



Evidence Summary

First-Year Library Student Assistants Have Better Information Literacy Skills, and Demonstrate a Larger Increase in these Skills, Compared to Their First-Year Peers

A Review of:

Folk, A. L. (2014). How well are we preparing them?: An assessment of first-year library student assistants' information literacy skills. *College & Undergraduate Libraries*, 21(2), 177-192.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10691316.2013.829377>

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Received: 29 May 2015

Accepted: 17 Sept. 2015

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Abstract

Objective – To examine the information literacy skills of first year library student assistants, in comparison to first year students who are not library assistants. Additionally, the study investigates whether information literacy skills of library student assistants increased more than those of the general student population during their first semester at college.

Design – Pretest/posttest.

Setting – Two regional campuses of a research university in the United States of America.

Subjects – First-year students, including library student assistants and students in the Freshman Seminar course. At one regional campus, 103 first-year students, including 5 library student assistants, completed the pretest. At the same campus, 75 first year students, including 5 library student assistants, completed the posttest. At the other campus, 30 first-year students, including 3 library student assistants, completed the pretest, and 26 first-year students, including 2 library student assistants, completed the posttest.

Methods – The researcher distributed a pretest and posttest that included demographic questions and 11 items related to information literacy to first-year students. The pretest was given within the first two weeks of the fall

semester, before the students attended library instructional sessions. At one campus, the library student assistants took the pretest at the beginning of their first shift, while at the second campus, the library student assistants completed the pretest within the first two weeks of the semester. The posttest was given to participants within the last two weeks of classes during the fall semester.

Main Results – On the pretest, the library student assistant scores ranged from 6 to 10, out of a maximum of 11 points. For the posttest, these students had scores that ranged from 8 to 11. Both of these score ranges were higher than the mean score of the general first-year students.

The mean of the pretest scores of the general first-year students was 5.95 points out of 11 points with a mean score of 54.1%, while the mean of the pretest scores for the library student assistants was 8.13, or 73.9%. The mean of the posttest scores for the general first-year students was 7.29, or 66.3%, while the mean of the posttest scores for the library student assistants was 9.43, or 85.7%. No students earned a perfect score on the pretest. On the posttest, 29% of the library student assistants scored a perfect 11 points, while only 4% of the general first-year students earned a perfect score.

In comparing pretest to posttest scores, the general first-year students' mean score increased 1.34 points, while the mean score of the library student assistants increased by 1.3 points. The library student assistants scored higher than the general first-year students on both the pretest and posttest; these numbers are statistically significant. The author reports that the increase in the mean scores from the pretest to the posttest for the library student assistants is not statistically significant. On the other hand, the increase of the mean scores from the pretest to the posttest for the general first-year students is statistically significant (p. 186).

Conclusions – The author concludes that the information literacy skills of first-year library student assistants are better than general first-

year students. This information is valuable to librarians who wish to gauge how well they are doing in regards to teaching information literacy skills to library student assistants. Additionally, librarians can better understand how their instruction is contributing to the library student assistants' educational experiences in general as well as their future as lifelong learners.

Commentary

In the literature review, the author notes that there has been no other research conducted that directly links increased information literacy skills to college-level student employment in the library. Considering this gap in the published literature, the author has clearly contributed to the baseline knowledge on this topic and filled a void on the subject.

This study was evaluated using the ReLIANT Instrument (Koufogiannakis, Booth, & Brettle, 2006). The strengths of this research related to study design include the clearly explained research methodology, the detailed description of the study population, and the inclusion of the survey instrument in the article's appendix. Furthermore, the author notes that the survey questions were based on and linked to ACRL's *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education*.

The results of the study are explained in detail, but in some cases the explanation may be too detailed for some readers. Fortunately, the author provides an easy-to-read summary of the results, including which test scores are statistically significant.

The study had several limitations. First, a convenience sample was used to select participants and collect data for the assessment. Second, the survey was not pre-tested or piloted, so the researcher did not have an opportunity to test whether the questions made sense to the first-year students, and did not know if the instrument included the correct questions to obtain the desired information. Additionally, the author did not provide an overview of the specific job responsibilities of library student assistants or

include an outline of the training schedule for these students at the institution where the research was conducted. Such job responsibilities and training may play a role in the library assistants' information literacy fluency. In regard to data collection, the author did not indicate if the students completed the questionnaire online or in paper format. The author also did not state if the surveys were given during class time. Furthermore, the data was unpaired (i.e., the assessment did not track the performance of individual participants). Other limitations include the small sample size of the library student assistants, and also that the assessment only asked about basic information literacy skills.

Despite these limitations, the study results should be considered at universities beyond the regional campuses under examination. Most universities employ library student assistants, and so understanding how their information literacy skills compare to those of the general student population can certainly help librarians and other library staff with training, and provide insight into how these skills translate into customer service for patrons. Additionally, library student assistants are already more knowledgeable

about information literacy concepts than their first-year peers prior to instruction. Training at a level that is more advanced than the introductory information literacy sessions aimed at first-year students may be more appropriate for library student assistants.

As the article suggests, there are several opportunities to conduct further research in the area of information literacy and library student assistants. Future studies could include a larger number of library student assistants, a longer time period for data collection, including paired data, inclusion of targeted information literacy education for library student assistants, and examination of information literacy skills of junior and senior library student assistants.

Reference

- Koufogiannakis, D., Booth, A., & Brettell, A. (2006). ReLIANT: Reader's guide to the Literature on Interventions Addressing the Need of education and Training. *Library and Information Research*, 30(94), 44-51. Retrieved from <http://www.lirjournal.org.uk/lir/ojs/index.php/lir/>