Academic Libraries And Student Retention: Expanded Findings, Evolving Practice, and Evidence-Based Decision Making

Mary O'Kelly
Western Michigan University

Jon Jeffryes
Grand Valley State University

Maya Hobscheid
Grand Valley State University

Abstract

This poster provides a follow up to the 2016 presentation, "Academic Libraries and Student Retention: The Implications for Higher Education," and gives an abbreviated preview of the long-term findings of our eight-year study of the correlation between library instruction and student retention. The study has demonstrated a consistent, positive relationship between library instruction and student reenrollment the following fall, using a methodology that foregrounds student privacy. This poster emphasizes the unique impact such a study has had on the evolution of our library instruction program and how we use the findings from the study to make future-focused decisions.

Methods

Librarians log instruction data using Springshare's LibInsight datasets. Data include date, librarian name, location, course prefix (an alphabetical academic department designation), course number, and section number. Librarians do not collect identifying student information nor do they take attendance. It has been determined that typical absence is within the margin of error, therefore whole-class enrollment is assumed.

The university's Institutional Analysis (IA) department is a critical partner. IA annually receives the library instruction session data and uses section-level information to determine the relationship between student enrollment data and student library session participation. The analyst performs a chi-squared test of independence and odds ratio, p-value = .0001. To reduce confounding factors, the analyst controls for high school GPA, ACT score, socioeconomic status, and first-generation status. N > 17,000 for each year of the study, drawn from the entire enrolled student population.

In addition to testing the null hypothesis -- that no relationship exists between library instruction and student retention -- the study also provides information about the reach of the library instruction program across academic programs and grade levels, information which informs instruction strategies.

Individual liaison:
- Enters instruction data into LibInsight.

Library Project Lead:
- Collates and cleans annual data
- Curates research questions for analysis
- Coordinates analysis with IA

IA Department:
- Analyzes instruction data with student data
- Provides report with anonymized results

Library Instruction Teams and Administration:
- Interpret results
- Use information to inform future practice
- Develop related assessment plans

Privacy

- Student privacy was built into the original design of the study.
- The university's IA department collects and securely stores student-level data.
- Librarians do not take attendance nor collect any identifying information during instruction.
- No private student data is ever shared with or held by University Libraries - all results are returned to the libraries in aggregate only.

Findings

The blue column on the left indicates the numbers of students in a class with library instruction. The gray column to the right indicates the number of students with no classes with library instruction.
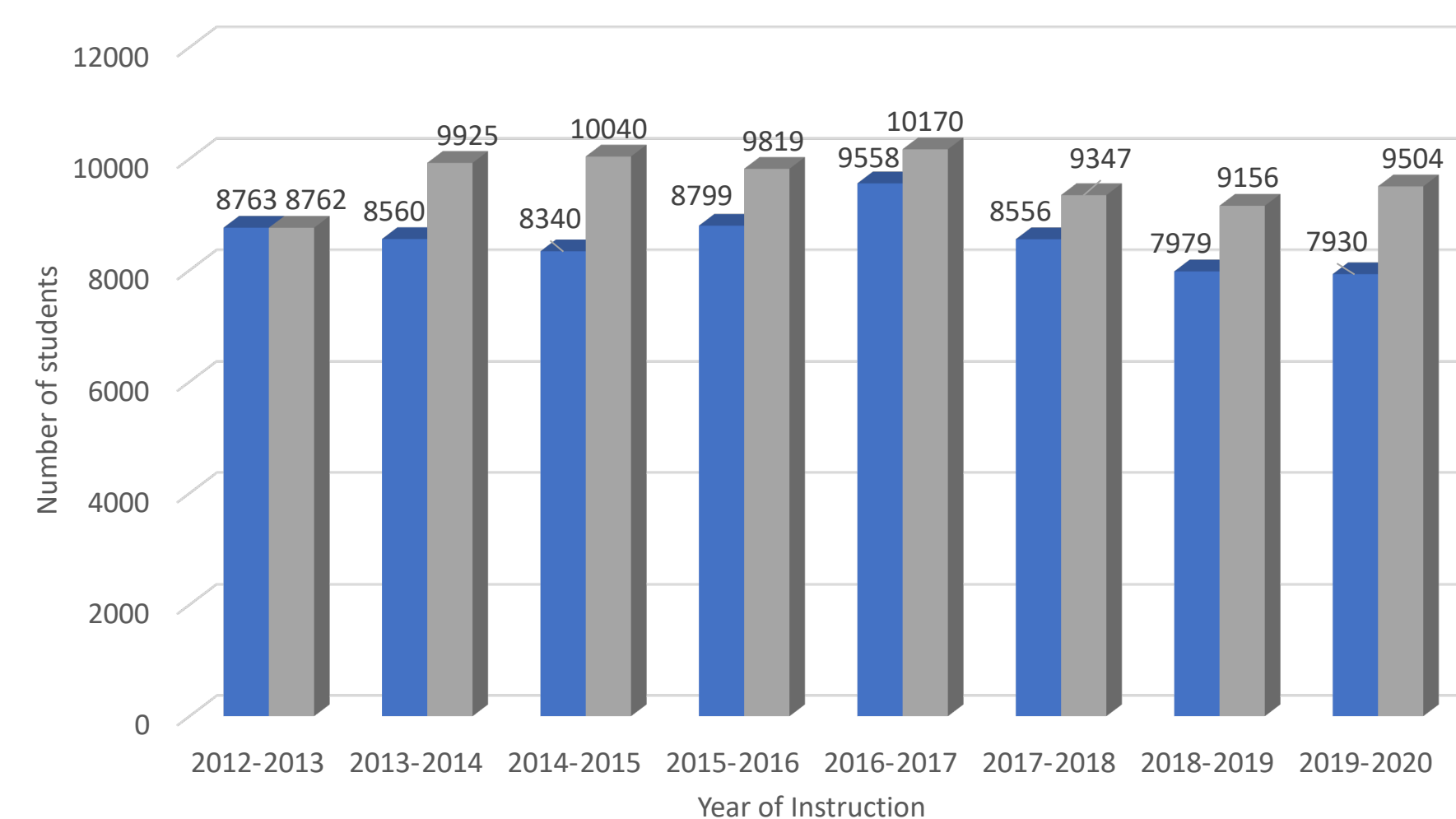
The blue line along the top indicates the percentage of retention from fall semester to fall semester of students who had a class with library instruction. The gray line on the bottom indicates the percentage of retention from fall semester to fall semester of students with no classes with library instruction.
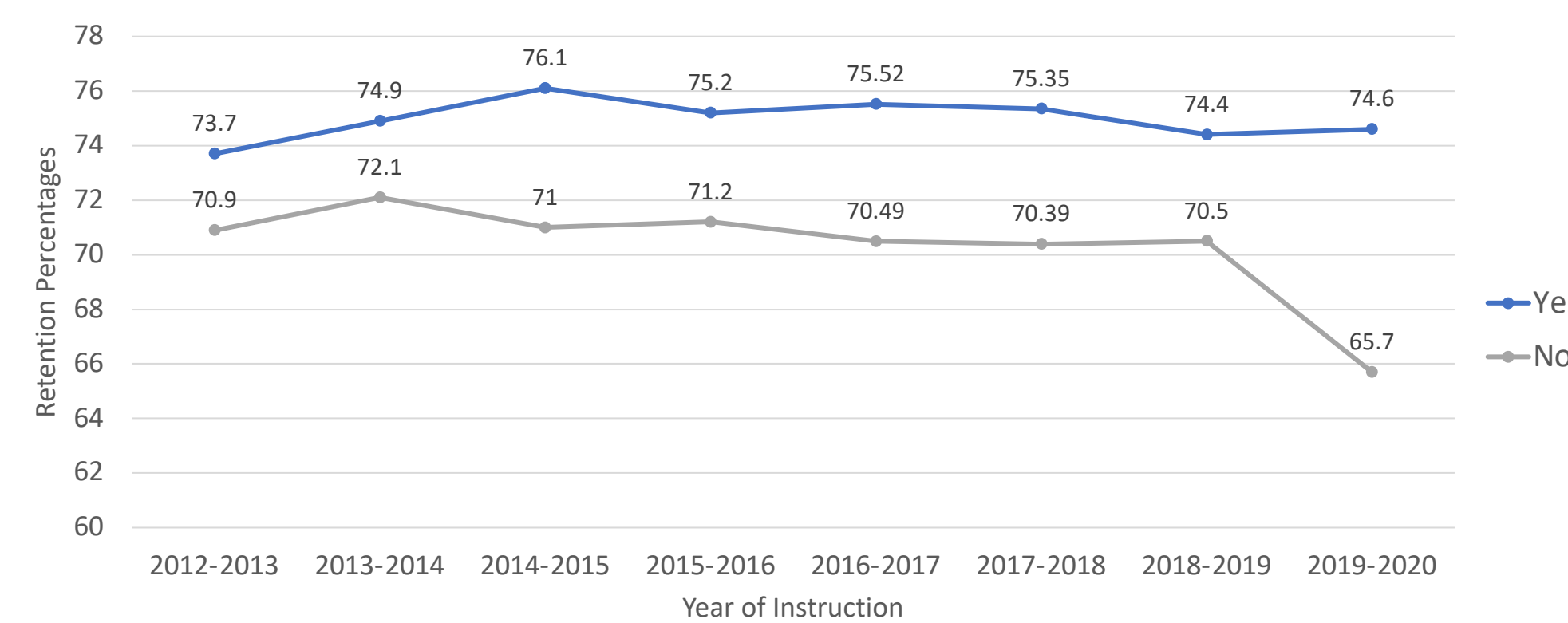
	12-13	13-14	14-15	15-16	16-17	17-18	18-19	19-20
Odds Ratio	1.14	1.15	1.31	1.23	1.29	1.13	1.2	1.5

Instructional Evolution

- This study has improved and standardized data collection, starting in 2012 and continuing with improvements every year since. The Library Project Lead shares out trends from data so liaison librarians see how the data they enter is being used changing perceptions of the work from "busy work" to a valuable practice.
- Consistent data entry practice enables us to update research questions to match the strategic direction of the Libraries and to align better with campus assessment requirements. Updates have included:
  - Collecting online instruction data to allow for future study of online versus in-person library instruction and track the overall trends in library instruction comparing in-person and online as well as synchronous online and asynchronous online instruction delivery.
  - Designing more nuanced micro-level assessments of student learning at the individual class session level to complement the broad macro-approach of this study.

Impact on Decision Making

- The Libraries regularly communicate findings that students who experience course-integrated library instruction sessions are also retained at a higher rate the following fall. This data has been shared with our Provost's Office and candidates for the University's most recent Presidential search. The numerical evidence helps make a case for continued staffing levels when creating documented justifications to refill faculty lines.
- Data on which academic programs the library reaches allows liaisons to deliberately target outreach to academic programs that have not received library instruction and provides an evidence-based talking point when advocating for library instruction integration into the curriculum.
- The detailed information about library instruction by academic program and grade level informs librarian curriculum maps, which detail the strategic integration of library instruction into the curriculum and facilitate deliberate scaffolding by grade level.
- Liaison librarians have worked with Institutional Analysis to explore their individual disciplinary instruction in more depth.
- Annual collection, analysis, and communication of such thorough library instruction data has provided a foundation for a culture of assessment and accountability that we're now moving into other components of liaison work including reference consultations and liaison outreach.

Literature

O'Kelly, Mary, "Academic Libraries and Student Retention: The Implications for Higher Education" (2016). Library Assessment Conference. https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/library_presentations/57

O'Kelly, Mary, Maya Hobscheid, Jon Jeffryes, and Rachael Passarelli. "Correlation Between Library Instruction and Student Retention: Methods and Implications" [manuscript in progress]

Images: form by priyanka from the Noun Project; Librarian by Yugudesign from the Noun Project; analysis by Viral faisalovers from the Noun Project; analysis by Oksana Latysheva from the Noun Project