

Updated Survey Information About Librarian-Researchers Prompts Authors to Consider Revising the Curriculum for Their Institute for Research Design in Librarianship Course

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Evidence Summary

Updated Survey Information About Librarian-Researchers Prompts Authors to Consider Revising the Curriculum for Their Institute for Research Design in Librarianship Course

A Review of:

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Abstract

Objective – To examine academic librarians' current attitudes and preparedness to conduct research in order to update the knowledge gained from the authors' 2010 survey, and to determine if changes were needed in their Institute for Research Design in Librarianship continuing education curriculum.

Design – Web based survey.

Setting – Institutions that employ academic and/or research librarians.

Subjects – 793 academic and research librarians.

Methods – The researchers posted a call for participation in their 2015 Librarian Research survey on listservs where academic and research librarians are members. The survey expanded upon the authors' 2010 survey by adding questions to more fully explore three areas: research self-efficacy; Master's thesis and statistics courses, and; research mentoring and institutional support. 793 librarians responded to the survey, and 669 of these respondents completed it. All data from incomplete surveys was included in the

analysis. Survey results were compared with the results from the 2010 survey as well as with the responses from a survey conducted in 2000 by Powel, Baker, and Mika, which addressed many of the same topics under investigation.

Main Results – The authors analyzed the survey results based on four areas: the current research practice of responding academic librarians; a self-evaluation of their confidence in performing the steps in the research process; methods training courses in which they have participated, and; demographics and institutional data related to support of library research.

Regarding current research practices, 84% of respondents said it is assumed that they will read research-based literature as part of their job as academic librarians; 80% are allowed time at work for this purpose; 6% did not know if it was assumed that they will read research-based literature as part of their job; and 9% were unsure if they were allowed to use work time to read the literature. 78% scan tables of contents for research-based journals, while 58% regularly read the full content of these articles (this is a significant drop from the 78% who reported that they regularly read full text articles in the 2010 survey).

Time was the primary reason cited for not regularly reading research-based literature. 77% of respondents have conducted research since completing their Library Science degree (although 2% did not have a Master's degree).

Respondents rated their confidence on a scale of one to five, with one being "Not at all confident" and five being "Very confident." Overall, there were 38 components related to the steps in the research process, which were grouped into 8 questions on the survey. For these questions, an average rating of 3.41 was calculated. From statistical analysis, the authors determined that there is a significant correlation between conducting research and librarian confidence in the process.

The survey contained seven questions related to methods training. The authors were

specifically interested in the correlation between librarians having conducted research since completing their degree and librarians' belief that their degree adequately prepared them to do so. Statistical analysis revealed that the relationship between these factors was not significant; this result was consistent with the results from the authors' 2010 survey as well as from the findings of Powell, Baker, and Mika. The authors were also curious as to whether librarians who had written a thesis as part of their Library Science degree were more likely to have conducted research since earning their degree. This relationship between these variables was not significant, however the relationship between writing a thesis for another graduate degree and conducting research was significant.

Conclusion – The number of survey responses indicates that research is still a current, important issue for academic and research librarians. The authors will use the information from the surveys to revise their educational curriculum, specifically in the areas of current research practice, librarian confidence, and methods training.

Commentary

As noted by the authors, academic librarians are actively conducting research and contributing their publications to library and information science journals. While both intrinsic and extrinsic factors contribute to this scholarship, the "publish or perish" pressure that accompanies tenure and promotion decisions most likely has a large impact on librarians' decision to conduct research. The obstacles as well as the factors that contribute to research success for librarians have been noted in the literature, and were examined in the authors' 2010 survey of academic librarians. From the original survey, the authors developed the Institute for Research Design in Librarianship; they now want to dig deeper into research barriers and enablers, and as such, have revised and expanded their survey with the intention of updating their class curriculum for librarian-researchers.

The critical appraisal tool developed by Glynn (2006) was used to evaluate this study. While 793 librarians responded to the survey, this number only represents 3% of the total U.S. academic librarian population (American Library Association, 2018). The sample was not systematically generated, and the results were not intended to be generalized to the larger population of academic librarians. This purposeful sampling may introduce selection bias, as only those librarians who were subscribed to the chosen listservs were invited to participate in the study. Regarding data collection, the methods are clearly described, the survey was field tested, and the instrument was included in the publication. The authors provide a detailed rationale for including additional questions in the 2015 survey and list the study results in a comprehensive, organized fashion, including tables that compare results from the 2010 survey, the 2015 survey, and the 2000 Powell, Baker, and Mika survey.

The study findings, while meant to provide insight into the research capabilities of a particular group of librarians, may be broadly applicable to academic librarians; many academic librarians, whether on tenure track or not, engage in research. The evidence suggests that one of the primary barriers for librarians is time, both for reading research articles and for conducting research, as well as confidence in certain steps in the research process. Institutions that employ librarian-researchers should consider this data when making decisions about librarian duties, responsibilities, and continuing education opportunities, especially for those librarians on the tenure track or those who hope to contribute to the broader field of library science. Because librarian-generated research may benefit the author's institution and the profession, the findings of this study may have a wider impact beyond the individual librarian.

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