

Academic Library Use is Positively Related to a Variety of Educational Outcomes

Soria, K. M., Fransen, J., & Nackerud, S. (2017). Beyond books: The extended academic benefits of library use for first-year college students. *College & Research Libraries*, 78(1), 8-22. <https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.78.1.8>

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Evidence Summary

Academic Library Use is Positively Related to a Variety of Educational Outcomes

A Review of:

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Abstract

Objectives – To consider the relationship between academic library use and four specific outcomes: academic engagement, engagement in scholarly activities, academic skills development, and grade point average.

Design – Hierarchical regression analysis.

Setting – A large, public research university in the Midwest US.

Subjects – 1,068 non-transfer, first-year students who voluntarily completed the

Student Experience in the Research University (SERU) survey.

Methods – The SERU survey results were analyzed alongside student data derived from institutional records and 10 library usage variables generated from library systems. Velicer's minimum average partial (MAP) method was employed to develop a factor analysis. Hierarchical regression analyses measured the relationships between independent variables (demographic characteristics, collegiate experiences, and libraries use) and dependent variables (students' academic engagement, academic

skills, engagement in scholarship, and fall semester grade point average).

Main Results – Students' use of academic libraries was reported to have a positive relationship with all four dependent variables, above and beyond those explained by pre-college and collegiate experiences: academic engagement ($R^2\Delta = .130$, $p < 0.001$), academic skills development ($R^2\Delta = .025$, $p < 0.001$), fall semester grade point average ($R^2\Delta = .018$, $p < 0.001$), and engagement in scholarship ($R^2\Delta = .070$, $p < 0.001$). Use of books and web-based library resources had the most positive relationships with academic outcomes; workshop attendance and use of reference services had limited positive relationships with academic outcomes; and use of library computer workstations had no significant effects on academic outcomes.

Conclusion – Undergraduate student use of the academic library is positively associated with diverse academic outcomes. Although the explanatory power of library use was relatively low, ranging from 1.8 to 13.0 percent of final variance in the dependent variables, library use is nonetheless reported to contribute significantly to academic outcomes.

Commentary

This study builds on existing studies that measure the impact of library use on the academic success of undergraduate students, including similar studies on the topic by these researchers, two of which focus on the relationship between library use, student grade point average, and retention (Soria, Fransen, & Nackerud 2013 & 2014). This study however, is unique in its analysis of the relationships between a variety of library usage metrics and academic success metrics beyond grade point average and retention, specifically academic engagement, engagement in scholarly activities, and academic skills development. This study dovetails current work on library involvement in student privacy and learning analytics, such as the Institute of Museum and Library Services-funded "DataDoubles" project.

The authors cite relevant literature to convey the increasing need for accountability within higher education and libraries. Astin's (1993) Input-Environment-Output model from *What Matters in College* is employed as a conceptual framework and is used to control for inputs, such as student demographic characteristics and college experiences, which may contribute to academic success.

The evaluation methods are appropriate to the objectives and required statistical expertise that may serve as an obstacle to librarians who do not know how to conduct or interpret a hierarchical regression analysis. It is worth noting that the study is co-written by librarians and an employee of the Office of Institutional Research; this collaboration would likely prove essential to academic librarians seeking to recreate elements of the study. Student data is frequently unavailable to academic librarians, particularly at the aggregate level. The authors note limitations with their sample, the most problematic of which is that those students who completed the survey are likely more engaged than their peers. Additionally, the reliability of the blocks of self-report information are presented, but the reader does not learn how the reliability was tested.

The authors meet their objective of measuring the relationship between academic library use and academic engagement, engagement in scholarly activities, and academic skills development; this study quantifies several ways in which the library plays an active role in the academic success of undergraduate students. By identifying a variety of standard library services that may be assessed and by detailing how to collaborate with campus partners to measure this impact, this article makes a significant contribution to the literature. Future studies might make explicit how the privacy of student data is considered and protected in this process.

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