

Embedded Academic Librarians Instilling Life-Long Learning Skills: A Proposed Methodology for Assessing Self-Perceived Information-Seeking Behaviors of Undergraduate Students

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Abstract. As librarians, we want to believe that we impact information-seeking behaviors of students and instill a desire to continue learning. While many institutions collect student feedback from students taking library instructional classes, there is not always a clear indicator of the role librarians have in shaping information-seeking behaviors. With the growing number of embedded librarians, there is a growing need to assess how information-seeking behaviors are changing. These teaching opportunities and atypical model for library instruction may potentially have a different impact on student research behavior over time. Therefore, this paper proposes a methodology to begin assessing how undergraduate students perceive their information-seeking behavior development.

Keywords. Embedded Librarian, Librarian Impact, Library Learning Outcomes, Information-seeking, Academic Librarian

1. Introduction and Context for Proposed Study

Contrary to the more typical model of students receiving library instruction in a one-time session, there are some librarians at Texas A&M University Libraries (TAMU) who have established themselves in their subject areas with corresponding campus departments as embedded librarians. For the purpose of this study, embedded librarianship is defined as Kesselman and Watstein (2009) suggest through the association of the two factors, integration and collaboration by being a part of a collaborative learning environment whether in a traditional or nontraditional setting. The International Studies librarian who has become embedded into the TAMU International Studies (INTS) degree program demonstrates an example of that. The INTS librarian

sees these students repeatedly throughout their undergraduate academic career. As the semesters have progressed, one trend that has been noticed by the librarian is the seemingly increased sophistication and focus of their theses, requiring more in-depth personalized instruction. As a result, the multiple visits with the students may be impacting the quality of their work, in addition to making them better researchers at finding, evaluating and utilizing credible and relevant resources.

Since most of the student feedback received at TAMU has been from one-time library instructional sessions, the focus of the feedback has been on the delivery of the instruction and asks few questions about the student's comfort in conducting research. The responses given by the student are rated along a Likert scale and the form offers little opportunity to expand on their perceptions of the research process. Studying the students' perceptions from the embedded librarian model would elicit first-hand knowledge as to how they perceive their research skills to have developed over time. The potential findings may contribute to librarianship in providing guidance for improving teaching techniques of embedded librarians and hopefully derive a measurement tool for assessing library learning outcomes in this model.

There is much evidence supporting the measurement of learning outcomes through citation analysis, surveys, and pre/post testing. The biggest challenge, however, as stated by Portmann and Roush (2004) comes in measuring student behavior and skill development. They propose that the "first step in accurately measuring changes in student behavior and skill development is either in selecting or constructing a valid and reliable instrument". Rubrics are often times utilized as measurement instruments, and work done in particular by Knight (2002, 2006) is instrumental in developing a rubric for the embedded librarian model, in conjunction with the competencies and standards established through the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL). Nevertheless, there is little research done on actual student perceptions of their own research skills. One study by Morrison (1997) attempts to measure student perception through the use of a focus group. The study, however, measured the value of information literacy as opposed to research skill development. Participants regarded "information literacy as a valuable skill...[that] should be attained in the course of pursuing an undergraduate degree". Morrison (1997) suggests further research be done to investigate research skills that the participants alluded to needing. Yet, despite this attempt, and the numerous research done to measure learning outcomes, a need exists to gain first-hand knowledge from the students on their view of research skill development. One recent study conducted by Gross and Latham (2007) attempts to address the "miscalibration between students' self-assessments of their information literacy skills and their actual skill level". The study presents a very thorough methodology and concludes their findings to have an impact on theoretical and practical frameworks and presents a new way of thinking about how library-learning outcomes are measured. Building upon this more recent research is important in assessing the impact of embedded librarianship.

2. Proposed Methodology

The proposed research study methodology would be a case study examining the role of an embedded librarian in an academic degree program in instilling life-long learning skills by developing undergraduate students' information-seeking behaviors. The belief is that embedded librarianship provides opportunities to develop a closer relationship with students, resulting in placing more focus on student's learning style, study habits, and information-seeking behaviors. These teaching opportunities and atypical model for library instruction may potentially have a different impact on student research behavior over time, as well as have a potential impact on teaching techniques utilized by librarians.

Research Questions

The qualitative analysis intends to answer the following questions:

1. Where is the impact of library instruction reflected in a student's work?
2. What is the value added by having students attend multiple library instructional sessions in the same semester for the same class over a span of time?
3. What sense is given of the students having been instilled with life-long learning skills?

Data Source

The cohort will consist of 5 undergraduate students from the International Studies degree program who have completed the required course, INTS 481 and their completed student thesis. The cohort is not exclusive and can represent various ethnicities, male and females, and various majors and minors. The criterion for the cohort is based on the ongoing interaction the participants had with the same librarian through their degree program.

Data Collection

This case study will consist of student interviews, and document analysis of students' theses, which is a graduation requirement for the International Studies degree program. Institutional Review Board (IRB) review and approval would be requested. All information identifying the participants will be removed from any transcriptions, and theses. Each participant will be issued a participant number to go with the interview transcript and thesis. Confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained throughout the study.

Data from the students will be collected by conducting interviews with each student independently. The interview would be scheduled for an hour, with flexibility to go beyond that hour should the interview provoke more lengthy responses and/or questions. As a noted expert in conducting interviews for qualitative research, Seidman (2005) offers a specific model for the disciplines of education and social sciences, which will serve as the framework for constructing the interview questions. The purpose of the student interviews is to

gain insight from the student's perspective of the information-seeking process and to identify how those behaviors may have developed or changed after multiple interactions with the librarian. The data would be recorded and transcribed.

Data from the theses will be collected from the actual work that has been submitted by INTS students. The theses will be coded and analyzed using criteria established within the library profession since the most common way of assessing library learning outcomes has come from doing content analysis. Specifically, the criteria to be used will be based on recent work by Long and Shrikhande (2010). While they use 4 criteria, for the purpose of this study only 3 will be utilized.

The 3 criteria are

1. Quality of Sources: Are the sources appropriate for the topic and scope of the paper? Are the sources well-respected sources in the discipline?
2. Variety of Sources: Are there enough sources to sufficiently develop a well-rounded argument/perspective? Do the sources provide diverse perspectives?
3. Citation Format: Is a consistent citation format utilized? Is enough information provided in the citation to enable the reader to locate the source referenced?

The purpose of analyzing this data is to gain an insight to actual library learning outcomes. This study lends itself to future comparative research analyzing content between work completed from having had only one library instructional session, and work completed from an embedded librarian model. The data might also be enriched by finding out how many students visited with the librarian outside of class for further assistance and then comparing that data against the class visits. This would undoubtedly need to be reserved for follow up study.

Data Analysis

Since the use of interviews is not a customary approach in librarianship as a mode of collecting data, the coding structure for the interviews of this study will be developed after the interviews have been recorded, transcribed, and reviewed. The data will first be reviewed for general themes addressing their perceptions of research skill development. For the document analysis, existing coding will be utilized since citation analysis is a popular way of assessing library-learning outcomes. The belief is that high quality written papers demonstrates effective research skills.

3. Conclusion

The proposed methodology for a case study of how undergraduates perceive the development of their information-seeking behaviors when working with an embedded librarian would serve as a pilot study. As a pilot study, the

findings would be utilized to further develop the methodology, resulting in further research with other students from other programs that utilize an embedded librarian. Ultimately, it would be beneficial to conduct this same type of research at other institutions and then begin the development of a rubric to assess librarian impact on library learning outcomes. Working with entities such as the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) would be necessary so that the rubric falls in line with the standards established for library instruction efforts. Future research could also be conducted from the perspective of the faculty and librarians who work closely together to examine how teaching is enhanced. Still, future research could also be conducted through a longitudinal study following a cohort over time consisting of multiple interviews, document analysis, and perhaps pre and post testing.

4. References

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