



*Evidence Summary*

**Collaborations between Libraries and Writing/Tutoring Services are Diverse and Provide Opportunities to Support Student Success and Information Literacy Outcomes**

**A Review of:**

Jackson, H. A. (2017). Collaborating for student success: An e-mail survey of U.S. libraries and writing centers. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 43(4), 281-296.  
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**Abstract**

**Objective** – To collect information on the existence and characteristics of collaborative partnerships between libraries and writing centers/writing tutoring services.

**Design** – Email survey questionnaire.

**Setting** – Academic libraries, writing centers, and writing tutoring services at two-year, four-year, and graduate/professional institutions across the United States of America.

**Subjects** – 1,460 librarians, writing center staff, and tutoring services staff.

**Methods** – Subjects were invited to participate based on a “. . . random sampling of 33% of each institutional “Size and Setting” group from the 2010 Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education” and the availability of contact information for the library or writing center at the randomly sampled institutions (p. 282). Respondents who identified an existing partnership between the library and writing center/tutoring services answered questions regarding collaboration methods, training, and

promotion as well as open-ended questions on goals, assessment, ideal relationship qualities, strengths, and weaknesses. In the absence of a known partnership, questions focused on potential for, and ideal methods of, collaboration.

**Main Results** – The survey had a response rate of 13.5%, based on the 197 responses that met the criteria for inclusion in the results. Of the respondents, 117 identified as librarians, 59 as writing center staff, and 21 as tutoring services staff. Respondents were affiliated with institutions in 43 states and the District of Columbia. 65% of respondents reported that a collaborative relationship between the writing center and library existed at their institution. Of those without a known current partnership, 77% believed there was potential for collaboration. Top existing collaborations included instruction (21%), student orientations (16%), appointments (14%), classroom presentations (14%), and writing tutors embedded in the library (14%). Only 35% identified strategic goals for collaborations. Respondents engaged in partnerships highlighted shared space, referrals, a unified focus on student success, and defined roles as top ideal partnership characteristics. Key partnership strengths included teamwork/relationship, focus on student success, and shared goals/knowledge/resources. Common weaknesses included lack of communication, planning, shared space, patron awareness, funding, staff, and collaboration.

**Conclusion** – Diverse collaborations between libraries and writing centers/writing tutoring services exist. These collaborations may provide opportunities to support student success and information literacy outcomes. Based on survey results, the author suggested that improved communication between partners could mitigate identified weaknesses and assist in achieving partnership ideals. Additionally, increased creation and assessment of strategic partnership goals may strengthen communication and planning. Many respondents were interested in shared library and writing center space, an area which requires further research. Ultimately, the

author concluded that more investigation is needed to inform best practices for partnerships.

### Commentary

Case studies, primarily at four-year institutions, comprise much of the published literature on library and writing center collaborations (Elmborg & Hook, 2006; Montgomery & Bradshaw, 2015). A few studies have undertaken broader analysis. Todorinova (2010) conducted a telephone survey of reference librarians at 154 institutions of varying types, finding 26.7% had a partnership with the writing center. Todorinova's survey served as a "starting point" for the study author's expanded email survey (p. 282). Ferer (2012) authored a literature review identifying themes in collaborative efforts, many of which are reflected in the author's survey results. Ferer observed that little has been written from the writing center perspective. The author's study fills a gap in the literature by providing an updated overview of collaborative trends across various institution types from the perspective of both writing center and library professionals.

When evaluated against Glynn's (2006) EBL Critical Appraisal Checklist criteria, this study excels in several ways: the criteria for population selection was clearly defined; the data collection methods were clearly articulated; the full survey instrument was provided; and the results section effectively summarized potential applications and areas for further research. There were, however, several areas that could be strengthened as well. First, the survey instrument could be validated. It may also be useful to devise an alternative way of connecting with potential respondents: invitations to participate in this study were sent based on availability of contact information for the library and/or writing center, which may have led to less representation of certain groups. It would also be ideal to have a mechanism to determine if libraries and writing centers at the same institution submit potentially overlapping responses. Additionally, the language of some

survey questions could be revised: while most survey questions were constructed to elicit clear responses, the author acknowledged that several respondents misinterpreted the open-ended question on how they “assess the success of the relationship,” responding with a measure of quality (e.g. “good”) rather than an assessment mechanism (p. 283). Finally, further details on the process used to analyze open-ended responses would be helpful for practitioners interested in conducting similar analysis.

This study may be informative for academic libraries and writing centers/writing tutoring services embarking upon or evaluating existing partnerships. The survey results offer an overview of current endeavors, while providing some insight into successful strategies and potential pitfalls. As the study author suggests, additional work is needed to establish best practices for partnerships. This research provides direction for increasingly robust evaluation of specific library and writing center partnership aspects in future studies.

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