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Positive correlation between academic library services and high-impact practices for student retention

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Evidence Summary

Positive Correlation Between Academic Library Services and High-Impact Practices for Student Retention

A Review of:

Murray, A. (2015). Academic libraries and high-impact practices for student retention: Library deans' perspectives. *portal: Libraries and the Academy*, 15(3), 471-487.
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Abstract

Objective – To investigate the perceived alignment between academic library services and high-impact practices (HIPs) that affect student retention.

Design – Survey questionnaire.

Setting – Public comprehensive universities in the United States of America with a Carnegie classification of master's level as of January 2013.

Subjects – 68 library deans or directors out of the 271 who were originally contacted.

Methods – The author used Qualtrics software to create a survey based on the HIPs, tested the

survey for reliability, and then distributed it to 271 universities. Library services were grouped into 1 of 3 library scales: library collection, library instruction, or library facilities. The survey consisted of a matrix of 10 Likert-style questions addressing the perceived level of alignment between the library scales and the HIPs. Each question provided an opportunity for the respondent to enter a "brief description of support practices" (p 477). Additional demographic questions addressed the years of experience of the respondent, undergraduate student enrollment of the university, and whether librarians held faculty rank.

Main Results – The author measured Pearson correlation coefficients and found a positive correlation between the library scales and the

HIPs. All three library scales displayed a moderately strong positive correlation between first-year seminars and experiences (HIP 1), common intellectual experiences (HIP 2), writing-intensive courses (HIP 4), undergraduate research (HIP 6), diversity and global learning (HIP 7), service learning and community-based learning (HIP 8), internships (HIP 9), and capstone courses and projects (HIP 10). The library collections scale and library facilities scale displayed a moderately strong correlation with learning communities (HIP 3) and collaborative assignments and projects (HIP 5). The library instruction scale displayed a strong positive correlation with HIP 3 and a very strong positive correlation with HIP 5. Each of the positive correlations was of high significance. As the rating of library alignment with each HIP increased, so did the total rating of each library scale. Along with the quantitative data, various themes for each HIP relating to the library's support practices emerged from the qualitative feedback. No significant trends were noted from the demographic questions.

Conclusion – Library deans or directors can utilize the conceptual framework presented in this study to connect the impact of library services to terminology and practices commonly understood by university administrators. Further research using the conceptual framework would benefit future discussion on how academic libraries measure impact or success of their library services.

Commentary

This study presents a fascinating perspective on the perceived correlation between library services and student retention rates. As the author indicates, there are a number of studies that examine the relationship between libraries and student retention, but a vast majority of them focus on a student's library usage behaviour rather than library services as a whole (Soria, Fransen, & Nackerud, 2013). Furthermore, none of these studies attempt to study the alignment with the HIPs.

The reviewer critically appraised the article using Glynn's EBL critical appraisal checklist

(2006). The overall validity was 76% and so this study falls within the range for validity. Section validity yielded 80% for population, 67% for data collection, 100% for study design, and 67% for results. The percentage for the data collection and results sections did not fall within the range for validity and should therefore be questioned.

The author does not include the survey instrument in the publication. The sample question that appears in the manuscript provides one example of the instructions and questions posed on the instrument, but was not sufficient enough for the reviewer to conclude whether all questions posed were clear enough to elicit precise answers. The author provides a link to additional information on the reliability testing for the instrument, but an attempt to access the provided URL resulted in an error, therefore making the supplemental material unusable. The exclusion of the instrument compromised the data collection validity. On a separate note, it should be common practice for an author to include the survey instrument, in its entirety when possible, as an appendix, supplement, or table. This practice allows for transparency and promotes reproducibility.

For the results section, some but not all variables were addressed. Furthermore, some variables, such as the demographics of the respondents, were only analyzed as a means to identify future research topics rather than to identify the impact of these variables within the study. In addition, the results were not externally valid. The target population of the study is limited to library deans or directors in the United States of America with a Carnegie classification of master's level as of January 2013. The reviewer agrees with the author that the population is not representative of all users. As a result, the findings cannot be generalized to a broader population. The study, however, can be generalized and applied to institutions with different Carnegie classifications.

This article presents a compelling framework to align the perceived impact of library services to student retention concepts. With

some modifications, this study is worth exploring for future research. Library deans and directors should take note of this research as it provides a unique process for measuring library impact.

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