Editorial

Research: Value, Methods, and Publishing

Notwithstanding the debate about the increased/decreased quantity of current research activities regarding academic libraries, no one is arguing against the enormous need and opportunity for more research in this area. The growing use of technology in academic libraries, for example, has presented an oasis for both basic and applied research. The library world is in ferment. It is changing constantly because of the discovery of new ways of doing things. Research is not an academic library banality. Rather, it is a vital and dynamic force that is indispensable to all types of libraries. Research has one prime goal: discovery. If there is no discovery, there is no research. Some research in library and information science is similar to trying to knock down an open door.

Benefits of Research

During the past winter term, I taught a research methods class in Fort Lauderdale for the University of South Florida’s School of Library and Information Science. At the beginning of the class, several students expressed apprehensiveness about its difficulty. Ronald R. Powell’s Basic Research Methods for Librarians was the textbook for the class. As the students were introduced to the various research methodologies, different types of research, data collection techniques, and ways of interpreting and presenting research results, they became more interested in the value of research. Indeed, some actually became excited about the topic.

Without basic research, academic libraries will not solve their problems in a reliable, systematic, and thoughtful manner. The practice of academic librarianship must have a theoretical base. Academic librarians who understand the basic principles of research will be better able to assist students and faculty in their research endeavors. The researcher will quickly become aware of a librarian’s lack of understanding of basic research methods. Librarians who seek tenure and promotion must have a solid comprehension of research methods in order to perform research and to get results published. It is a sad commentary to learn that an academic librarian has lost employment due to the lack of published research articles. One wonders if the reason was that the librarian did not understand how to conduct research. If one has not had the opportunity to take a research methods class, I recommend reading Powell’s book.

An Editor’s Observations

As editor of College & Research Libraries, I read all the manuscripts submitted for consideration. This is one of the many benefits of the position. Many of the manuscripts that are not published by C&RL are excellent pieces but for one reason or another are not recommended by the reviewers to be included in the journal. C&RL is a research journal, and the manuscripts submitted to it undergo rigorous review; about 38 percent of them are accepted for publication. I have been able to help some authors whose manuscripts were rejected to get their work published in other reputable journals.

In my role as editor of the journal, I have observed that some authors forget to include a “statement of the problem” in their manuscript, or write one that is unacceptable. The problem statement is the axial center around which the entire research effort turns. The situation is quite simple—no problem, no research! The problem
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statement must be written in complete sen­
tences and must be lucid, precise, and
stated responsibly. If necessary, subprob­
lems should be used to strengthen the
problem statement, but they should not
result in more than the totality of the main
problem.

Few manuscripts received for C&RL’s
consideration contain hypotheses. In lieu
of hypotheses, research questions are be­
ing identified and used to guide the re­
search. While developing the research
study, various characteristics must be kept
in mind. For example, can the study be
generalized and used in other library set­
tings? Will its findings/conclusions be
compatible with existing knowledge? Can
the hypotheses/research questions be
tested? Reviewers of C&RL manuscripts
use these questions and others when de­
termining the fate of manuscripts.

As Gregory Crawford notes in his ar­
ticle included in this issue, the survey is
the most common type of data collection
technique used in C&RL articles. The
mailed questionnaire has many advan­
tages (anonymity, frank answers, large
number of respondents, easy to adminis­
ter); its disadvantages include eliminating
personal contact, getting a biased sample
due to tendency of highly opinionated
people being more likely to respond to
questionnaires, and some people dislik­
ing mail questionnaires. As academic li­
brarians engage in more qualitative re­
search, we will begin seeing more focus
group interviews used as the primary
data-coll ecting technique.

Based on the manuscripts I have read,
prospective authors should give attention
to three obvious areas. First, many of the
research manuscripts received fail to ana­
lyze and interpret the data collected. It
would appear that some authors “run out
of gas” at the end of their manuscripts.
Second, many manuscripts do not include
a conclusion, which leaves the readers
hanging. Convincing and compelling are
descriptors of a good conclusion. Third,
even though the January issue of C&RL
carries an “Instructions for Authors” sec­
tion, it is apparent that some authors do
not read it. For example, stylistic features
do not follow The Chicago Manual of Style,
14th ed. (the style manual followed by
C&RL). And it is obvious that authors do
not examine past issues of C&RL for
stylistic features. The lack of conformance
to C&RL stylistic features will not prevent
a manuscript from being published in the
journal, but prospective authors should be
cognizant that this type of work will have
to be done sooner or later. Also, the lack of
or incomplete bibliographic information
in the “Notes” section is far too common.

Conclusion
Due to their increasing work pressures,
many academic librarians believe they
have less time for research and reflection
and for publishing the findings of re­
search. And this phenomenon is occurring
concurrently at a critical time in our civi­
лизation when we need to grasp a better
understanding of why we do what we do.
We cannot bask in a fog of indecision and
procrastination. Much of our future will
depend on how well we analyze/resolve
problems dispassionately and use the sci­
entific method to promote self-assurance
and reduce panic during constant change
and greater ambiguity. Research powers
improvement in the library world!

DONALD E. RIGGS
Editor

Note
1. Ronald R. Powell, Basic Research Methods for Librarians, 3rd ed. (Greenwich, Conn.: Ablex,
1997).