



*Evidence Summary*

**Education and Criminal Justice Faculty Value Electronic Serials over Print to Support Professional Activities**

**A Review of:**

Jones, G. F., Cassidy, E. D., McMain, L., Strickland, S. D., Thompson, M., & Valdes, Z. (2015). Are serials worth their weight in knowledge? A value study. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 41(5), 578-582. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2015.07.004>

**Reviewed by:**

Sue F. Phelps  
Health Sciences and Outreach Services Librarian  
Washington State University Vancouver Library  
Vancouver, Washington, United States of America  
Email: [asphelps@vancouver.wsu.edu](mailto:asphelps@vancouver.wsu.edu)

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**Abstract**

**Objective** – To determine the faculty assessed value of print and electronic serials.

**Design** – Qualitative survey.

**Setting** – Doctoral research institution in the southern United States of America.

**Subjects** – 122 tenured or tenure-track faculty from the School of Criminal Justice and the School of Education.

**Methods** – A survey was designed to measure the value of online and print serials for key faculty activities: research, publishing, course preparation and development, service, and personal interests. Measures included:

recentness of use, the extent to which library journals supported work in the key activities (minor, moderate, or major), requirement of students to use online or print journals in their courses, cancellations of personal journal subscriptions in favor of library subscriptions, and travel to other libraries to use library journals.

**Main Results** – Twenty-seven faculty responded to the survey (22%). Two of the respondents (7%) had never used the library journals, though the majority (93%) had. Of those who used library journals, the most recent use was of online over print publications.

For each key activity, 40-87% of the respondents reported they had never used

print journals, and those who did use print reported that it supported their work only to a minor extent, primarily in the area of research. Respondents noted they used online journals most frequently for research (92%), publishing (83%), and course preparation and development (76%). Service is the least supported by journal use in either print or online, with 87% of the respondents never using print and 50% never using online journals for service.

The respondents who taught undergraduates required the use of online journals over print journals at a ratio of 3:1 for assigned readings, course activities, and writing assignments. The ratio increased to a range of 4.5:1 to 8.5:1 across activities for graduate students. Respondents indicated that print (22%) and online journals (72%) had the highest use in assigned readings. The majority of respondents required graduate students to use online journals in all activities and less than a quarter required the use of print.

Twenty respondents (80%) had not dropped personal subscriptions, but among those who did, print subscriptions were more likely to be dropped than online. If institutional access were available, 55% indicated that they would drop a personal subscription for online access, and only 27% indicated they would cancel personal subscriptions for print access. Those who did drop subscriptions cited cost, storage space, and ease of access to library journals as their motivation. Faculty comments praised the serials holdings, especially the holdings of back issues.

Finally, the majority of respondents (74%) reported not having traveled to another library for journal access, but those who did, accessed materials for research, class preparation, and publishing. Many of those who went to other libraries did so because they were closer to their residence or they needed to access original manuscripts.

**Conclusion** – Participants used journal subscriptions for all of the key activities surveyed, with research and publishing the top reasons for use and service the lowest.

Both undergraduate and graduate students were required to use both print and online journals, with graduate student use being greater for online access. Faculty acknowledged their use of print and online journals for key activities to a major extent, with a strong preference for online journals.

### Commentary

The published literature includes both qualitative and quantitative research methods to determine the value of serials collections. Some of the quantitative methods included in the literature review for this article are the cost per download model, the return on investment model, and citation analysis. The authors also indicate some of the potential complications presented by each method. They cite two qualitative studies that used interviews and surveys to assess the value of serials, both of which indicate a high value placed on journal collections, especially those that are available electronically. The authors used surveys to assess the value of the journal collection on a more granular level by asking the degree to which the library's journal publications affect the teaching faculty's achievement with regard to research, publishing, course preparation and development, service, and their personal interests.

Using Glynn's Critical Appraisal Checklist (2006), the study scored high in the subsections for study design (80%) and results (80%), but not as high in the subsections for population (60%) and data collection (28%). The overall validity calculation (59%) is based on the 4 sub scores, and falls below the 75% score that indicates validity.

The selected population for this survey was 122 faculty in the Education and Criminal Justice programs. The researchers did not offer an explanation for why they limited the study to these two colleges. However, they acknowledged that the low number of participants and the focus on only two disciplines do not allow generalization to all SHSU faculty. This does not discount the usefulness of the results to those librarians who are responsible for serials decisions for

this population, nor does it invalidate the use of the methodology.

The data collection process was well described and could be replicated by others, though they would need to design their own survey questions. Because the survey instrument was not included in the article and because the authors did not indicate that they had validated their survey, mention the number of questions on the survey, or specify the means of survey distribution, the score for data collection was at a level considered invalid. However, outcomes were clearly communicated through text and tables, as were the results of the study, with conclusions in line with the data analysis.

The authors identify areas for further research, including administering the study to a broader pool and to faculty across various disciplines. Because their survey responses came from faculty with 15 years or less experience, they would like to solicit responses from longer tenured faculty. Additionally, they suggest

asking whether the comprehensiveness of a subject area correlates to the perceived value of the serials, and whether providing serials in one format influences the frequency of use in another format.

The design of the study is strong. The authors have given the library community a new application for the tried and true survey method, the results of which can make a statement about library value in the critical area of serials subscriptions. Regardless of why this particular study was limited to two disciplines, it may illustrate that the best use of the method is in the departmental level of specificity.

#### Reference

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>