Evidence Based Library and Information Practice

Librarians Are Interested in Finding Research Collaborators

Tran, N. Y., & Chan, E. K. (2020). Seeking and finding research collaborators: An exploratory study of librarian motivations, strategies, and success rates. College & Research Libraries, 81(7), 1095. https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.81.7.1095

Jennifer Kaari

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Evidence Summary

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A Review of:

Reviewed by:

Jennifer Kaari
Librarian
East Orange Public Library
East Orange, New Jersey, United States of America
Email: jkaari@eopl.org

Abstract

Objective – To explore research collaboration among librarians, including librarians' motivations for collaboration, methods for finding collaborators, and how they perceive the success of these methods.

Design – Online survey questionnaire.

Setting – N/A

Subjects – A total of 412 librarians took the survey, and 277 respondents completed the entire survey.

Methods – The researchers developed a survey using Qualtrics, including questions focused on whether respondents had sought research collaboration, factors that motivated them to collaborate, methods they used for finding collaborators, and success rates of these methods. Demographic questions were also included.

Main Results – The survey results indicated that librarians are very interested in research collaboration, with 91.8% of respondents answering that they had sought collaborators, were currently collaborating, or were interested in seeking collaborators in the

future. The top motivating factor for seeking collaboration was to gain expertise that the respondent lacked. The most common strategy for finding collaborators was through a respondent's current or past place of employment, and this method was rated as extremely successful by more than 50% of respondents. Demographically, 70.1% of respondents worked in academic libraries.

Conclusion – The results of this study indicate that research collaboration is of interest to librarians at a higher rate than previously observed. These results can help inform initiatives to support and promote collaboration in library and information science research, as well as provide a groundwork for further research in this area.

Commentary

Why are librarians seeking out research collaborations and how are they finding their collaborators? The authors of this paper set out to explore these questions, building on an established literature that indicates research collaboration and co-authorship are both common and increasing in practice among library and information science researchers (Chang, 2018; Cheng et al., 2019).

Utilizing Glynn's critical appraisal tool, this study was found to have 80% validity (2006). The authors clearly describe their methods, include the survey in the published paper, and provide well-outlined results. The largest weakness of the study is the small sample size, which as the authors note, makes the results not generalizable to a large population.

This study would have been strengthened by narrowing the focus of the survey population. The survey was open to librarians from all disciplines and areas of library science; however, the environment around research and collaboration varies across different types of institutions and disciplines within librarianship. Given that academic librarians were the largest subgroup of respondents and that the environment around publication is very specific in academia, focusing the study on academic librarians exclusively may have

made the results more insightful, even with a small sample size. In addition, it seems unclear if the term "research collaboration" was clearly defined for the respondents of the survey. The authors define the term as research wherein professional contributions are written by two or more authors, but it seems unclear if the term is meant to encompass published papers as well as other research outputs such as posters and presentations.

As an exploratory study, this paper does provide a good foundation for further research into the area of research collaboration. The authors note many areas for future inquiry, including opportunities for cross-sectional analysis and further study into the researchers with whom librarians are collaborating. It would be interesting to know how often librarians are collaborating with researchers from outside library science.

Institutions and individuals seeking to strengthen and encourage research collaboration would find insights into where librarians are looking for collaborations, and they could potentially find opportunities to encourage use of these existing methods as well as develop pathways to explore new methods for collaboration seeking. The results of this study seem to indicate that librarians may find collaborators primarily through existing connections—it would be very intriguing to investigate how new connections for research collaboration are, or could, be formed. Although this study found that very few respondents utilized social media to find collaborators, a deeper investigation into the potential of social media to facilitate collaboration is also an area for further research.

References

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