Impact of Libraries on Student Success
2023 Survey Report
Perspectives from Academic Faculty and Libraries
Impact of Libraries on Student Success

Every school, every institution, every library wants students to succeed. However, student “success” is a difficult thing to define. Is it test scores, GPA, and other academic performance metrics? Those are certainly the first things that come to mind. But other elements can be involved. One recent research initiative, Ithaka’s Texas Student Success Program Inventory (SSPI), defined it thusly:

Student success is a core concept in higher education, yet its definition can vary widely. Understandably, most definitions of student success emphasize improving academic performance, raising graduation rates, and reducing time-to-degree. Yet, institutions are also highly interested in improving students’ overall experience on their campuses and setting them up for success post-graduation.

There is no doubt that libraries have a very large part to play in the student success proposition. Ithaka’s 2022 US Library Director Survey found that:

Ninety-one percent of all directors strongly agree that librarians at their college or university contribute significantly to student learning by helping them to find, access, and make use of a range of secondary and primary sources in their coursework, 90 percent that librarians contribute significantly to student learning by helping them develop their research skills, and 63 percent that librarians contribute significantly to helping students develop skills to identify media manipulation and disinformation.

In fact, recent research has shown that the majority of 2- and 4-year college/university students agree. Library Journal’s 2022 College Student Library Usage Survey found that more than three-fourths of students agreed with the statement, “I believe the library contributes to my success as a student,” with one-third (35%) agreeing strongly.

Now Library Journal has fielded a study to quantify, as best we can, the library’s role in optimizing academic outcomes for undergraduate students. The study included two surveys: one for academic libraries and one for academic faculties, asking them the same basic questions about the role of the library in student success.
The Faculty Story

To start, we asked faculty what academic resources their institutions make available that could contribute to student success. “Campus library resources” was the most common answer, with “office hours/tutoring,” and “Learning Management System (LMS)” rounding out the top three.

*Figure 1. What resources does your institution make available that contribute to undergraduate student success in your courses? —All Faculty*

![Bar chart showing resource availability percentages]

- Campus library resources: 88%
- Office hours/Tutoring: 79%
- Learning Management System (LMS): 77%
- Writing center: 53%
- Interactive media: 49%
- Other: 9%
- None: 1%

\[n=584\]

When we asked what faculty thought was the greatest contributor to student success, the LMS emerged as the top answer and “campus library resources” dropped to number three, slightly behind “office hours/tutoring.”
It is not surprising that faculty would value one-on-one student sessions more than the library, so the fact that “campus library resources” was selected by 22 percent of faculty is somewhat enlightening—especially when you consider that nearly one-fourth of faculty is acknowledging the impact of the library above the LMS or their own office hours.

There were some interesting spikes looking at the regional and subject cross-tabulations. The library was perceived as a more important contributor to student success internationally than in the US—29 percent of non-US/Canada faculty selected campus library resources as the most important item versus 17 percent of US/Canada faculty. And campus library resources were considered to be of more importance for humanities and education faculty than for those in other disciplines—usually by about 10 percentage points.

**Faculty and the Library**

To get a sense of how faculty value library resources, it’s worth looking at how faculty works with the library. First, to what extent do faculty say they integrate library resources into course work?

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1 In more than 10 years’ worth of Library Journal studies of academic libraries, we have often found a bit of a disconnect—and a somewhat contentious relationship—between campus faculty and library.
Faculty in general are availing themselves—or having their students avail themselves—of library resources. Two-thirds (65%) say they “always” or “usually” integrate library resources with course work. One-fourth “sometimes” do, while 10 percent “rarely” or “never do.”

As might be expected given the results to the previous impact question, non-US/Canada faculty are more apt to integrate library resources with course work than US/Canada faculty (72% vs. 61%). Humanities faculty are far and away (77%) the most likely to integrate library resources.

When setting course requirements, seven out of ten faculty “always” or “usually” consider the availability of library resources, while 17 percent “sometimes” do. Another 13 percent “rarely” or “never” do.
Lastly, what are the barriers to integrating more library resources into coursework?

The top response, selected by 34 percent of faculty, is that the library doesn’t have the necessary resources they want (while 13 percent say that the library deliberately refuses to purchase their requests). One-fourth say that coordinating with the library is too much hassle, and 20 percent cite lack of communication/input from the library. Twelve percent selected “other,” and the write-in responses largely indicated that the students themselves were the barrier to faculty making more use of library resources. And it’s not just “lazy students with short attention spans,” as one respondent put it, but, as another wrote, “students increasingly find print a foreign medium. They need podcasts, short videos that give them the info—they can process it better that way.”

One-fifth of faculty respondents selected “no barriers”—it’s a nice long bar on the following chart, but it also means that, for 80 percent of faculty, there is some kind of barrier to integrating more library resources into coursework.
Figure 5. What barriers, if any, stand in the way of integrating more library resources into course work? — All Faculty

Just over one-half (53%) of faculty say that the library interacts with them to ensure that it has course reserves. A third or more say their library creates course reading/resource lists, visits class to provide instructional support, or actually suggests/selects course materials. Over a quarter say their library suggests low or no cost alternatives to keep students’ materials fees down. What’s disheartening here is that nearly one-fifth of faculty seem to have no interaction with the library at all (18 percent selected “none of the above”).
In the figure above, 37 percent of faculty said that a librarian visits the class to provide instructional support. In the figure below, we specifically asked about the frequency with which faculty invite a librarian to speak to their classes.

A net 25 percent of faculty say they “always” or “usually” invite a librarian to talk to their classes about information literacy and using library resources. Twenty-seven percent “sometimes” do, but nearly half, 48 percent, “rarely” or “never” do. Faculty in the humanities and education disciplines are the most likely to engage embedded librarians, while those in the natural and applied sciences are the least likely.
When asked how important library instruction on information literacy is to student success, 42 percent of faculty answered “very important,” with another 42 percent saying it is “important.”
The percentage rating library instruction on information literacy as “very important” rises to over half of faculty teaching in education, business, and medicine/health science disciplines, and falls to just a third of faculty in natural and applied sciences.

Library Impact

We asked faculty straight out, “In your opinion, do library resources increase student engagement or have a marked impact on student performance?” Nearly two-thirds of faculty conclusively feel that, yes, the library increases student engagement or impacts student performance. Twelve percent decidedly said “no.” A full one-fourth of faculty said “don’t know.” (“Don’t know” was highest for faculty in natural and applied sciences and education.)

Figure 9. In your opinion, do library resources increase student engagement or have a marked impact on student performance? —All Faculty

n=538

The Library Story

We’ve seen what faculty said. This section examines the results of our corresponding library survey.

Nearly all library respondents said that “providing library resources to support coursework” and “providing space for students to study and collaborate” are ways that libraries contribute to student success. Scheduled and/or ad hoc instruction by library staff (including answering reference, information literacy, database/studio usage questions, etc.), was deemed a student success contributor by over 80 percent of library respondents. Collaborating with faculty about
course requirements, curating course reading/resource lists, and addressing textbook affordability issues were selected by about three-quarters of library respondents.

In a rare case of numbers aligning, 85 percent of librarians selected “information literacy instruction at the library” as a contributor to student success—while in the faculty survey, a similar 84 percent felt that library instruction on information literacy was “important” or “very important.” Forty-two percent of librarians selected “embedded librarians in the classroom/virtual classroom”—but, as we noted earlier, only 25 percent of faculty say they “always” or “usually” invite librarians to speak in their classes.

*Figure 10. In what ways does your library contribute to undergraduate success? (multiple responses permitted) —All Libraries*

![Diagram showing various library contributions and their percentages](image)

*n=553

Asked which of the library’s actions has the *biggest* impact on student success, 26 percent selected “providing library resources to support coursework.” “Information literacy instruction in the library” was the second most impactful action, selected by 19 percent, and 13 percent selected “providing space for students to study and collaborate.”
Eight out of ten libraries believe that faculty in their institution are receptive to the idea of integrating library resources with coursework--22 percent saying they are “very” receptive. Seventeen percent feel that faculty are somewhat reluctant, and 3 percent are very reluctant.

Earlier, we saw that 65 percent of faculty said they always or usually (and 25 percent sometimes) integrate library resources into coursework, aligning with the library response to some extent. A third of faculty had said that the library doesn’t have the materials they want, and 13 percent said that the library deliberately refuses to purchase their requests—which could represent the 20 percent reluctance to integrate library resources into coursework.
Embedded Librarians

While 42 percent of libraries feel that embedded librarians contribute to student success, only 5 percent feel that it is the biggest contributor. But do libraries have any empirical means of evaluating that extent? Not really. At best, they count the number of classes requesting in-class instruction (60%), and just about half (49%) rely on anecdotal evidence from faculty to measure impact. Fourteen percent track grades and student passage rates. Still, nearly one-fourth of libraries (23%) do not have any measurement system in place.
Libraries that do assess the effectiveness of embedded librarians, however, place it as the second most impactful library contributor to student success after “providing library resources to support coursework.” For the few libraries that empirically measure the effectiveness of embedded librarians (either through tracking grades/passage rates/student retention or through formal testing), the impact of “embedded librarians in the classroom” ranks nearly as high as “providing library resources to support coursework.”

**Information Literacy**

A three-part question asked libraries how important their institution’s librarians, professors, and administrators felt information literacy instruction by the library was to student success. Nearly all, 99 percent, said that librarians felt it was “very important” or “important,” but only 70 percent thought professors felt likewise (As we saw above, 84 percent of faculty who were directly asked the same question said library information literacy instruction was “very important” or “important.”) Only 44 percent of libraries said that their institution’s administrators felt information literacy instruction by the library was “very important” or “important.”
How important do the following at your institution feel library instruction on information literacy is to student success? —All Libraries

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<th>Librarians</th>
<th>Professors</th>
<th>Administrators</th>
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<td>NET Very important/Important</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>45%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Very Important</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>21%</td>
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<td>Important</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>49%</td>
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<td>Slightly Important</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>27%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not Important</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3%</td>
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Forty-three percent use resource usage metrics to measure the impact of information literacy instruction on student success, while 37 percent rely on anecdotal accounts. Measuring improvement in student grades/retention/passing rates is done by 20 percent of libraries, and formal testing by 12 percent. Just about one-fourth do not assess the impact of library information literacy instruction at all.

Figure 14. How does the library assess the impact of its information literacy instruction on student success? —All Libraries

n=406
Unlike with embedded librarians, the ranking of the most impactful library actions does not change based on whether libraries make library information literacy instruction assessments or not.

**Barriers to Impact Measurement**

Three-fourths (77%) of libraries say that the principal barrier to measuring the impact of the library on student success is that there are no definitive methods of measurement, and even if there were, 50 percent say that it takes too much time to conduct such measurements. One-fourth cite student privacy issues as a barrier to measurement, as access to grades and other registration information is often protected by institutions, and students are wary of answering surveys because of anonymity concerns.

![Figure 15. What are the barriers to measuring the library's impact on student success? (Multiple responses permitted) —All Libraries](image)

An open-ended question asked librarians what more they wished could be done to measure the library’s impact on student success. Many mentioned grade tracking, exit surveys, or library usage assessments. Some thought that better communication with faculty would help. All agreed that a more formalized, standard solution across institutions is needed. But one respondent has qualms; “I would like to have methods that didn't rely on thinking of students as data to be harvested.”
Challenges/Barriers

Time, money, and staff—these are the three biggest obstacles libraries say stand in the way of the library having a bigger impact on student success. One-half (52%) of libraries say that “lack of communication from faculty about course needs” also is an obstacle. And it should be pointed out that 37 percent say “lack of interest from students.”

*Figure 16. What obstacles impede your library’s ability to have a larger impact on undergraduate student success? (Multiple responses permitted) —All Libraries*

Not enough time to do everything we’d like to do 60%
Increased resource/subscription costs 58%
Understaffed 58%
Lack of communication/input from faculty about course needs 52%
Insufficient materials budget 47%
Inability to measure library impact 43%
Lack of interest by students 37%
Lack of support from administrators 33%
Building/facility doesn’t meet our needs (too small, outdated, etc.) 32%
Inadequate resources available 27%
Other 10%
None 0%

n=510

Three-fourths (77%) of libraries feel “strongly” or “very strongly” that collection development budgets have an impact on student success, and a similar percentage (78%) feel “strongly” or “very strongly” that staffing budgets are tied to student success. Library respondents reported that both of these budgets had decreased in their library over the past three years. Meanwhile, the majority admit that their library has no effective way to measure the return on investment of collection development or staffing budgets.

Libraries also said that different disciplines provide different challenges in building library engagement—natural and applied sciences (31%) and business (23%) courses appear to present the biggest challenges. In the case of the former, it’s likely that coursework involves one or two major textbooks and lab work, at least at the undergraduate/introductory level.
Figure 17. Which disciplines present the greatest challenge in building more library engagement? —All Libraries

Next Steps

What contributes to student success, and how can libraries be an even greater contributor to it? Looking at the faculty portion of our data set, professors have mixed feelings about their institution’s library. They obviously feel that the library is an important resource for students, and is a major contributor to student success, but the day-to-day working relationship with the library sometimes undermines that. Faculty report that they do make an effort to consider library resources when developing course plans, but some find that their libraries do not have the specific resources they want—and in a minority of cases deliberately refuse to procure them (likely for budgetary reasons).

Everyone agrees that information literacy, teaching students to discover and critically evaluate resources, is a vital part of student success. Yet the library seems to be an underused resource for this. Librarian instruction—whether through one-on-one interactions with students using the library or embedded librarians in classrooms—is the best way to accomplish this, but few faculty report that they avail themselves of it. Where the fault lies—with the librarians who may have time or other constraints, or with the faculty who may not want to take time away from actual course instruction—remains an open question, but the answer is probably a little of both.

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2 This will only become more important as more and more students start relying on so-called “artificial intelligence” like ChatGPT and other large learning models to conduct research.
Perhaps the biggest issue with regard to student success is that there seem to be very few metrics to quantify it. As we remarked in the introduction, basic definitions of student success vary widely, although it is generally agreed that academic performance is a key part of it.

What is needed going forward is to:

- Clearly define what is meant by “student success.”
- Develop a methodology for measuring it.
- Identify the roles of both faculty and the library in achieving student success and identify how to measure the extent to which both sides are fulfilling their roles.
- Bring together faculty and libraries and align them such that they can work more closely and effectively to meet the goals of student success.
  - Why are library resources not available and how can this be addressed?
  - Get libraries more involved in the course planning process so that library resources can be more effectively integrated.
  - Why are librarians not utilized more often in classrooms for instruction in information literacy and how can that be rectified?
  - Develop a metric so the library can accurately measure the extent to which embedded librarians in the classroom impact student success.
  - Use tools and software designed to facilitate collaboration and communication between faculty and librarians.
- Get students to take greater advantage of the library and its resources.
  - The trick of course is how. Make some degree of library usage part of their overall grade? Specific library-centric class assignments?

View the faculty and library data tables for more insight into the study.