Data Ever After: Tackling Data Reference Questions at the Library
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**Background & Methods**

**Background**

The survey was created with a focus on librarians who answer any secondary data questions in their work as the target audience. The survey was created in Qualtrics (International Association for Social Science Information Services & Technology) and received IRB approval through the University of Minnesota. The survey was sent to various national, international, and local libraries and was hosted online.

In order to have more about the landscape of secondary data librarianship and how librarians are working with this support, researchers designed a survey to be distributed to one of the largest listservs of data librarians, GOVDOC (Library professionals working with government information), Twin Cities Libraries, and others. The survey was created in Qualtrics (IASSIST) in December 2017 and was distributed to various listservs in January 2018. The survey was open from November 27, 2017 to December 22, 2017. Only responses from those who work the desk were included in data analysis, which amounted to 278 total respondents.

**Methods**

The survey was designed to gather data about the types of questions librarians are receiving, how they spend their time answering these questions, roadblocks they experience, and opportunities for increasing expertise in this area of practice. The survey included questions about the types of data requests they receive, the time spent answering these requests, and the types of sources they use to find the data. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data, and the mean, median, and mode were calculated for each question.

**Types of Questions**

- **Topic Areas**
  - Demographic: 206
  - Business/Economics: 194
  - Health: 198
  - Education: 157
  - Politics: 143
  - Agriculture: 164
  - Science: 198
  - Environment: 158
  - National: 233
  - International: 183
  - Local or State: 224

- **Geography**
  - Global: 250
  - US: 200
  - Other: 150

- **Time**
  - <30 min: 227
  - 30-60 min: 218
  - 1-2 hours: 192
  - 2-4 hours: 156
  - 4+ hours: 100

- **Miscellaneous**
  - Data never requested: 100
  - Data received: 250

**Data Reference Emails & Consultations**

- 102
- 102
- 102
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- 102
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- 102

**Frustrations and Roadblocks**

- Data librarians who work the desk are 1,421 times more likely to be frustrated by paywalls than those who do not work the desk. (Chi-Sq=4.329, df=1, p=0.037)

- Data librarians who work the desk are 1,488 times more likely to be frustrated by difficulty navigating resources than those who do not work the desk. (Chi-Sq=7.824, df=1, p=0.005)

**Strategies for Answering Questions**

- Use personal knowledge of data
- Reference colleagues
- Google it to get started
- Google search
- Data reference
- Data discovery
- Data citation
- Data standards
- Data visualizations
- Data ethics
- Data governance
- Data policy
- Data stewardship

**Suggestions from Data Librarians:**

- “Consult with or refer to your institution’s data experts! Saves everyone time & frustration.”
- “It’s often less about finding the data they want, and more about helping them construct a research question around what data already exists.”
- “Keep a good set of bookmarks, and back them up!”
- “As a first pass, I always search for government sources. The government is an amazingly prolific publisher!”
- Most importantly, 4 people called out IASSIST as a great resource and community for answering data questions!

**Conclusions & Next Steps**

Data librarians continue to play vital roles in the research library and academic subject and resource environment to locate secondary data and statistics for patrons. This is a specialized skill set that is boosted with experience answering questions and time spent in the field, even though valued information is not always on or available in browse databases. Our research is in the exploratory analysis stage and further work with this dataset is necessary to reveal deeper and more nuanced conclusions about trends.

**References**

Kellam, L. M., & Thompson, K. (Eds.). (2016). Librarianship in a digital environment: Digital literacy, data reference and how librarians can better support researchers and users in this area, data reference and how librarians can better support researchers and users in this area, Data reference and how librarians can better support researchers and users in this area. Chicago: American Library Association.

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