



Commentary

Reality Through Evidence

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"Perception is reality" ... or is it? This famous saying frequently is used to justify whatever course of action we undertake, will undertake, or have already undertaken. When perception is reality, "I" am never wrong, "I" am always right. Never doubt the importance of the "I". Or to phrase it another way, *"it's all about me"*. Behind the importance of being "right" are a range of emotions, facts, uncertainties, views, evidence, history and analysis. For many library staff, being "right" is a passion. On issues that seemingly should have any number of acceptable answers, pitched battles are waged to ensure that all are swayed to THE obvious correct answer. The motivations are the best! The banner of the user is waved high -- our users are always first and foremost in guiding our decisions! Yet our users' perception of a Google searchable free web crash everyday

into the library's efforts to spread information literacy throughout the campus and the community. A librarian's background, experience, training, and knowledge of controlled and structured information come second to the uninformed but free and easy alternative. Perhaps reality is more accurately reflected in a different saying: *"ignorance is bliss"*.

In the academic world we participate in an environment that elevates research methodology and processes to a pedestal that is under-pinned with peer-reviewed validation using universally accepted standards. Librarians are, by training and inclination, service oriented rather than research oriented. Those of us truly interested in exploring the profession from a research-based perspective usually register for and complete a PhD program. There is

no better preparation for research than the PhD process. Most librarians, however, have not chosen to follow that route. Without the credibility of a PhD we need to ensure that our professional practice activities are based on more than just perceptions and assumptions. Just as clinicians ensure that appropriate patient care follows from evidence based decisions, so too must those working in the information world ensure that professional practice activities are grounded in appropriate evidence-based decisions.

Yet, in many ways academic librarians operate at a daily disadvantage. We are partners in the educational process but fulfill an intermediary role. This role is critical to educational successes but it is a role that is anchored in the environment in which we operate, and therefore dependent upon others. Between students' desire for information that is "good enough" to meet the requirements of an assignment and our faculty colleagues' concern for pedagogical control we must insert ourselves to achieve both groups' interests while upholding library outcomes. Although our profession is not regulated, and there are few standards and benchmarks, we must somehow achieve academic credibility. Within the profession we bemoan the undervaluing of our skills and expertise. For our contributions to the educational process to be recognized, we must approach our work with an intellectual

rigor that will allow our efforts to be viewed and appreciated on their inherent merits. Embracing an evidence based approach will change our environment for the better. By adopting and promoting practices that derive from thoughtful evaluation of the evidence before us we move beyond perceptions. By consciously structuring our efforts to identify needed inputs for decisions we set the stage to achieve meaningful outcomes. If we believe we are "right" then we should welcome the evidence that will prove it so. Then it is our responsibility to give back to the profession by both creating data for others to utilize and by reporting on our efforts to build upon the contributions of colleagues. Perception can legitimately be a starting point; reality is where we land. If we want to control our destinies we have to not only be open to the evidence before us but we must seek out new interpretations of that evidence. A good starting point is to recognize that "I" am correct only when the evidence substantiates my position. We need to consciously seek to inform our decisions with the best possible information and analysis available. "It is not hard to learn more. What is hard is to unlearn when you discover yourself wrong."ⁱ As we undertake a journey through the profession let us do it with a willingness to learn from evidence that is suitable for the issue. Let us embrace an evidence based approach to serving our users and learning more about the work we do.

ⁱ Attributed to Martin H. Fischer in numerous sources, including the February 2008 AMA Management Update (Newsletter for AMA Members) and the Croydon U3A Inc Sharing Knowledge & Skills webpage at <http://home.vicnet.net.au/~unita/timetable.htm> (Accessed February 25, 2008).