

Thematic “Repackaging” of the Evidence Summaries Section and an Initial Focus on Evidence Based Reference Practices

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Editorial

Thematic “Repackaging” of the Evidence Summaries Section and an Initial Focus on Evidence Based Reference Practices

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Since the publication of the first issue in 2006, *Evidence Based Library and Information Practice* (EBLIP) has published evidence summaries, which are brief critical appraisal reviews of current research articles from the library and information science (LIS) literature. With the first issue of 2022 and in the coming issues, the Editorial Board would like to respond to a study of the EBLIP community (Kloda et al., 2014) assessing the impact of evidence summaries (ES) on helping to bridge the gap between research and day-to-day library practice. Kloda et al. concluded that their survey highlighted “a potential need to improve marketing or packaging of the evidence summaries to ensure that they reach the intended audience and achieve maximum impact on practice” (p. 43).

In 2022 and 2023, we will be “repackaging” the evidence summaries section by providing critical appraisals to readers using the six domains of EBLIP that Koufogiannakis et al. (2004) identified in their

content analysis of LIS research: reference, education, collections, management, information access and retrieval, and professional issues/LIS education. Packaged together, the value of evidence summaries as tools for practice becomes even more apparent. Not only do they make collections of evidence more accessible to librarians and other information practitioners, but they also reaffirm the value of evidence that is of high quality—in other words, evidence that has been gathered through careful attention to study design and rigorous data collection and analysis. Themed collections of evidence summaries emphasize the need for grounding library and information practices in solid research and assessment, which is even more critical during the rapidly changing times in which we find ourselves. When grouped together, these works emphasize the different types of evidence that can be used to answer similar questions, while also revealing patterns, contradictions, and areas for further investigation.

The five evidence summaries published in Volume 17, Issue 1 are focused on reference, probing the relevance of reference services today and placing a spotlight on different avenues of current research and practice in this domain: the impact of different reference staffing models, responses to COVID-19, possible racial bias in virtual reference services, administrative views about such services, and the very definition of such services themselves. Given the overall decline seen in recent years in traditional reference services at many (but not all!) institutions and the challenges to in-person reference services caused by recent events, the studies appraised here—several focused on virtual reference services—provide a variety of perspectives that may help librarians consider and experiment with possible changes to reference services in the coming year. They also prompt many questions. How do we best provide virtual reference services and reach more members of our communities? How do we continue to articulate the value of such services to decision makers? How might we work even more closely together to incorporate findings from others into our activities? We hope the research highlighted in this issue's evidence summaries will ignite your curiosity and spur you to consider your practice—be it in an academic, corporate, or public library setting—in a new light.

As we implement this new approach to the evidence summaries section, we welcome your feedback on thematic groupings as well as on any other ideas you may have to improve the transfer of research to practice. On a personal level, as two instruction and reference practitioners who navigated the many (often rapid) transitions associated with COVID-19 on our physical and virtual campuses, we sincerely hope that the year ahead provides us all with greater ability to contemplate our practice, using the lessons learned from the past two years to consider the broader importance of our profession to those we serve directly and to civic society more broadly.

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