

Partnerships or parallel lines? The contributions of practitioners and academics to library and information research

Academic libraries are seeking to extend their roles beyond traditional document provision and knowledge discovery into such areas as strategic research support, research data management and scholarly publishing. If this transition is to succeed, librarians will need to develop a robust understanding of the scholarly research process as experienced by academics. Relevant activities include developing research projects, formulating research questions and robust research methods, and publishing the results through appropriate scholarly channels (McBain, Culshaw and Walkley Hall, 2013; Perkins and Slowik, 2013). Librarians will also benefit from participating in scholarly publishing as reviewers (Taylor & Francis Group, 2016) and by serving on editorial advisory boards, which will expose them to many different types of research and methodologies as well as to issues of quality and validity.

On top of this, the scholarly literature and the profession generally could benefit from increased engagement by practitioners and from greater collaboration between practitioners and LIS academics.

To enable this extension to libraries' customary roles, academic librarians will need the support of the Library and Information Studies (LIS) academic community in order to foster individual development and ensure the quality of practitioner research. However, the forces motivating academics to participate in research are very different from those affecting librarians, who face a number of barriers to participation as well as a paucity of incentives (Galbraith et al., 2014; Sassen and Wahl, 2014).

This paper examines a sample of recent articles in established library studies journals to identify the comparative contributions of practising librarians and LIS academics and the extent of collaboration between these groups, based on jointly written articles. Analysis of keywords highlights the different spheres of interest each group has, and questions the degree of alignment between the scholarly literature and the widely-recognised preoccupations of the field.

Journals were drawn from the Scimago Library and Information Sciences list (<http://www.scimagojr.com/journalrank.php?category=3309>) and a bibliometric algorithm was used to identify authors of individual papers as practising librarians or LIS academics, or both (joint authorship). Keywords were extracted and aggregated by author category to identify the subject interests of these two groups. Preliminary results point to some striking differences as well as broad areas of common interest. The data were also analysed by geographic area to examine variations in practice at a national level and by journal to show differences in practice at a title level.

The paper further considers support measures for librarians in Australia and New Zealand that could encourage fully-realised research activities, explores briefly the benefits for journals and practitioners of their engagement in the editorial and review process, and discusses the benefits of enhancing the librarian-researcher nexus.

References

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