



Evidence Summary

Benefits of Unionization Still Unclear for U.S. Academic Libraries and Librarians

A Review of:

Applegate, R. (2009). Who benefits? Unionization and academic libraries and librarians. *The Library Quarterly*, 79(4), 443-463.

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Abstract

Objective – To investigate the quantitative benefits of unionization for libraries, librarians, and students at academic libraries in the United States.

Design – Quantitative analysis of existing datasets.

Setting – Academic libraries in the United States.

Subjects – One thousand nine hundred four accredited colleges and universities in the United States.

Methods – Institutions that provided data for both the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Academic Libraries Survey

(ALS) and the NCES Integrated Postsecondary Education Data Service (IPEDS) survey series in 2004 were considered for inclusion in this study. Of these institutions, only those with student populations over 500 and employing more than one librarian were included. The study did not include specialized libraries at institutions where “most of their degrees were awarded in a single area” (p. 449). The institutions were categorized by type derived from data by Carnegie and the Association of Research Libraries. The final categories were: ARL, Doctoral Non-ARL, Masters, Baccalaureate, and Associates. Governance was determined by using information from IPEDS that classified the institutions as public, private not-for-profit, and private for-profit. Unionization status was derived from the *Directory of Faculty Contracts and Bargaining Agents in Institutions of Higher Education*. After

private not-for-profit and private for-profit classifications were collapsed into one category, governance and unionization information were combined to create the final governance categories of: private, public nonunionized, and public unionized. The study analyzed the following characteristics in terms of institution type, governance, and institution type and governance interaction: ratio of students to librarians, ratio of library expenditures to institutional budget expenditures, average librarian salary, percentage of staff who were librarians, librarian salaries as a percentage of staff salaries, and percentage of the library budget spent on staff salaries.

Main Results – Analysis revealed statistically significant differences ($p < .05$) between governance and student-librarian ratio and between governance and percentage of library budget spent on staff salaries. No consistently beneficial relationship between governance and student-librarian ratio was determined. A consistently positive relationship was found between governance and percent of the library budget spent on librarian salaries; all public unionized institution types had higher percentages of the library budget devoted to librarian salaries than private and public nonunionized institutions. All five dependent variables showed statistically significant differences ($p < .05$) when analyzed by institution type. Analysis by institution type and governance interaction found statistically significant differences ($p < .05$) for student-librarian ratios, librarian salary, and percentage of library budget devoted to staff salaries. Strong R^2 values were determined for the dependent variables of: staff salaries as a proportion of library budget (.51) and student-librarian ratio (.34).

Conclusion – Based on the results, the author stated that unionization appears to have positive or neutral benefits for the library, librarians, and students, regardless of institutional type. Further quantitative and qualitative research is needed to analyze the effects of unionization on library quality.

Commentary

This study looks at whether quantitative “benefits” are associated with unionization in U.S. academic libraries. It will be of interest to academic librarians, especially those who are interested in comparing the benefits of working at a different institution or under a different governance structure. The author clearly defined the context of the study with an overview of the previous research on unionization and libraries. While this study does add to the understanding of unionization of academic libraries, the stated results do not support the conclusions of this article.

The author clearly explained the methodology, described the variables analyzed as well as the confounding variables, and used appropriate descriptive and inferential statistics for the variables analyzed. However, one of the variables, librarian salaries as percentage of staff salaries, was never analyzed. Data from either ALS or IPEDS was lacking for some of the institutions for three of the variables analyzed. It is impossible to determine the effect on the analyses as there were no further explanations on which categories the lack of data affected.

While the results do support the conclusion that “being private is ‘best’ on most quantitative measures for the library,” they do not support the conclusion that “unionization is best for librarians” (p. 461). Private institutions showed lower student-librarian ratios than either unionized or nonunionized public institutions. Librarians at public unionized institutions have higher student-librarian ratios than at public nonunionized institutions, except at the ARL and Baccalaureate levels. Librarians at unionized public institutions also have lower salaries than at public nonunionized institutions, except at the Masters and Baccalaureate levels. Most of the statistically significant findings reported in this study came from the analyses by institutions type and not by governance. Also, it is unclear how the study is summarized results in Table 9 relate to the

previously discussed statistically significant findings.

Applegate frankly states “this study provides some, but very limited, answers in the unionization area” (p. 461) and the results cannot be generalized beyond U.S. “traditional, mainstream academia” (p. 449). The analyses do reveal that some quantitative differences can be correlated with governance,

but add more to the understanding of differences correlated with institution type. Therefore the results are most helpful for librarians who are considering where it would be “best” to work based on institution type and not on governance type. Further qualitative and quantitative research, as noted by the author, is warranted in analyzing the effects of unionization for academic libraries and librarians.