**Evidence Based Library and Information Practice**

**Academic Librarians at Institutions with LIS Programs Assert that Project Management Training is Valuable**

**A Review of:**
Serrano, S. C. & Avilés, R. A. (2016). Academic librarians and project management: An international study. *portal: Libraries and the Academy*, *16*(3), 465-475. http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/pla.2016.0038

**Reviewed by:**
Elaine Sullo
Coordinator, Information and Instructional Services
Himmelfarb Health Sciences Library
The George Washington University
Washington, District of Columbia, United States of America
Email: elainej@gwu.edu

**Abstract**

**Objective –** To investigate academic librarians' project management education and training, project management skills and experiences, and perceptions of project management courses within the library and information science (LIS) curriculum.

**Design –** Online questionnaire.

**Setting –** 70 universities worldwide with LIS programs and at least one project management course.

**Subjects –** 4,979 academic librarians were invited to complete the online questionnaire.

**Methods –** From the identified institutions, the authors invited academic librarians to participate in a 17-question survey via e-mail. The survey was available in both English and Spanish and was validated via a pilot trial. A total of 649 individuals participated, for a response rate of 13%. The survey included questions related to geographic region and institution affiliation, university education and librarian training associated with project management, project participation and use of project management software or methods, and project management courses in LIS curriculums, and a final open-ended comment section.

**Main Results –** Of the 649 librarians who participated in the survey, 372 were from North and South America (58%). The next

highest number of responses came from Europe (38%), followed by low response rates from Africa, Asia, and Oceania. Respondents reported working in a variety of library departments and identified themselves as being one of a director or manager, assistant librarian, or library page. Of the 436 respondents who reported having a university degree, 215 attended an LIS Master's level program, and 12 studied at the doctoral level. The majority of respondents indicated they have had training in project management, participating in formal coursework, conferences, webinars, or other self-directed learning methods. Of the 459 academic library staff responding to the question, 40% considered project management courses of "high importance in the university curriculum" and 26 % responded that project management courses were "extremely important in their field of expertise and working environment" (p. 472). The consensus among participants was that project management courses should be included in both undergraduate and graduate level LIS curricula.

**Conclusion –** The high participation of librarians in project management, compared to the limited formal education received, suggests that courses in project management, including software and methodology, are needed in LIS university curricula. Additionally, less than 40% of academic librarian survey respondents were trained in LIS; other professions are working as librarians and therefore may have insufficient knowledge and skills to manage the projects they direct. The research results confirm the relationship between strategic planning and project management skills. The authors conclude that universities should revise their LIS curricula to include and require additional project management courses.

**Commentary**

As noted by the authors, many articles have been published that describe project management experiences of librarians and information professionals, librarians' perceptions of project management tools, and

the use of project management software and techniques. This article is a follow up to a previous article by the authors (Aviles, Serrano, & Simon, 2014), and adds to the current knowledge on the topic.

The study was evaluated using the CriSTAL Checklist for appraising a user study (CRiSTAL, n.d.). The researchers attempted to study a focused issue in terms of the population studied (academic librarians) and the outcomes measured (the authors conducted both quantitative and qualitative analysis of survey data). The authors surveyed "academic librarians," but included librarians with the roles of director or manager, assistant librarian, and library page. For the purposes of this study, it seems that library pages are considered to be academic librarians, which is not the case in many institutions.

The survey instrument, while described in the text, was not included in the article, which makes for a study that cannot be easily replicated. Furthermore, the article does not indicate what platform was used to administer the survey (e.g., Survey Monkey, Zoomerang, etc.); it only states that the survey was "an online self-administered questionnaire."

The librarians surveyed in this study were employed at academic institutions with LIS programs with at least one course on project management, but the authors did not provide a rationale for including only librarians at institutions with LIS programs. For a broader perspective, the authors could replicate this study by including librarians at all academic institutions.

Another limitation of this study was the low number of responses from librarians in specific geographic regions, namely Africa, Asia, and Oceania. The authors describe their process for identifying the 70 participating universities but it is not clear who was invited to participate. The article does not divulge how many invitations were sent to each continent or geographic area. Additionally, because the survey was only available in English and Spanish, some librarians may have disregarded the invitation to participate due to

language barriers. Although the authors stated that they conducted an international study, the low number of responses and lack of data from many geographic regions brings this point into question.

The survey results appear to demonstrate that the majority of respondents are involved in project work, although many did not receive project management training during their LIS programs. From this, the authors concluded that project management courses should become part of LIS curricula and possibly a requirement, but there is no clear evidence in the study data to support the authors' conclusions.

It is difficult to consider applying the researchers' conclusions to other academic libraries based on the shortcomings of this research. Although study respondents may have indicated that project management courses are valuable, the deficiencies in the study methodology, especially the lack of participating international universities, does not provide clear evidence for the authors' deductions, and does not allow for the study's findings to transfer to other academic institutions.

**References**

Avilés, R. A., Serrano, S. C., & Simón, L. F. R. (2014). International presence of project management in the university curricula in Library and Information Science. *Qualitative and Quantitative Methods in Libraries, 2*, 367-375. http://www.qqml.net/

CRiSTAL Checklist for Appraising a User Study. (n.d.) In *nettingtheevidence.pbwiki.com*. Retrieved from http://nettingtheevidence.pbwiki.com/f/use.doc