

Nolan, D. (2013). Examining the role of the embedded librarian in online learning: A qualitative study. (Doctoral dissertation, Towson University, 2013).

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Dissertation Abstract

As the array and scope of distance learning programs and online learners in higher education expand, the academic library's role in enhancing student success assumes new dimensions. Academic libraries are committed to providing distance learners with the resources and services equivalent to those provided to learners in a traditional environment (American Library Association, 2008). Academic librarians, instructional partners in the higher education enterprise, enhance the learning, teaching, and scholarship of their institutional constituents regardless of time or place. To ensure comparable support to distance learners, some academic libraries have implemented a model in which the librarian, embedded into the online course, provides resources, services, instruction, and research support to students and faculty via technologies that bridge separations of time and space.

This study sought to better understand the role of the embedded librarian in online courses. Through a multicase qualitative approach, this research examined instructor, student, and librarian perceptions of how the embedded librarian worked in four online courses. The research findings revealed multiple factors that affected perceptions of the value of, challenges to, and future enhancements for the work of the embedded librarian. Communication, librarian's assistance to students, and librarian's availability were among the factors that shaped perceptions of the value of the embedded librarian. Perceived challenges to the work of the embedded librarian emerged as issues related to role clarification, technology functionality, and librarian workload, among others. Perceptions of future enhancements for the work of the embedded librarian were shaped by factors including planning, librarian competencies, and types of courses to support.

This qualitative study provided insight to the work of the embedded librarian in online courses. With a deeper understanding of instructor, student, and librarian perceptions of the role of the embedded librarian, academic libraries can enhance their support to the growing number of distance learners in higher education. Given the digital realm's primacy for change in the academic universe, this enhanced understanding is not only important, it is vital to libraries accomplishing their missions in the continually evolving educational frontier.