



Evidence Summary

While Collaboration Is Increasing in the Profession the LIS Dissertation Remains a Solo-Authored Monograph

A Review of:

Sugimoto, C. R. (2011). Collaboration in information and library science doctoral education. *Library & Information Science Research*, 33, 3-11. doi:10.1016/j.lisr.2010.05.003

Reviewed by:

Diana K. Wakimoto

Online Literacy Librarian, California State University, East Bay

Doctoral Student, San Jose-QUT Gateway Program

Hayward, California, United States of America

Email: diana.wakimoto@csueastbay.edu

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Abstract

Objective – To investigate collaboration in LIS doctoral education, in particular the extent and perception of collaboration between advisors and advisees, and the dissertation as a collaborative product.

Design – Quantitative and qualitative analysis of questionnaire data. Qualitative analysis of interviews. Bibliometric analysis of curricula vitae (CVs) and dissertation citations.

Setting – American Library Association (ALA)-accredited, doctorate-granting schools in the

United States and Canada.

Subjects – A total of 374 full-time, tenured faculty members with the rank of associate or full professor (advisor group) and 294 assistant professors (advisee group) comprised the pool of faculty members (n=668) who were sent the questionnaire. Of these, 30 individuals participated in follow-up telephone interviews, which were equally split between the two groups. There were 97 faculty members from the original pool of 668 faculty members were included in the bibliometric analyses.

Methods – The author developed two questionnaires, one for the advisors (associate and full professors) and one for the advisees (assistant professors), and sent the surveys to faculty members at ALA-accredited schools in the United States and Canada. The questionnaires gathered information about the extent of collaboration and perceptions of collaboration in LIS doctoral education. The author also collected contact information from those interested in participating in a follow-up interview. The author selected the first 30 individuals who responded as the interview participants. The interview participants were split equally between advisors and advisees.

A separate subpopulation of 97 faculty members was chosen for the bibliometric analysis phase of the study. These faculty members were chosen with the following criteria: graduation from an ALA-accredited school; full-text of dissertation available online; and a current, full CV available online. CVs were searched to determine the level of co-authoring before and after graduation.

Main Results – A total of 215 faculty members completed the questionnaires. The results from the surveys showed that more than 61% of the advisors reported collaborating with at least half of their advisees, while 58% of the advisees reported collaborating with their advisors. Both advisors and advisees defined collaboration mainly as publishing, researching, and presenting together. More than 50% of the advisors reported co-publishing with half of their advisees during the advisees' doctoral education. The advisors reported co-publishing with less than 30% of their advisees after the students completed their doctoral education. Advisees reported similar numbers: 44% and 31%, respectively.

Following graduation, the majority of advisees (96%) planned to publish from their dissertations. Of these, 78% did not plan to include their advisor as co-author in these publications. 42% of the advisors reported that

none of their advisees included them as co-authors, while 3% of advisors stated that their advisees always included them as co-authors.

After the 30 interview transcripts were coded using inductive and deductive approaches, the results showed that advisees saw research as a process whereby they became collaborators with their advisors. Advisees also found collaboration with other doctoral students as “kind of key” (p. 7). Advisors saw collaboration as a form of mentorship. However, both advisees and advisors reported that the dissertation itself was not a collaborative product, with the responsibilities of the dissertation tasks falling more heavily on the advisees than the advisors, except in the realm of reviewing and approving the final version of the dissertation.

Analysis of the CVs for co-publishing between advisees and their advisor and/or committee members showed that 41% of the advisees published with their advisors and 34% published with at least one committee member before receiving their doctorate. After receiving their doctorates, 31% of the advisees published with their advisors and 32% published with a committee member.

Conclusion – The author concluded that a majority of advisors and advisees see collaboration as joint publication during the period of doctoral studies. Both advisors and advisees see the doctoral dissertation as a solo-authored monograph and not a collaborative product. However, other forms of collaboration among advisees and their advisors, committee members, and fellow doctoral students are viewed as important parts of the doctoral education experience. Based on these findings, the author suggests that the profession may need to adapt its model of doctoral education to become more aligned with the increasingly collaborative nature of LIS research.

Commentary

This study examined the collaboration between doctoral students (advisees) and their advisors during and after the successful completion of the dissertation. While advisors and their advisees have similar positive views of collaboration in general and its growing importance in LIS research, neither group views the dissertation as a collaborative product. The study is important for our understanding of current collaboration in the doctoral process and will be of interest to those involved in LIS doctoral education. It may also provide an impetus for reconsidering how students prepare for “collaborative models of scholarly productivity” (p. 4).

The author clearly explained the study’s multiple methods of data collection and analysis. All methods were appropriate for the research questions. It would have improved the paper to have broken down the numbers of advisors versus advisees who responded to the surveys. This information can be deduced from Figure 1, but it would improve readability to include the numbers in the text. In addition, reporting the overlap of advisors and advisees used in the bibliographic analyses compared with the surveys and interviews would have strengthened the study. The paper would have also benefited from presenting the statistics in

more readable tables to facilitate understanding the key results. However, these are minor points in an otherwise methodologically strong paper. The author did note the limitations in representing only “one kind of ‘successful’ doctoral experience” (p. 5) and not including either unsuccessful doctoral students or those who did not become faculty members at ALA-accredited schools in the study.

Overall, this is a clear, well-written article covering a very important topic for the LIS profession. While it may be an oversimplification to assert that we are “requiring a product of 19th century science from scholars who we expect to contribute to 21st century science” (p. 10) by requiring a solo-authored dissertation and therefore are not adequately preparing students for the rigors of collaborative research, this article is important for the ongoing conversation about LIS doctoral education. As suggested by Sugimoto, future research that explores the impact of “doctoral student colleagues in the intellectual development of their peers” (p. 9), the impact of grant funding on LIS research, and how the LIS model of doctoral education relates to other social science disciplines will continue to increase our knowledge of and ability to improve LIS doctoral education.