
Reviewed by Paula L. Webb, Reference and Electronic Resources Government Documents Librarian, University Library at the University of South Alabama

College Libraries and Student Culture was one of the results of a 21-month research study conducted from 2008 to 2010 and funded by a Library Services and Technology Act grant through the Illinois State Library. The project, titled Ethnographic Research in Illinois Academic Libraries (ERIAL), studied various aspects of student academic research, such as methods students use and how they access needed resources. The four core goals of this project were to gain firsthand accounts of how students researched for assignments; explore the relationships that shape this process; determine what roles librarians play in the research process; and modify library services to more effectively meet the needs of students.

The ERIAL project had more than 650 individuals, from librarians to students, participating in the study and provided an in-depth analysis of academic library service with a focus on libraries’ relationships with students and faculty. A number of contributors to this publication studied social interaction factors between librarians, teaching faculty, and undergraduates. The chapter authors approached other challenging issues such as teaching faculty and librarian expectations, marketing library instruction services on campus, student behavior, and seeing library spaces through the students’ eyes. Thorough in its approach to gathering knowledge, this resource can be very useful in discovering how current college students access information.

Asher and Duke discuss their findings in the final chapter of the book: Conclusions and Suggestions for Future Research. This project was unique in that it used site-specific data (information gathered from individual institutions) as well as cross-institutional comparisons with select components of the data. The editors point out the relationship between the librarians and teaching faculty within the students’ research processes as one consistent and very important factor between the different institutions.

One interesting study is the analysis of the teaching faculty and librarian expectations and values. Thirty faculty and nine librarians from DePaul University and Northeastern Illinois University were interviewed with questions focused on the interplay of teaching faculty and librarian values and areas of conflict or inconsistency. One faculty member shared the perspective that librarians can give the student more information than they need, causing frustration. This information could influence the future response of the librarian. Instead of asking the student, “What do you need?” the librarian could ask, “What is your immediate need?”

College Libraries and Student Culture is an excellent study of relationships in the research process. The analyses were very informative, and the data is a useful foundation for future
studies. This publication is recommended for instructional librarians and teaching faculty who want to use library resources in their courses.