

Improving the Efficiency and Quality of Digitization Practice

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Introduction

As libraries and cultural heritage institutions continue to digitize their unique collections, it has become clear that a wide range of methods and infrastructures exist to enable these collections to materialize and become publicly accessible. Efforts range from small-scale projects to large-scale digitization of entire archives and beyond.

University of Houston Libraries' Metadata and Digitization Services is currently in the process of revisiting its digitization approach. We are aware that efficiency and quality must be improved. Because of the collaborative nature of our work culture, it is crucial that we address a range of stakeholders' concerns and come to a thoroughly-researched conclusion that lends itself to the adoption of policies and procedures that will move our efforts forward.

Methodology

UH Libraries took three-pronged research approach to collect data for our needs assessment and recommendations:

Focus Group Interviews: Institutional focus groups interviews were conducted to discuss the range of concerns existing across the Library in regard to our Digital Library and our digitization and metadata practices. The themes that arise from the focus groups provided a structure to address the needs of our key stakeholders.

Survey: A survey of cultural heritage institutions was distributed to collect data that would serve as a "snapshot" of current trends in digitization practice; the results of the survey are helping us gain an understanding of how specific institutional, departmental, or individual decisions might influence the development/outcomes of digitization programs.

Site Visits: Finally, site visits to other institutions' digitization programs serve to qualitatively benchmark the practices of a number of institutions within the state.

Selected Top Survey Findings

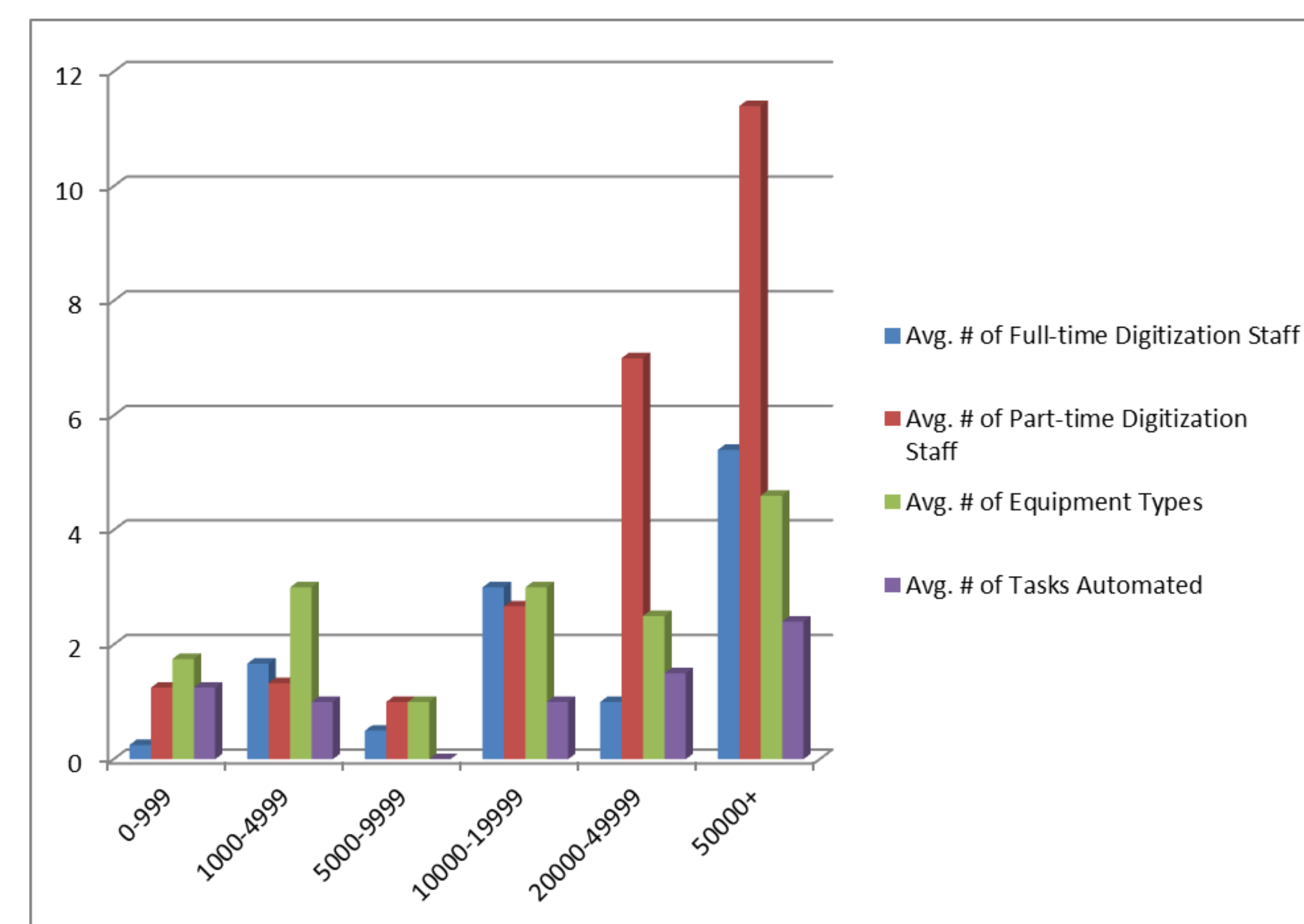
Characteristics of Efficient Digitization Programs:

- 1-5.4 full-time employees in digitization
- 7-11.4 part-time employees in digitization
- Wide range of digitization equipment
- Automated workflows whenever possible

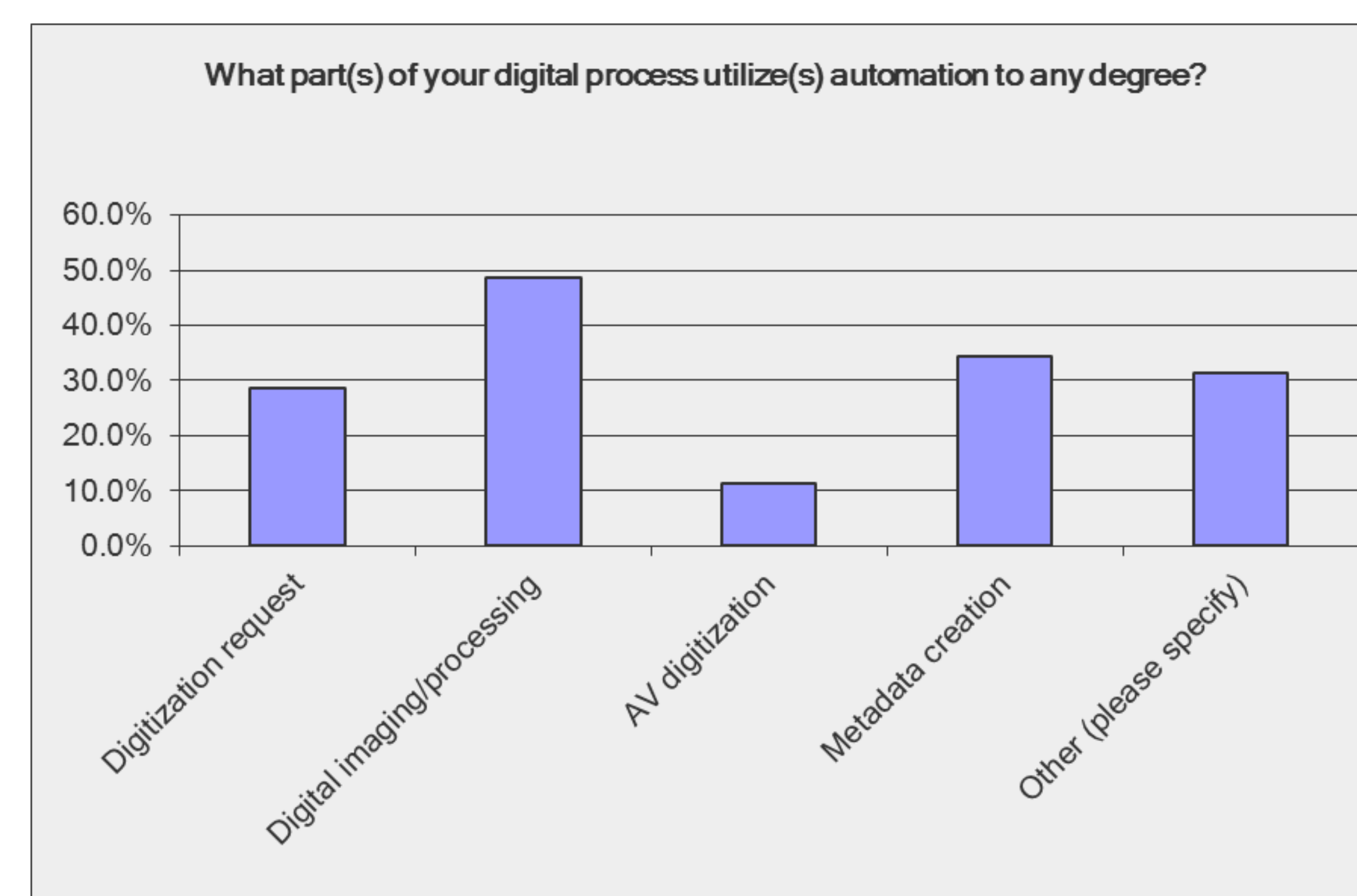
Other key survey findings:

- 52.4% of institutions have digital collection policies
- 54.5% use "Digital Collections" to describe their assets
- 62.9% have multiple repositories for their assets
- Digital Preservation solutions vary widely

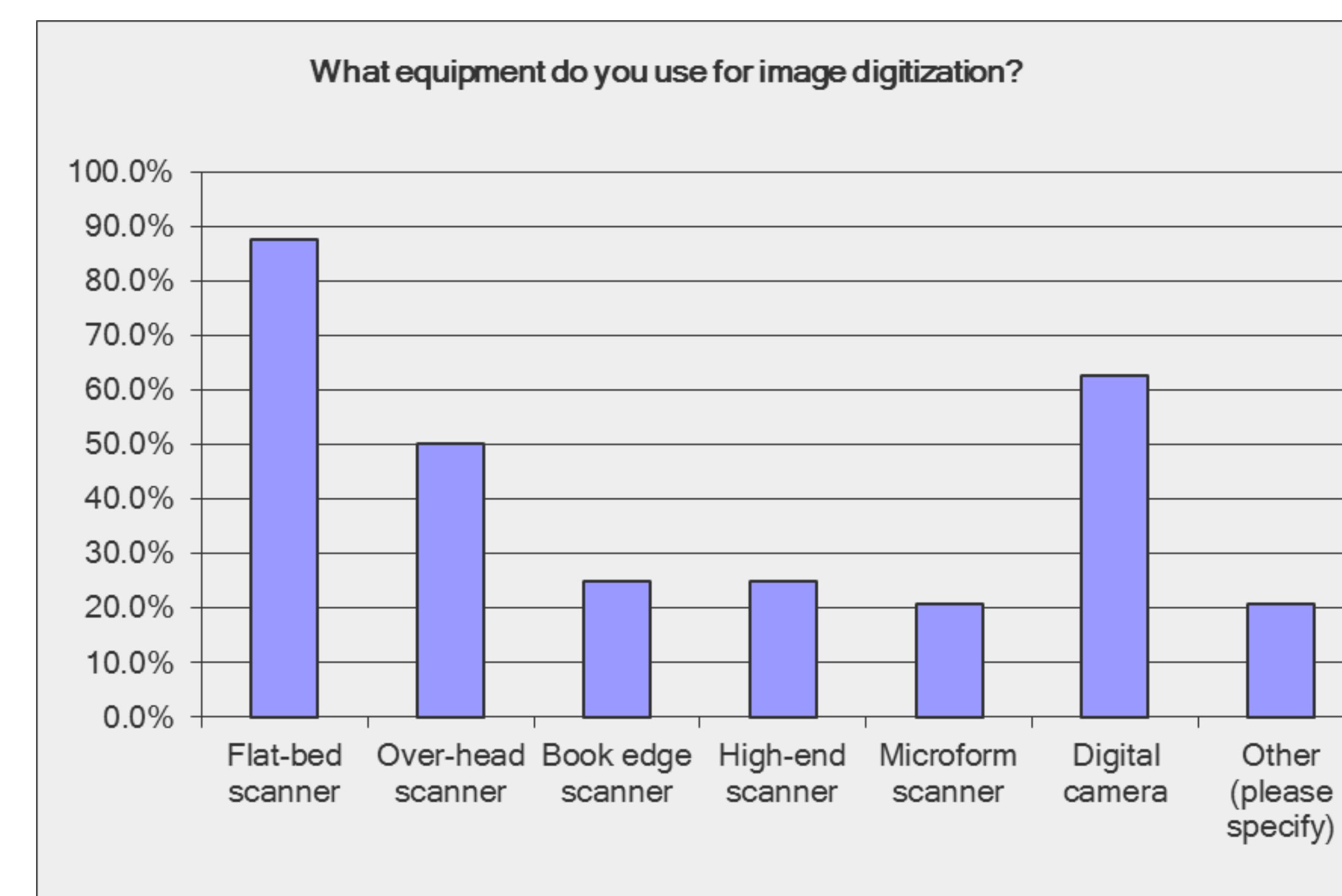
Number of part-time staff dramatically increase as number of files produced per year increase.



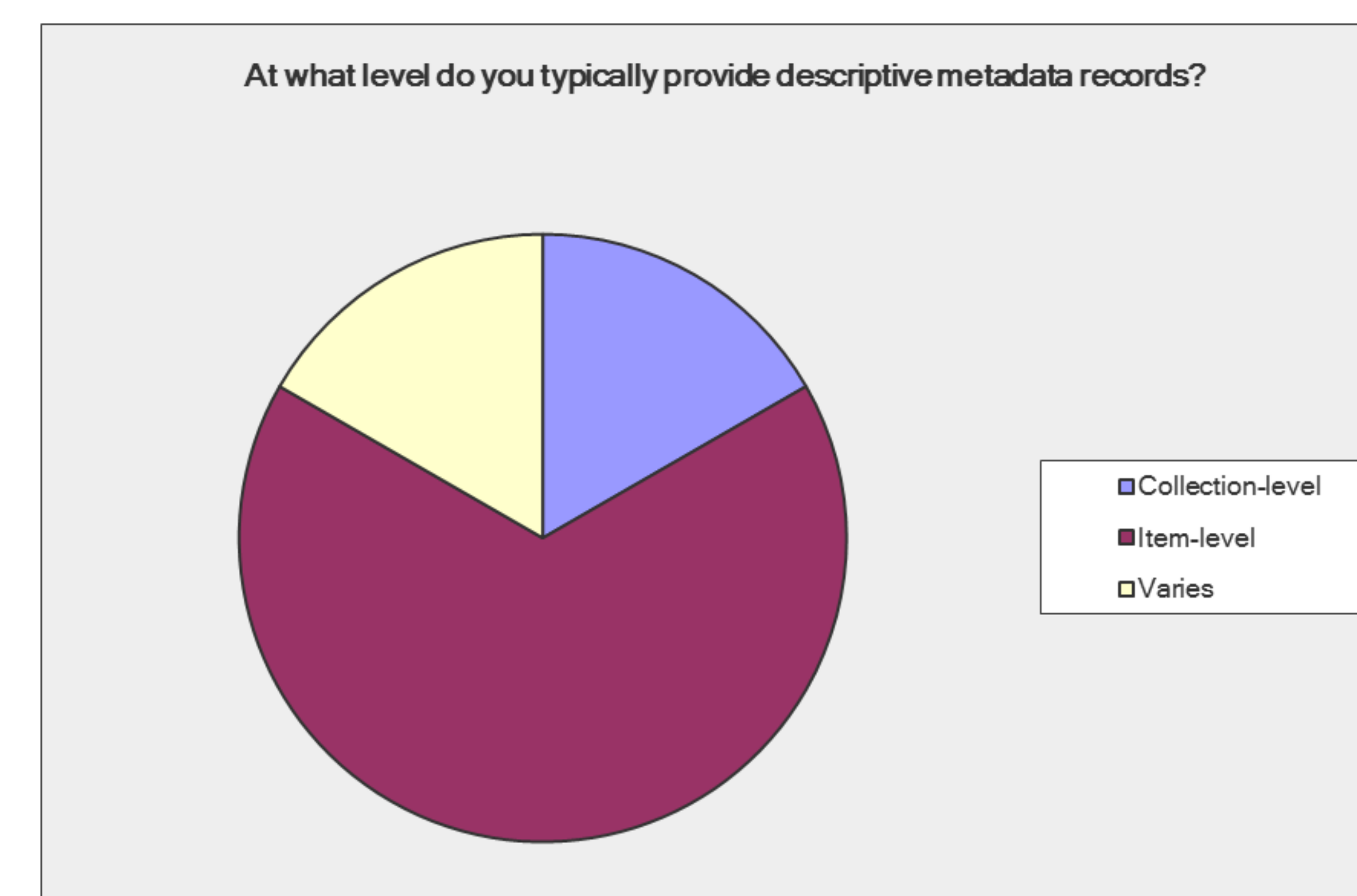
Digital imaging was the most frequently automated task, followed by metadata.



Flatbed scanners and digital cameras are the most frequently used types of equipment.



Most institutions are still describing digital collections at the item-level.



Recommendations

- Staffing:** Need to increase the number of part-time student digitization positions.
- Automation:** Consider a DAMS system that has the option of automating certain aspects of image conversion and SIP creation; use existing metadata to populate DC records; automate technical and preservation metadata.
- Equipment:** Need to secure a commitment to maintain a diverse set of equipment to more efficiently support a variety of digitization scenarios; invest in quality digital camera setup; audiovisual digitization requires the use of a variety of legacy equipment as well as new equipment.
- Workflow:** Need to automate digitization requests, metadata creation, and need to invest in equipment and software that allows for more automated imaging functions.

Conclusion

With the increasing expectation of digitization efforts to become large-scale, it becomes critical to benchmark other institutions to justify changes in workflow and increases to budgets. Productivity doesn't occur in a vacuum—it is a combination of factors that work together toward a model of efficiency. With shifting workflows and increased production, we must acknowledge and accept that "bottlenecks" will occur; we must view these moments as opportunities to develop creative solutions that will ultimately lead toward greater efficiency and increased professional knowledge.

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