



Evidence Summary

Academic Librarians Would Benefit from Instruction on Conducting Research

A Review of:

Kennedy, M. R., & Brancolini, K. R. (2012). Academic librarian research: A survey of attitudes, involvement, and perceived capabilities. *College & Research Libraries*, 73(5), 431-448. Retrieved 31 May 2013 from <http://crl.acrl.org/content/73/5/431.full.pdf+html>

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Received: 27 Feb. 2013

Accepted: 25 May 2013

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Abstract

Objectives – To survey and ascertain the level of confidence academic librarians demonstrate with regard to performing and consuming research, as well as to gather information in order to plan a curriculum that would offer professional continuing education programming for librarians interested in enhancing their research skills.

Design – Web-based survey of academic librarians on their level of confidence with regard to performing and consuming research.

Setting – Various email lists with academic librarians as subscribers.

Subjects – 918 self-selected academic librarians who subscribe to email lists.

Methods – The authors chose to gather a convenience sample of academic librarians by sending a survey via various email lists. A link to an informed consent notice was sent via the request for participation and then linked to the survey. The survey consisted of 19 questions and gathered information regarding four areas: current research practices, self-evaluation of confidence in research practice, research courses in which the participants participated either during their library and information studies (LIS) programs or through other means, and demographic information and information related to support provided by the librarians' home institutions. The authors adapted their survey from other previously published surveys, and it was pre-

tested for its effectiveness and reviewed by the Institutional Review Board. Question 10 included a confidence scale from 1-5 with 1 being "Not at All Confident" and 5 being "Very Confident." The confidence scale was used to capture respondents' self-perceptions of their research design expertise. Various statistical tests were performed.

Main Results – The authors received 918 responses to their call for participation, with 809 completing the full survey; incomplete responses were not excluded. Results indicate that the vast majority of academic librarians are focused on staying current with regard to the literature, and there is the assumption or expectation that they will do this as part of their job duties. While nearly 78% of librarians view the table of contents of journals, fewer librarians regularly read the full content, as time is a determining factor with regard to consumption of the literature. The results show that 62% of academic librarians have undertaken some type of research since graduating with an LIS degree, but they do not necessarily publish or disseminate their results; only 77% of those who had done research had presented at conferences, published in a journal, or presented at their institution in an informal setting.

A confidence scale was used to determine the level of confidence in performing certain research tasks, and while respondents recorded the highest level of confidence in conducting a literature review, the lowest levels of confidence were noted for the ability to design a project to test their questions and to analyze research data. Respondents were fairly confident on average with regard to turning their topics into questions, gathering data, reporting results in a written format, reporting results verbally, and identifying appropriate places to disseminate results. The authors chose to analyze two variables with regard to their question on confidence (Average Confidence and Conduct Research), as they predicted that whether librarians conduct research after completing their LIS studies was dependent upon their confidence in performing evidence-based research. After running a logistic regression analysis in SPSS,

the authors found that confidence may be a predictor for research performance.

With regard to training in research methods, only 26% of respondents felt that their LIS training provided them with the background to perform research tasks. The authors analyzed the data in this instance and found that there is no statistically significant relationship between the belief that LIS training prepared them and the likelihood of performing research.

The demographic section of the survey provided the authors with information regarding research support from institutions, and asked librarians if they are tenure track/promotion, promotion only, or not eligible for tenure and promotion. The results showed that 45% were eligible for tenure, 28% achieved tenure, 48% had been through the tenure process, and 40% had other degrees in addition to their LIS qualification.

Conclusion – By surveying a sample of academic librarians, the authors were hoping to gather information about their confidence level, training level, and current practices with regard to research. The data was collected as a way to inform the authors as to how they could best design a curriculum for continuing education in research practice. The survey results show that academic librarians are confident with regard to consumption of the literature and developing research questions, but less confident with regard to gathering and analyzing data.

The proposed curriculum would provide training on conducting research, and the authors' eventual goal is to offer an "Institute for Research Design in Librarianship" that would help librarians, especially those who are required to do research for tenure and promotion purposes, to perform the more difficult aspects of research such as design and analysis. Librarians would complete the course and be able to return to their home institutions with the capability to perform all steps in the research process.

Commentary

The authors focus on a very important issue within the academic librarian community: some librarians are required to perform research tasks, but may not feel confident in performing these tasks. While the article uses a survey instrument to gather general data about the population, the main goal was to gather evidence to support a curriculum that would effectively teach research design and data analysis. The authors' proposal to offer an Institute for Research Design in Librarianship, from the evidence provided in the article, looks to be a much needed form of continuing education, as many librarians' jobs depend upon producing and disseminating quality research. While there is evidence that some librarians receive training in research methods during their LIS program, it appears that the courses do not always go into sufficient detail regarding data gathering and analysis. A course focused mainly on conducting research, as opposed to just consuming and understanding research, could be one way of closing the gap with regard to low confidence levels in the academic librarian population. The authors should continue in this line of inquiry and gather further evidence to support their idea.

The authors are very forthright about their research limitations, and state that they used a convenience sample, gave two weeks for response time, and only sent out one call to the email lists. They also felt that further study would need to be done with regard to the idea of self-efficacy as a predictor for completion of research tasks. The authors mention that

confidence as a predictor may not show the whole picture, and more would need to be done to get a better perspective. However, as stated several times throughout the article, the survey was only meant to generally inform and gather evidence in order to develop a curriculum in research design.

Future research possibilities were also identified by the authors. Research culture is one area of interest to them, as support from an academic librarian's institution is important to fostering production and dissemination of research. An institution's expectations for staff to publish or disseminate may enhance the research culture and therefore provide support through resources such as time and money to attend training workshops and conferences. One other possible area of interest noted by authors is to study academic librarians who are successful researchers and who have published their research, in order to explore their steps to success. The authors believe that a study of high level researchers in the academic library world may enable a formula for effective research practice.

The article is only an introduction to what could potentially be derived from a more substantial analysis of academic librarian research behaviors. The authors do an excellent job of utilizing the evidence they gathered in an effective way and do not make assumptions based on the data. Their goal is to inform themselves so that they may develop an effective strategy for continuing education for academic librarians. They clearly state their purpose, their goals and their limitations, and hopefully will continue to develop the Institute for Research Design in Librarianship.