

Library Staff Need More Support in Order to Alleviate Teaching Anxiety

Lundstrom, K., Fagerheim, B. & Van Geem, S. (2021). Library teaching anxiety: Understanding and supporting a persistent issue in librarianship. *College & Research Libraries*, 82(3), 389-409. <https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.82.3.389>

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Evidence Summary

Library Staff Need More Support in Order to Alleviate Teaching Anxiety

A Review of:

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Abstract

Objective – To determine academic librarians' attitudes towards their teaching, how teaching anxiety manifests itself, and how teaching anxiety affects these attitudes.

Design – Online Survey.

Setting – The survey was distributed through various library science listservs.

Subjects – Any library staff with a teaching component in their role were invited to respond. There was a total of 1,035 initial responses.

Methods – The survey questions were based on a previously published survey about teaching anxiety by Davis (2007). However, the survey for this study added questions about formal and self-diagnosis of other types of anxieties, physical and psychological anxiety symptoms, and how teaching anxiety impacts other areas of the respondents' lives. There were also questions on potential supports to reduce teaching anxiety, as well as potential barriers to these supports.

Main Results – It was found that approximately 65% of respondents experience teaching anxiety. Approximately 40% of those respondents were formally diagnosed with anxiety, and approximately 42% were self-

diagnosed. There was a significant association between a formal diagnosis of anxiety, and teaching anxiety. There were also significant associations between past training, preparation, and teaching anxiety, with anxiety occurring less with increased training and preparation.

Conclusion – Teaching anxiety is a significant issue among library staff. Supports in the form of workshops on teaching as well as coping with anxiety can possibly help to reduce this phenomenon.

Commentary

The quality of this study was appraised using “The CAT: a generic critical appraisal tool” created by Perryman & Rathbun-Grubb (2014). Overall the article was found to be of high quality based on this assessment. The first two authors are research and instruction librarians at a university, and the third author is a sociology faculty member. The research questions were clearly defined, and matched the method used. The single limitation that was mentioned in the article was the fact that the respondents were self-selected, as opposed to being randomly selected. The authors stated that they “attempted to mitigate” this factor by obtaining a high number of responses, however the response rate does not seem high enough to have achieved this goal.

A copy of the survey itself was included as an appendix, however a significant limitation was that it was not piloted. It was not clear if the survey was open to librarians or library staff, since all the respondents were referred to as “librarians” throughout the article. Also, geographical information was not obtained, which is a significant piece of information, especially since the survey was distributed through both national and international listservs.

One of the major findings of this article is that teaching anxiety in library staff is linked to other formally diagnosed anxiety disorders, which is not surprising. What is shocking is that there is such a large number of respondents (367 out of 925, or 39.68%) that

reported having a formal diagnosis. The authors include statistics showing that the rate of anxiety diagnosis in the general population both internationally and in the U.S. is much lower. Further research is necessary to clarify this finding. Is it that people with anxiety are drawn to the profession, or are there certain aspects of it that may be anxiety provoking, such as teaching? Could this be related to the fact that the respondents were self-selected, and therefore those with anxiety were more likely to participate in the survey?

It is unclear as to why the authors chose to include an option for self-diagnosis of anxiety disorders in this survey. 41.65% of those not formally diagnosed with anxiety claimed to be self-diagnosed. It is highly questionable that the respondents would be able to accurately diagnose themselves with these conditions, as this is typically done by trained mental health professionals. This should be taken into account when examining the data for these respondents.

Some of the factors that contributed to teaching anxiety were found to be, “fear of looking foolish or unknowledgeable in front of others” (13.70%), “fear of being unprepared” (12.73%), and “no previous contact or rapport with students” (11.26%). Not surprisingly, it was found that respondents that had previous coursework in information literacy instruction were less likely to experience teaching anxiety. Additionally, those who felt prepared to teach were less likely to have anxiety than those that were not. Thus, it seems that training and preparation may play a vital role in mitigating this issue.

Respondents also indicated that they would be willing to enroll in a course or workshop on teaching, coping with teaching anxiety, as well as coping with anxiety in general. They also indicated that a structured group of colleagues, or peer observations and feedback on teaching may be helpful as well. Libraries need to acknowledge that teaching anxiety is a significant issue for many, and multiple supports should be put in place to for those with this issue. Additionally, libraries should

consider alternative staffing patterns and workloads for those that prefer not to teach.

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