

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Subject Librarian Contributions to Student Learning and Success Project of the Pius/Medical Center Libraries Assessment Committee, Spring 2014

Purpose of Study

During Spring Semester 2014, the Pius and Medical Center Libraries Assessment Committee¹ conducted a study of Saint Louis University's undergraduate and graduate students about their awareness of subject librarians and their roles, their use of services provided by subject librarians, and the effectiveness and impact of those services. The study consisted of an online survey closely followed by a series of focus groups.

Definition of Subject Librarians

Those referred to collectively in the study as "subject librarians" are known within their respective libraries as research and instruction librarians, liaison librarians, special collections librarians, and archivists. Research and instruction librarians at Pius Library and liaison librarians at MCL have academic unit assignments and serve their respective departmental faculty and students. Special collections librarians and archivists provide expertise to any faculty and students who engage with manuscripts, rare books, or archival collections. All subject librarians provide research consultation services, offer instructional support for courses, and provide expertise in the use of the library's resources and collections.

Findings and Implications

Quality and Impact of Services

- **Subject librarians are delivering effective services to students on all fronts.** All eight of the service categories surveyed were rated as helpful by 93%–98% of those who used them.²
- **Students who consult librarians report better academic outcomes.** Of those who said they worked with a librarian on a paper or course project, 91% believed that working with a librarian improved the quality of the paper or project.
- **By helping students achieve better academic outcomes, librarians contribute to higher student satisfaction and retention.** Results of a University-wide study³ on undergraduate student satisfaction and retention indicate that both faculty support and student learning are two of the most important predictors of student satisfaction. Furthermore, of all of the factors affecting student retention, academic performance is shown to have the greatest impact.

Awareness and Use of Services

- **Overall non-use of services is very high.** The rates of non-use of the eight service categories surveyed range from 52%–86%, with a mean of 70%.
- **Some students do not use services because they are unaware of them.** While a majority of respondents indicated awareness of the eight service categories surveyed, 20%–50% did not.
- **Some students do not use services despite being aware of them.** 37%–73% of respondents were aware of the eight service categories surveyed but did not use them.
- **By far, the most effective "driver of business" for consultations is the instructor referral.** Students whose instructor suggested they meet with a librarian were five times more likely to do so than students who did not receive such a suggestion.

Future Actions

Goals

- Intensify the promotion of the full range of subject librarians' services to students.
- Further cultivate relationships with instructors and make them aware that they are *the most important factor* in getting students to visit a subject librarian.
- Emphasize the link between use of subject librarians' services and improved academic outcomes.

Implementation

- Formulate a marketing campaign with slogans emphasizing the improved academic outcomes of students who use subject librarians' services.
- Intensify the marketing of services in the following ways:
 - Virtual: email; expanded social media presence and involvement
 - Print: flyers, mailings, printed directories of subject librarians
 - In person: instructional sessions; resource fairs; freshman orientation
 - Website: redesigned to emphasize and clarify services; improve findability of research guides; improve access to subject librarian directory
 - Library signage
- Increase visibility of subject librarians in the libraries.
- Encourage library staff and student workers at library service points to promote subject librarians' services.
- Work with faculty to increase integration of librarian contact information into course materials.
- Encourage faculty to recommend student consultations with subject librarians as part of the research process for their students.
- Strengthen efforts to work with faculty to integrate library instruction into the curriculum more systematically.
- Consider adopting the following "student-friendly" library policies:
 - Expand chat hours
 - Expand library's open hours on weekends
 - Create more group study areas
 - Offer social events for students or targeted workshops and training on specific library topics

¹ Patricia Gregory (chair), Bram Boettge, Ronald Crown, Sam Deeljore, Jonathan Harms, Miriam Joseph, Jennifer Lowe, Amy Pennington, Donghua Tao

² Percentage ranges reflect differing levels of awareness and use of the following eight service categories: in-person help, unscheduled; in-person help, scheduled in advance; instructional sessions taught by librarians; phone help; chat help using the "Ask a Librarian" button; email help; text help; research guides on the library website.

³ SLU Retention Analysis, 11/18/11 and Undergraduate Student Satisfaction at SLU, August 2014 [Draft], published by the SLU Office of Institutional Research