



Evidence Summary

Enrollment in a Library Credit Course is Positively Related to the College Graduation Rates of Full Time Students

A Review of:

Cook, J.M. (2014). A Library credit course and student success rates: A longitudinal study. *College & Research Libraries* 75(3), 272-283. doi:10.5860/crl12-424

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Abstract

Objective – To determine the impact of a credit-bearing information literacy skills course on student success rates.

Design – Observational Study.

Setting – An academic library at a mid-sized university in Georgia, United States of America.

Subjects – Nine cohorts of students (n=15,012) who entered the institution for the first time, on a full-time basis, each year between 1999 and 2007.

Methods – Aggregate data on each student cohort was gathered from the Department of

Institutional Research and Planning. Data included high school ACT and SAT scores, high school graduating GPAs, college graduating GPAs, and college graduation dates. The nine cohorts were each divided into two groups: students who took a credit library course (LIBR 1101) at some point during their student career, and students who did not. For each cohort, a Pearson Chi-Square test was used to determine statistical correlation between library course enrollment and four-, five-, and six-year graduation rates. Z-tests were used to determine a difference in the average graduation GPA of students who did and did not take the course, as well as a difference in the average high school graduation GPA, ACT, and SAT scores of the two groups in each cohort.

Main Results – Graduation rates were positively associated with students who took the library course at some point during their studies. Students who took the library course graduated at higher rates than students who did not: 56% of those students who took the library course graduated within the study's time frame, compared to 30% of those who did not take the course. On average, there was no significant difference in college graduation GPAs between students who did and did not take LIBR 1101. During the time period of the study, more students who took the course graduated than those who did not, but those students who took the course did not have higher graduating GPAs.

Conclusion – Students who enrolled in LIBR 1101 at some point in their studies graduated at a significantly higher rate than students who did not.

Commentary

This is an instructive example of how to employ institutional analysis and planning data to measure library impact on student success. This is one of many similar studies aimed at quantitatively and qualitatively proving the value of academic libraries, but the distinct contribution of this article is its use of a large secondary dataset which not only allowed the author to study 15,000 students over a 9-year period, but also allowed her to contextualize and compare data on library course registration with other institutional data (aggregate graduation rates, college graduation GPAs, and high school GPAs and test scores).

Interestingly, this institutional data that in some ways offered unique potential for impactful evidence also presented the study's most significant threat to the validity of that evidence. This study does not meet the standards of validity established by Glynn's (2006) critical appraisal tool, primarily because of challenges presented by the non-random, non-representative sample, and the biased population selection and inclusion/exclusion criteria. These limitations were the result of a decision to gather and present data that could

be compared to the institution's official metrics, and are clearly noted by the author. It is significant, therefore, that the author makes no mention of the impact (realized or potential) of sharing this information with institutional stakeholders, which was the initial purpose for this study and the reason for proceeding with the study in the face of methodological challenges that would potentially impact the study's validity.

Despite the methodological issues that prevent this study from being generalizable, either to other forms of library instruction or to credit courses on other campuses, it does effectively present evidence of a positive correlation between enrollment in a library instruction course and graduation rate. The author also raises good questions for future research, related to impacts of timing of library instruction in a student's career, instructional delivery method, and instruction on students with different levels of academic achievement.

Although the quality of evidence presented by this particular study is weak in itself, the author recognizes that it is only through the "gathering together an increasing number of suggestive correlative studies" (p. 282) that librarians can begin to present a stronger argument for the value of academic libraries' instruction efforts and the impact of instructional practices on certain measures of student success. This study is potentially reproducible in other institutions that have access to similar institutional data. And, while the limitations of this study identified by the author are significant and limit its external validity, it lays the groundwork for future studies on the associations between library instruction and student outcomes using existing institutional planning data.

References

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