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Academic library administrators perceive value in their librarians' research

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Evidence Summary

Academic Library Administrators Perceive Value in Their Librarians' Research

A Review of:

Perkins, G.H. & Slowik, A.J.W. (2013). The value of research in academic libraries. *College & Research Libraries*, 74(2), 143-158. Retrieved from <http://crl.acrl.org/content/74/2/143.full.pdf+html>

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Abstract

Objective – To explore academic library administrators' perceived value of their librarians' research, specifically the importance to the profession and the library community.

Design – Qualitative, exploratory study using a survey questionnaire.

Setting – Academic libraries in the United States of America.

Subjects – 23 library administrators.

Methods – During the summer of 2010, one of the authors conducted 20-30 minute telephone interviews with 23 academic library administrators. Interviews were recorded and

transcribed for coding. Interview questions 1-3 and 8-19 were content-analyzed; the authors described common themes for each of these questions. Items 4-7 had Likert scale response formats, and a mean and standard deviation were computed for each of these items.

Main Results – The benefits of librarians' research included fulfilling tenure-track requirements, enriching relationships with teaching faculty, library faculty recognition, improved services and programs, collaboration with others, research result application to daily issues, development as librarians, and improved knowledge of the research field.

The perceived current changes and future issues for university libraries included

increased digitization of collections, scholarly communication, and expanded instructional engagement of faculty and students, as well as future economic downturn and budget cuts. Administrators noted several methods that influenced their thinking: professional meetings, reading professional journals, informal discussions with colleagues, and social media such as Facebook and Twitter.

Academic library administrators used a variety of methods to support their librarians' research. These included tenure-track requirements, research incentives, travel funds, grants, sabbaticals, release time, and shared communication about research. Additionally, there was a substantial perceived interrelationship between how librarians' research benefited the librarian, the library, the university, and the profession. Recognition and new programs and services were thought to benefit all four areas, and monetary rewards were considered benefits for the first three areas.

Conclusion – Based on the sample of 23 academic library administrators, the authors conclude that librarians' research is perceived as valuable to both the academic and library communities.

Commentary

While early history of research in academic libraries did not show much value for librarians, the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL)'s first "Standards for College Libraries" in 1957 marked the beginning of setting research standards and valuing academic librarians' research. Most literature since this point written about librarians' research roles has emphasized advantages or disadvantages of library research, as well as the level of institutional support for such undertakings and its effect on research activities. The authors of this study state that they hope to add to the dialogue on academic research by assessing the opinions of library administrators for the benefit of the research community.

The article was appraised using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme Qualitative Research Checklist (CASP, 2013). The structured interview format was appropriate for the exploratory nature of this study. The steps taken by the authors for data collection, analysis, reporting, and explicit description of findings meet the criteria specified in the CASP checklist. The survey questionnaire used in the study is included as Appendix A in the article.

In addition to the qualitative data, the survey also asked participants several demographic questions, such as title, number of library volumes, highest academic degree earned, whether the institution is public or private, ALA accredited, or ARL affiliated. This data is clearly presented in table format throughout the article.

The authors use several methods to ensure trustworthiness and credibility of their research. Both authors reviewed the interview transcripts and agreed upon themes. Additionally, by using several participant quotes, the authors were able to share the rich, thick description of the context with the reader. However, while the authors offered to send a copy of the finished study to the interviewees, they did not do member checks with the participants to verify that the interview transcripts had indeed captured the ideas that were intended to be conveyed.

This study was well-designed and could serve as a model of how to conceptualize and report the findings of qualitative research. As such, the article is of potential interest to a wide audience. Furthermore, as the study methodology is well constructed and explained in detail, it could be replicated by other researchers. The results are clearly presented, and provide the audience with a wealth of information which could lead to additional research ideas. Finally, because the article includes demographic information about the administrators and their associated libraries, the data could be relevant to other libraries that share the same qualities as these institutions.

Considering the sample size for this study, there may be some concern regarding the issue of confidentiality. Details from the research results could lead to the identification of institutions; however the answers to specific interview questions would be more difficult to associate with a particular library.

Other than stating a confirmation that the research suggests that library administrators perceived multiple values of their librarians' research, the authors mention that what was discovered during this research project was similar to what was already mentioned in the literature. They also suggest that additional research is needed to shed further light on this topic. Perhaps a more semi-structured interview guide, along with additional participant quotations, would lead to a richer understanding of the value of research and the specific institutional policies that either support or hinder its progress.

References

Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP).
(2013). *Qualitative Research Checklist*.
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