



Evidence Summary

Quality of Student Paper Sources Improves after Individual Consultation with Librarians

A Review of:

Reinsfelder, T. L. (2012). Citation analysis as a tool to measure the impact of individual research consultations. *College & Research Libraries*, 73(3), 263-277. Retrieved from <http://crl.acrl.org/content/73/3/263.abstract>

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Received: 27 Nov. 2012

Accepted: 8 Feb. 2013

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Abstract

Objective – To determine whether the quality of sources used for a research paper will improve after a student receives one-on-one instruction with a librarian. To test citation analysis and a rating scale as means for measuring effectiveness of one-on-one consultations.

Design – Citation analysis.

Setting – Academic library of a large American university.

Subjects – Papers from 10 courses were evaluated. In total, 76 students were asked to meet with librarians. Of these, 61 actually participated. Another 36 students from the

control group were not asked to meet with a librarian (although 1 partook in a consultation).

Methods – Librarians invited faculty to participate in a new service to help improve quality of student research papers. Eligible courses included those with a required research paper component where papers could be evaluated at different times in the project. Faculty instructed students in the class to meet with the librarian after a first draft of a paper was written. Students from seven courses were asked to meet with a librarian. Courses included English Composition (2), Geography (1), Child Development (1), Occupational Therapy (1), Marketing (1) and Women Writers (1). Three courses acted as control groups (all English Composition). After

meeting with students to make recommendations, librarians used a rating scale (measuring relevancy, authority, appropriate dates and scope) to review the quality of sources in both drafts and final papers.

Main Results – One-on-one consultations with a librarian resulted in sources being of a higher quality in the final paper. With the exception of authority, the differences between draft and final paper were statistically significant in all measures (overall quality, relevance, dates and scope). Those in the control group showed no improvement in quality of sources between draft and final paper.

Conclusion – Quality of sources in final paper improves after one-on-one consultations with librarians. The use of a rating scale is helpful in objectively measuring quality of sources, although there is potential for subjective interpretation.

Commentary

Although citation analysis is commonly used to study library resources, this study takes a unique twist to the design by quantitatively examining the effects of individual research consultations. One-on-one instruction studies usually rely on more subjective tools such as satisfaction surveys and anecdotal evidence. Using citation analysis and a new rating scale offers a fresh take on evaluating library impact. This paper is not only testing to see whether librarian consultation is effective, but also whether citation analysis is a useful tool to test that hypothesis. The answer is yes to both, with some caveats.

The EBL Critical Appraisal Checklist (Glynn, 2006) was used to determine various strengths and weaknesses of the study. The researcher's rating scale was tested for reliability among raters and the author admits that the tool is far from perfect. However, he is to be commended for clearly explaining ways to improve the tool with better instructions and more descriptive categories and criteria, so that future researchers are fully aware of potential

drawbacks. A copy of the rating scale with descriptions is included for other researchers' future use.

This is a very readable article. However, there are concerns regarding the population and methodology. The researcher explains some of the issues regarding diversity of assignments and how faculty instructed students in acceptable sources, but it is challenging to know if there are just too many variables affecting the results. Although there are benefits to one-on-one instruction (such as tailoring to individual student needs), there is a lack of standardization involved. For instance, it is not completely clear if the librarians were telling the students the actual resources to use, or were recommending places where they could find useful resources.

Two librarians provided recommendations to students regarding resources and then subsequently scored student papers. There is potential for bias in the ways that they scored the sources, since they knew which students/papers they had assisted. The librarians might have looked more favourably on the papers/sources of those students that they had helped versus those students that they hadn't. Having different people score the papers would have helped eliminate this bias.

We don't know the librarians' individual style or their subject expertise. The researcher is comparing resources of English Composition, Geography, Child Development, Occupational Therapy, Marketing and Women Writers. These are very different subjects, and what one librarian recommends for resources could be quite different from the other based on their knowledge of the subject. Limiting to only English Composition papers for both groups would have made for stronger comparisons.

The use of tools such as rating scales and rubrics to measure student learning has received much attention in recent years. Despite some drawbacks, this paper helps to support academic librarians looking for different measures of library impact that are substantive and improved over methods such

as satisfaction surveys. However, time and scoring citations for large classes is a potential challenge. Future researchers should take the author's recommendations to make the rating scale a more reliable tool, and to limit comparisons to similar or equivalent courses.

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References

Glynn, L. (2006). A critical appraisal tool for library and information research. *Library Hi Tech*, 24(3), 387-399. doi: 10.1108/07378830610692154