



*Evidence Summary*

**Model Correlates Many Factors to Undergraduates' Perceived Importance of Library and Research Activities, but Low Explanation Power Suggests More Research Needed**

**A Review of:**

Soria, K. M. (2013). Factors predicting the importance of libraries and research activities for undergraduates. *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 39(6), 464-470.  
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**Abstract**

**Objective** – The purpose is to analyze characteristics and perceptions of undergraduate students to determine factors that predict the importance of library and research activities for the students.

**Design** – Student Experience in the Research University (SERU) survey questionnaire.

**Setting** – Nine large, public, research universities in the United States of America.

**Subjects** – 16,778 undergraduates who completed the form of the survey that included the academic engagement module questions.

**Methods** – The researcher used descriptive and inferential statistics to analyze student responses. Descriptive statistics included coding demographic, collegiate, and academic variables, as well as student perceptions of the importance of library and research activities. These were used in the inferential statistical analyses. Ordinary least squares regression and factor analysis were used to determine variables and factors that correlated to students' perceptions of the importance of libraries and research activities.

**Main Results** – The response rate for the overall SERU survey was 38.1%. The results showed that the majority of students considered having access to a “world-class library collection,” learning research methods,

and attending a university with “world-class researchers” to be important. The regression model explained 22.7% of variance in the importance students placed on libraries and research activities; factors important to the model covered demographics, collegiate, and academic variables. Four variables created in factor analysis (academic engagement, library skills, satisfaction with libraries and research, and faculty interactions) were significantly correlated with the importance students placed on libraries and research activities. The most important predictors in the model were: student satisfaction, interest in a research or science profession, interest in medical or health-related profession, academic engagement, and academic level.

**Conclusion** – Based on the results of this study, librarians should be able to tailor their marketing to specific student groups to increase the perception of importance of libraries by undergraduates. For example, more success may be had marketing to students who are Hispanic, Asian, international, interested in law, psychology or research professions as the study found these students place more importance on libraries and research activities than other groups. These students may be targeted for being peer advocates for the libraries. Further research is suggested to more fully understand factors that influence the value undergraduate students place on libraries and find ways to increase the value of libraries and research activities for those demographic groups who currently rate the importance lower.

### Commentary

This study is part of the growing body of literature concerned with determining factors associated with students valuing the academic library and demonstrating the libraries’ value to students and administrators (Oakleaf, 2010). The study’s topic and suggestions for practical application of the findings to showcase the importance of libraries and increase the perception of importance in various student demographic groups will be of interest to academic librarians. For many librarians, the

lack of accessibility of the statistical methods and results combined with the relatively low predictive power of the regression model, may make them cautious about applying the study’s results in outreach and marketing efforts.

The study provides an interesting look at correlating factors with student perceptions of the importance of library and research activities. The researcher notes the limitation of the low response rate, which is not a unique issue with online surveys (Sax, Gilmartin, & Bryant, 2003) and the large number of responses may compensate for the potential nonresponse bias. Using the appraisal checklist by Glynn (2006), the article is valid if the reader makes assumptions about the SERU questionnaire being validated; regardless of this lack of clarity, the analysis of the data is clear.

The main concern with the study is basing conclusions for marketing and outreach to specific demographics on a regression model that only explains 22.7% of the importance placed on libraries and research activities. The study found some factors that are statistically significant in predicting the importance of libraries and research activities, but many important factors were not uncovered via the SERU questionnaire and the researcher calls for more research to create a robust model.

Furthermore, while the statistical analyses are appropriate to the research questions, lack of clarity in communicating these methods and results for a non-statistician audience limits understandability. Librarians without strong statistics backgrounds will have trouble evaluating whether the results are valid to apply leaving them to rely only on the researcher’s interpretations. The researcher is very capable of communicating statistics and limitations to a non-statistician audience as seen in another recent article written with her colleagues (Soria, Fransen, & Nackerud, 2013). Hopefully her future articles will be written as clearly, as these topics are of great interest and importance to academic librarians.

As academic librarians seek ways to assess

their impact on undergraduate education and ways of marketing their value to students, research in these areas becomes increasingly important. In order to deepen the research base, as noted by the researcher, librarians should work with other academic units to collect and evaluate appropriate data to move beyond student perceptions and into library and research skills to correlate library activities with student performance.

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