

Book Reviews/Boekresensies

Academic library surveys and statistics in practice

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The seminar on which the publication is based, was designed for academic librarians who are involved in user research projects, and need information on surveying and analysing research results. The emphasis is on providing *practical* advice so that librarians can build on the strengths of the research projects which are reported and avoid their mistakes. The contributors are all from the United Kingdom. The principles discussed however can also be valuable to the South African profession.

The topics discussed are very stimulating and focus on timely issues. The papers cover quality issues and performance indicators in academic libraries (University of Northumbria and Cranfield University's respective experiences), user surveys (University of Wales), user satisfaction surveys (Nene College Northampton). There are also papers on using Libra software and focus groups in user satisfaction surveys (University of Brighton), book availability surveys (University of Sussex), market penetration statistics (John Rylands University Library of Manchester) and short loan collections (the ACORN project at the University of Loughborough and the experience of the University of Sussex are reported).

A paper which is particularly relevant to those who are investigating electronic libraries, deals with user studies of commercial and free electronic journals. This paper was prepared by the Department of Information and Library Studies at Loughborough University's and the Pilkington Library. Practical implications of sampling, statistical inference and statistical software are also covered. Software which are mentioned include SPSS and MINITAB for Windows.

The results indicated that students found access to electronic journals easier than to the paper versions and that free journals are not necessarily considered to be of a lower calibre.

Although the papers are all of a very practical nature, seven out of the eleven papers include references to the subject literature. The Nancy van House publication, *Measuring academic library performance: a practical approach*, seems to feature strongly in the lists of references.

Apart from survey statistics, six examples of survey questionnaires (collecting different types of information) are included. These can be adapted by other libraries or at least serve as point of departure for other surveys.

The practical tone of presentation in which the book is written and consideration of problems, pitfalls and challenges relevant to the academic environment, make the publication extremely suitable for practitioners. Although it takes note of the underlying theories, the publication is not burdened with a theoretical approach.

The style is easy to read and the layout is clear. No obvious problems were noted with the technical presentation. However, the index could be improved. The entries in the table of contents are merely repeated, with a few additional entries. The criteria for selecting entries are not clear. Although a number of survey types are included, there are, for example no entries for general satisfaction surveys, material availability surveys and single-issue surveys. It would have been useful had there also be entries for questionnaires. It was noted that the page references for focus groups are incomplete: the focus groups that have been discussed on pages 38–39 are not listed.

The book is recommended for practitioners as well as academics interested in practical discussions and can be ordered from Library & Information Statistics Unit (LISU), Publication Section, Loughborough University, Loughborough LE11, 3TU, UK.

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