I Just Want Tenure: Mapping Librarian Dissatisfaction with Library Science Scholarship

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Introduction

This research is formulated on a single large significant assumption— that these exist among marks of LIS literature or dissatisfaction associated with the quality of library literature. It was designed as an exploratory study to determine the shape of dissatisfaction in order to lay the groundwork for further work examining the scholarly conversation, discrepancy between the themes of dissatisfaction and evidence in the literature, and possible causes and solutions for the dissatisfaction. Four rough themes emerged, characterized by a series of subthemes. These are: perspective, depth and relevance; writing quality and presentation; methodology and innovation; and causality and solutions. Additionally, some minor themes emerged, which attempted to explain major themes or represented conversations within the data. I have provided select examples.

Methodology

A survey was designed to be open-ended and most of the analysis was done on aggregated answers to individual open-ended questions. While the survey asked a total of 8 questions, 5 core questions were used for the data analysis. Results to these questions were used to determine subthemes, then coded into five larger themes. I then coded for those themes in the aggregate answers, taking into account repeated “sub-themes” under each larger theme.

Core Questions:
1. How would you describe LIS literature that you find to be of high-quality?
2. How would you describe LIS literature that you find to be of low-quality?
3. What do you find to be lacking in LIS literature? What are your frustrations?
4. How would you describe LIS literature that you find to be useful in your work?
5. How would you describe LIS literature that you find to be useful in my work?

Participants, By the Numbers

74 Total Participants: 60 academic librarians or archivists, 2 academically-tracked LIS students, 6 non-academic librarians or archivists, and is listed as other.

Of the academic librarians or archivists: 25% held staff positions, 16% held non-tenure track faculty positions, and 52% were tenured or tenure-track.

Perspective, Depth, & Relevance

“...the problem with case studies is, they may not have wide implications beyond the case in which they were studied. I usually see a case study article where I think ‘that would seriously work at my library!’”

“High quality literature addresses important research questions or helps me learn about a new development or trend relevant to academic librarianship. In short, it proves the ‘so what?’ in it.”

Subthemes include:
• Theory needs practical grounding
• ‘How do we do it good’ literature

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Writing Quality & Presentation

“...most of the time the already poor writing of the authors is made even worse by their effort to correct to the terrible writing aesthetics of the scholarly culture.”

“The lack of clarity and conclusion impedes the usefulness of any literature.”

Subthemes include:
• Clarity: language, grammar, or structure issues
• Conciseness
• Engagement with the full scholarly conversation (literature reviews, e.g.)
• Diversity of research and analysis
• Rigor of peer review standards in LIS journals.

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Innovation & Creativity

“I don’t think LIS literature is radically different in quality from other social science scholarly literature but it is lacking in the variety of perspectives found elsewhere.”

“I find it lacking in inspiration and madness. I am frustrated by its lack of life.”

Subthemes include:
• New questions, answers, and ideas
• Diversity of literature, library types, geographic, etc.
• Impact of research and analysis
• Repetition of studies, ideas, arguments
• Formulas over exploration of theory
• Publication and exploration of failure

Other Minor Themes

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References


Significant work on LIS literature has been done recently to examine the reality of some perceptions identified on this poster (e.g., 2014, Charbonneau, Alfaro, & Watkins, 2014; Charbonneau, Alfaro, & Watkins, 2014; Kumasi, Charbonneau, & Watkins, 2013 among others). However, without examining and addressing these perceptions, perceptions themselves can lead to misunderstanding. We can do great to ‘influence some real changes.”

Further research should focus on the proof or disproof of these themes in the LIS literature, but not alone. If change is our goal, this work should be done in concert with reader, author, and editor perceptions of the scholarly conversation. Furthermore, it should address why the perceptions, reality, and any disconnect between the two exist in the first place. Lastly, further research should focus on the perceptions past survey results and perform analysis on the public conversation around LIS literature.