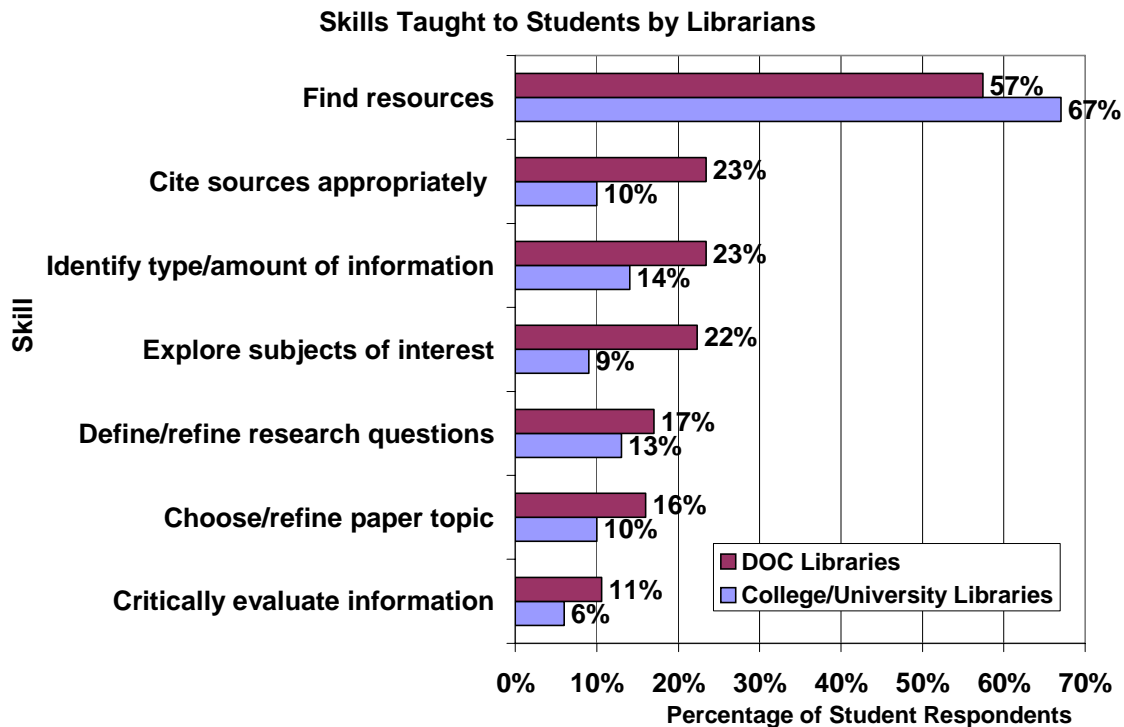


How Librarians Help College Students at Colorado Correctional Facilities

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In fall 2005, students taking college-level classes in 10 Colorado Department of Corrections (DOC) facilities participated in a study to examine the impact of correctional libraries on students' academic pursuits, with emphasis on the impact of skills taught by librarians. Earlier the same year, about 3,000 undergraduate students from nine Colorado colleges and universities answered similar questions.



When comparing the answers of DOC students with these students, some notable differences are apparent.

In both correctional and academic library settings, majorities of respondents were helped by librarians to find resources. This highlights the crucial role the librarian plays in formal education and information access. Fifty-seven percent of respondents in correctional settings reported receiving this service, indicating the importance of the librarian particularly in extremely restricted environments.



Additionally, DOC students were about twice as likely as the other students to report that librarians taught them how to:



- Cite sources appropriately,
- Explore subjects of interest outside their classes, and
- Critically evaluate information.

Critical information literacy skills were more likely to be taught by DOC librarians than those in other settings. Compared with their academic counterparts, correctional student respondents were half again as likely to:

- Identify type/amount of information, and
- Choose/refine paper topics.

This indicates that, in academic communities, where information is readily available, most students turn to other sources besides the librarian to learn how to explore outside subjects (only 9% of respondents) and evaluate information (only 6% of respondents). However, in correctional environments the librarian is more likely to teach DOC patrons how to keep up with subjects of interest, as well as to critically evaluate information.

Correctional librarians are also more likely to teach students how to define/refine research questions (17%).

Librarians in correctional settings may provide a patron's most important access to the outside world of news, events, ideas, and knowledge. From this comparison, it is clear that correctional librarians are more likely than their academic librarian counterparts to teach information literacy skills such as refining topics, citing sources, identifying information, and evaluating information critically. This kind of access to information as well as access to literacy skills instruction is essential to student success in formal education. In short, compared to their counterparts at Colorado colleges and universities, DOC librarians tend to play a greater role in teaching these essential library skills and research methodologies to DOC students.



ABOUT THIS ISSUE

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Fast Facts – Recent Statistics from the Library Research Service

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