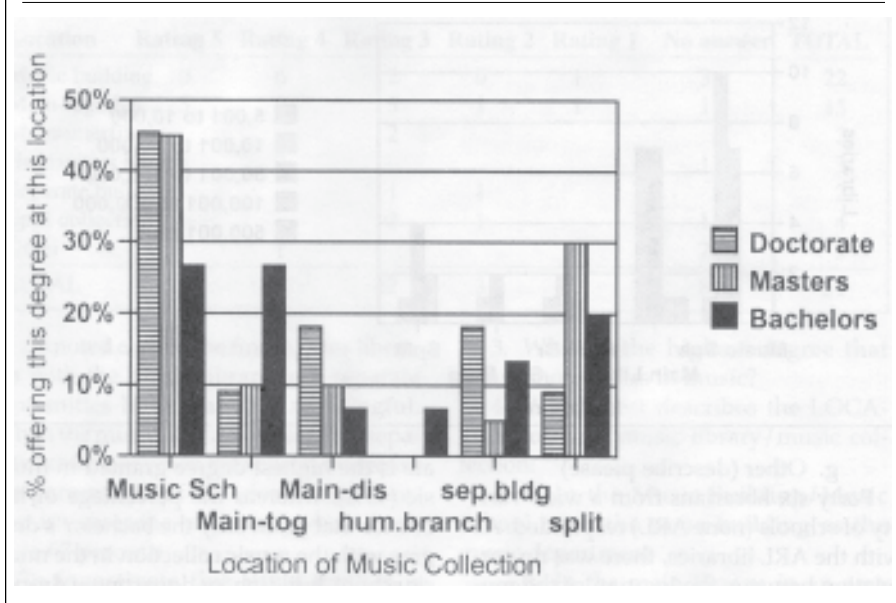**Degrees Offered versus Location of Library**

**FIGURE 6**
**Highest Degree versus Location**



many factors. Administrators must wrestle with the potential loss of support from the faculty if a branch library is integrated into the system and the continually rising cost of maintaining a branch facility if it continues as a branch or departmental library. It is clear that each situation differs from the next and that no reliable list of reasons can be used to centralize or decentralize. However, one aspect of a situation that should be considered is the degrees that are offered. Currently, a majority of university music programs offering the doctorate have chosen the branch music library, and this factor may provide support for maintaining decentralized music libraries in these institutions.

## Notes

1.Leon Shkolnik, "The Continuing Debate over Academic Branch Libraries," *College & Research Libraries* 52 (July 1991): 343.

2.Ibid., 344.

3.Ibid.

4.Olivia M. A. Madison, Sally A. Fry, and David Gregory, "A Model for Reviewing Academic Branch Libraries Based on ACRL Guidelines and Standards," *College & Research Libraries* 55 (July 1994): 342–54.

5.Charlotte Crockett, "Reconfiguring the Branch Library for a More Virtual Future," *Library Administration & Management* 14, no.4 (fall 2000): 191.

6.Wolfgang M. Freitag, "On Planing [sic] a Music Library," *Fontes Artis Musicae* 10 (Jan.–Apr. 1964): 35–49.

7.Ruth Watanabe, "The Music Collection and the College Library," *Notes* 27, series 2, no.1 (Sept. 1970): 5–11.

8.Mary Wallace, "Time-Space and the Music Library," *Notes*, 27, series 2, no.1 (Sept. 1970): 12–18.

9.James Cassaro, comp., *Space Utilization in Music Libraries*, Technical Reports 20 (Canton, Mass.: Music Library Association, 1991).

10.  Watanabe, "The Music Collection and the College Library," 11.

11.  Paul Emmons, "Are Music Libraries Special?" online posting, 8 May 1992. Music Library

Association-Listserv, 27 April 2001. Available from <http://listserv.indiana.edu/archives/mla-l.html>.

12. Travaline, Marjorie, "Centralization vs. Branch Libraries," online posting, 25 March 1997, Music Library Association-Listserv, 28 April, 2001. Available from <http://listserv.indiana.edu/archives/mla-l.html>.

13. Shkolnik, "The Continuing Debate," 345.

14. Crockett, "Reconfiguring the Branch Library," 191.

15. The "Humanities Library" location has 100 percent, but because there was only one of those, this is not a meaningful comparison.