

A scoping review of personal librarian programs in academic libraries

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Abstract

Personal librarian programs have been used in academic libraries since 1984, peaking in prevalence in the 2010s, and although assessment varies, they have shown to be a successful student engagement program in academic libraries. To survey and compile these programs for future program development, the authors comprehensively reviewed published literature on academic library programs categorized as personal librarian programs using scoping review methodology. Sources searched were Academic Search Complete, Web of Science core collection, Library and Information Science Abstracts, Library and Information Science Sources, Education Research Complete, monographs, conference proceedings, and grey literature. Programs were primarily in North America, with eighteen in the U.S., four in Canada and one in South Africa. The authors found that a plan of assessment should be in place before embarking on a personal librarian program. By reviewing the various models of personal librarian programs, the authors hope that this scoping review will assist librarians in selecting the appropriate model for their academic institution.

Keywords: Library outreach; reference services; library instruction; information literacy; academic libraries

Introduction

The transition into higher education can be a daunting one for many types of students (Hussey and Smith 2010). Undergraduates attending university directly from high school face unique challenges which differ from the challenges faced by transfer students, mature learners, or international students (Russell, Rosenthal, and Thomson 2010; Stone 2008; Townsend 2008). Personal librarian programs (PLPs) have been gaining traction in academic libraries as a way of providing customized support to diverse groups of learners. Programs tend to share common characteristics such as a focus on a pre-defined user group, a targeted marketing and communication plan with timed emails, and social events to introduce students to their personal librarians. Although not every PLP shares the exact same outreach initiatives, they aim to target specific user groups as a way of introducing library services.

Moniz and Moats state, “The intent of a personal librarian program is to build long-term, one-on-one connections that allow students to have the confidence and the resources to be successful in the skill sets that librarians particularly seek to instill in them” (Moniz and Moats 2015, 14). While the term ‘personal librarian’ is relatively recent, the services librarians provide change over time, and have been offered to students in many forms over the years (Bisko et al. 2019). As growing electronic collections take precedence over print collections, students find themselves struggling to obtain, assess, and use information (Koltay, Spiranec, and Karvalics

2016). PLPs can help students build trusting relationships with librarians in order to alleviate their information challenges and increase student success.

It is clear that student success can be bolstered by early interventions from librarians (Brown and Malenfant 2016; Emmons and Martin 2002; Blummer and Kenton 2018; Julien and Boon 2004). The 2016 report published by the Association of College and Research Libraries highlights that librarian connections with students can foster academic and personal skills such as increased retention, academic confidence, inquiry-based and problem-solving skills, and critical thinking. Student and librarian relationships in the form of outreach and instruction have also resulted in increased GPAs (Gaha, Hinnefeld, and Pellegrino 2018; Brown and Malenfant 2017).

The authors conducted this scoping review to examine the literature on PLPs as a way of informing the development of a PLP program at a large research-intensive university. The focus of this review was on identifying and gathering published accounts of PLPs that included elements of assessment or reflection. This scoping review will benefit librarians who may be considering implementing similar programs by providing a summary of models across a variety of academic institutions.

Personal vs Embedded Librarians

An issue of definition the authors encountered while analyzing the literature was the overlap and differences between embedded librarian programs and PLPs. Many examples of programs were

found that were labeled as PLPs yet appeared to follow an embedded approach. For the purpose of this review, definitions of PLPs versus embedded programs have been clarified.

The embedded model was driven by the need for librarians to move beyond the walls of the library and to connect with students on a programmatic level (Shumaker 2012). Often, embedded librarians become part of an online learning management system (LMS) and offer services remotely as well. The benefits of this type of approach are multifaceted (Brower 2011; Dewey 2004). Embedded librarians can offer course and program specific support and since they are considered part of the course or program, students can easily contact their librarian.

Embedded librarians are part of the groups they serve and as they are considered active team members, they are embedded into programs or courses. Personal librarians, on the other hand, are part of an individual student's experience. Shumaker suggested that embedded librarians become highly integrated into the success of a specific project, course, or program and develop "a full understanding of the nature of the task and the goals of the effort" (Shumaker 2012, 5). Personal librarians offer broader, generalized individual services outside of the course-specific models. Although personal librarians often communicate in bulk, the connections formed with students are individual and targeted to the needs of the specific student.

While for both embedded and personal librarians the target audience is predetermined, embedded librarians are often subject-specific, while personal librarians usually serve specific types of student populations, for example new undergraduate or transfer students. Paganelli and Paganelli discuss a personal librarian and embedded hybrid model and say, "The personal

librarian concept is created to assign students to a personal librarian, whereas the embedded librarian approach is course-based with approval from an instructor” (Paganelli and Paganelli 2017, 58). The Paganelli program combines aspects of embedded programs with PLPs. They note that embedded librarians work more closely with faculty, while personal librarians focus on building strong student/librarian relationships. Another example referred to librarians as personal librarians for an introductory English course however the librarian focus was on relationships with faculty teaching the course, which for our definitions led to an embedded model and was excluded for this review (Jewell 2014).

While some aspects of embedded programs and PLPs overlap, for this scoping review, our definition of PLPs refers to programs that exist separate of traditional program-based models and are not liaison based. PLPs are associated with targeted outreach to specific user groups. They are sometimes trialed with course-based groups, but often grow beyond to include a broader population. Based on an examination of embedded programs in contrast with PLPs, the authors have proposed the following definition of PLPs for this study:

PLPs are formalized outreach services by academic libraries that offer targeted communication to engage directly with a defined student user group, outside of the course and subject based embedded services typically focused toward faculty by liaison librarians.

Objectives

The authors examined the published literature on PLPs using a scoping review methodology in order to answer the questions:

- (1) Which institutions have offered PLPs?
- (2) What are the characteristics of those programs?
- (3) What types of assessments have been undertaken on these programs?

Methods

The authors conducted this scoping review based on the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) guidelines for conducting a scoping review (Peters et al. 2020). The JBI guidelines were derived from the original framework for scoping studies described by Arksey and O'Malley (2005). A scoping review aims to determine and summarize the evidence available on a topic, and uses a rigorous, transparent and trustworthy process (Arksey and O'Malley 2005). The methodology follows a sequence of steps beginning with definition of the review question, development of the inclusion criteria, and planning the methodological approach. This is followed by searching, selection, extraction, and analysis of the evidence. The final steps include presenting the results, summarizing the evidence, drawing conclusions if possible, and reporting implications. A scoping review methodology was chosen as the authors wanted to determine the extent of the literature on PLPs, especially as it relates to how these programs are assessed. Furthermore, scoping reviews use less restrictive inclusion criteria and may incorporate data from a variety of evidence sources and study designs (Arksey and O'Malley 2005); this will allow for a variety of evidence containing both formal or informal assessments of the PLP, including librarian reflections, to be included in the review. The reporting of this scoping review adheres to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analysis extension for Scoping Reviews (Tricco et al. 2018). The research team created a review protocol for internal use and is not formally published.

Population - The population of interest was students, including face-to-face, distance, and online programs.

Concept - The concept of interest was a personal librarian program, previously defined within the introduction as a targeted outreach program to specific student groups and are often outside of the liaison or course-embedded model.

Context - The context of interest was higher education, and included institutions of all types (college, technical schools, and universities), were publicly funded or private, and comprised both undergraduate and graduate programs. Furthermore, studies from any geographic region in the world were acceptable for inclusion.

Articles were eligible for inclusion if they: described a personal librarian outreach program; were situated in a higher education institution of any type anywhere in the world; included some form of evaluation or assessment, either quantitative or qualitative; were published in English; and were in a scholarly, professional, or trade article, book, book chapter, or conference proceeding, presentation, or poster.

Articles were excluded from the review if they: were about embedded librarian programs or other outreach programs not considered within the definition of a personal librarian program previously stated; were not in a higher educational setting; did not target students; provided only a brief description of the program but offered no assessment, evaluation, or reflective data; were published in any other language except for English; or were from either newspaper articles, blog posts, or other formats of information not specified in the inclusion criteria above.

Electronic searches

The research team searched the following electronic databases:

- Academic Search Complete (via EBSCO, 1887 to Jan 13, 2020)
- Web of Science core collection including Science Citation Index-Expanded (1900 to Jan 13, 2020), Social Sciences Citation Index (1900 to Jan 13, 2020), Arts & Humanities Citation Index (1975 to Jan 13, 2020), Conference Proceedings Citation Index - Science (1990 to Jan 13, 2020), Conference Proceedings Citation Index - Social Sciences & Humanities (1990 to Jan 13, 2020), and Emerging Sources Citation Index (2005 to Jan 13, 2020)
- Library and Information Science Abstracts (via Proquest, 1969 to Jan 13, 2020)
- Education Research Information Center - ERIC (via EBSCO, 1966 to Jan 13, 2020)
- Library and Information Science Source (via EBSCO, 1901 to Jan 13, 2020)
- Education Research Complete (via EBSCO, 1880 to Jan 13, 2020)

A comprehensive search, containing subject headings and textwords (keywords) combined using appropriate database syntax and Boolean operators, for Academic Search Complete was drafted by a librarian (one of the authors) and peer reviewed by the other authors. The authors then translated the primary search for the remaining databases, keeping the textwords and overall structure of each search consistent across the databases. The complete line-by-line search strategies for all databases are included in Appendix A.

The references from all database searches were exported as RIS or txt files, and then imported into Covidence for deduplication and screening.

Supplementary searching

The team also hand-searched the programs or proceedings of the following library and information science conferences from the previous 3 years/occurrences: ACRL annual conferences (2017-2019), ALA annual and mid-winter conferences (2017-2019), OLA super conference (2018-2020), WILU conferences (2017-2019), LOEX (2017-2018), IFLA (2017-2019), Personal Librarian & First Year Experience national conferences (2014, 2016, 2018), and Annual Conference on The First-Year Experience (2017-2019).

Additionally, the authors manually scanned the reference lists (backward citation chaining) and cited by (forward citation chaining) for each included study. The reference lists of all chapters in the book *The Personal Librarian: Enhancing the Student Experience* were also manually scanned to identify additional studies.

Study selection

The eligibility criteria were first piloted using 50 random records in Excel to ensure that inter-rater agreement was greater than 80 percent across the three reviewers. For title-abstract screening, each record was screened, in Covidence, independently by two reviewers, and conflicts were resolved by a third independent reviewer. Final average agreement level across all reviewers on the complete title-abstract screening set was 94 percent. Full-text articles were retrieved and uploaded to Covidence. Full-text screening in Covidence was carried out using a

similar process; two independent reviewers assessed each full-text article, and conflicts were resolved by a third independent reviewer. Inter-rater agreement across all three reviewers was 90 percent for the full-text screening process.

Data extraction

Two independent researchers extracted data from each article, and disagreements were resolved by discussion and consensus among the research team. The following categories of information were extracted in an Excel workbook; study (Author, year), title of article, institution of program, country of institution, years/dates of program, target audience/student group, program staffing at outset, ratio of librarian/student, changes to program staffing at a later date (if available), program components, evaluation methods, evaluation results, and any relevant additional information. See Appendix B for the data extraction table. Data extraction was first piloted using two random articles to ensure agreement and consistency among the researchers.

Results

Study Selection

The database and supplementary searches identified 1133 records. After the removal of duplicates, the authors screened 803 records based on the titles and abstracts. In the second stage of the screening process, 68 full-text articles were assessed for inclusion, from which 44 studies were excluded (See Figure 1 for reasons for exclusion). Once the second stage of screening was completed, 24 articles met the criteria for inclusion in the review (Adkins 2014; Bailey 1984; Barrett and Harding 2017; Boudinot et al. 2018; Buchansky 2015; Conor 2017; Custer et al. 2018; Dillon 2011; England, Lo, and Breaux 2018; Estelle-Holmer and Schwab 2011; Ferer

2018; Freedman 2010; Gillum et al. 2018; Gontshi and Owusu-Ansah 2015; Henry, Vardeman, and Syma 2012; Lafrance and Kealey 2017; MacDonald and Mohanty 2017; Melançon and Goebel 2016; Resnis and Natale 2016; Spak and Glover 2007; Sullivan, Sclipa, and Riley 2016; Yates 2018; Yates and Thiessen 2017; Ziegler 2017). The results of the study selection are shown in a PRISMA flow diagram (Figure 1).

[Insert Figure 1]

The 24 articles which met the inclusion criteria describe 23 unique programs strongly representing a North American context, with 18 based in the U.S., four in Canada, and one in South Africa (Figure 2).

[Insert Figure 2]

History and Timeline

Of the 24 publications examined, 95 percent (23/24) were published in 2007 or later, with 75 percent (18/24) published since 2014, indicating these types of programs are fairly recent and increasing in use (Figure 3).

[Insert Figure 3]

However, articles often presented programs in place for several years, and therefore Figure 4 presents the initial year of program implementation for each included PLP, if available.

[Insert Figure 4]

The first appearance of a PLP in the literature was in 1984 at Sam Houston State University in Huntsville, Texas (Bailey 1984). The author, a reference librarian, discusses how personalized services exist in banking, healthcare and retail, and would be highly beneficial in the academic library setting as well. The article discusses the launch of their “One-to-One” PLP catered to graduate students in the process of writing a thesis, with the goal of facilitating a personal connection between student and librarian.

The second program by initiation date appears in 1996 at the Cushing/Whitney Medical Library at Yale School of Medicine as described in 2007 (Spak and Glover 2007). The third appearance of a PLP was in 2000 at the University of Richmond (Dillon 2011).

As many articles discussed programs while they were in operation, or did not provide conclusion dates, it is impossible to accurately present how many years programs typically ran for, however several reported programs existed for longer than one year. Although not always possible to locate the program information on library websites, information currently posted indicates that many included programs are still in existence today.

As illustrated in Figure 4, the peak of program initiation was for the years 2013-2014, where 43 percent (10/23) of the included programs were launched. Another 39 percent (9/23) began before 2013-2014, with the remaining 17 percent (4/23) started after 2014.

Target Audiences

Over half (52%) of the generalized PLPs focused on engaging with new first-year undergraduate students. Other target audiences include transfer (19%), graduate students (9%) and other specialized student groups. Figure 5 presents generalized PLPs and their target audiences. Where programs targeted more than one primary audience (e.g., first year and transfer), these were recorded in both categories.

[Insert Figure 5]

Not included in Figure 5 are specialized programs occurring within special libraries (e.g., medical or law libraries) targeted towards a subsection of the student body. Table 1 presents these specialized PLPs and their audiences.

[Insert Table 1]

Several programs also added new types of students to the program over the years, typically transfer or also graduate students (Boudinot et al. 2018; Spak and Glover 2007; Sullivan, Sclippa, and Riley 2016).

Staffing and Ratios

Unsurprisingly programs were typically staffed by librarians, often reference or instruction librarians, however some other members of library teams were involved. One program included library assistants as personal librarians, and another included archivists in the program team (Boudinot et al. 2018; Custer et al. 2018). At branch or special libraries, more members of the library staff were occasionally included to add to the staff complement, for example, library directors, cataloguers, and special collections librarians (Estelle-Holmer and Schwab 2011;

Gillum et al. 2018). In a program focused on engaging Indigenous students, team members were selected based on Indigenous heritage or previous experience working with Indigenous students. Diversity in the program team was a focus (Melançon and Goebel 2016).

Not all programs included librarian to student ratios, however. Figure 6 presents that information where available. For programs that changed these ratios over subsequent years, an overall average is shown.

Several programs reported changes to either staffing complement, student groups, or ratios over years of operation. Many programs added more librarians (Buchansky 2015; Lafrance and Kealey 2017; Resnis and Natale 2016). One started with a large librarian complement and gradually downsized to one librarian staffing the entire program after 7 years (Ferer 2018).

[Insert Figure 6]

Program Components

Figure 7 displays the frequency of different outreach strategies used in PLPs. The most frequent program component (n=18) was tailored emails to students, typically with 2-4 sent per semester. Email click and read rates were often used to collect statistics on what content was most appealing to students. Emails directed students to library services at strategic times of the semester, encouraged students to connect with their PL for guidance or advice, or invited students to attend program events or workshops.

The second most popular component was an in-person event of some type (n=12), whether a meet and greet social, workshop, or one-on-one consultation with personal librarians.

[Insert Figure 7]

Rounding out the top five engagement components were: sending a mailed letter before or at the beginning of the new academic year; a program webpage or research guide; and handing out flyers promoting the program.

A few libraries incorporated unique outreach components in their PLPs. Texas Tech University created YouTube videos introducing each personal librarian in depth, including the librarian discussing a personal hobby (Henry, Vardeman, and Syma 2012). They also used QR codes posted outside librarian offices which connected to the librarian's digital contact card. The program focused towards Indigenous students included well-being strategies in communications and research strategies (Melançon and Goebel 2016). The PL team at Alfred University created and included librarian trading cards in the orientation packet, where librarian skills were described as superhero-style 'powers' (Sullivan, Sclipa, and Riley 2016). A couple of programs included providing food such as cake or pizza at events for students (Gillum et al. 2018; Gontshi and Owusu-Ansah 2015).

Program Impact and Assessment

A required inclusion criteria for this review was program assessment or reflection. Assessment methods and descriptions varied greatly. Table 2 summarizes which programs utilized which assessment methods, and whether or not those assessment measures were reported in the article.

[Insert Table 2]

The most common method of assessing programmatic impact was through the use of surveys (n=16), and although most publications included survey results, the level of detail reported varied significantly. Survey use differed greatly, with some utilizing surveys for needs assessment and many others sending out surveys after completing a term or year in the program (Gontshi and Owusu-Ansah 2015). Another common outreach component has been emails (Figure 7), and this has also been a common method of assessing engagement, typically through open and click rates (n=8). Many programs also reported assessment findings through the use of anecdotal evidence such as comments from students and other librarians (Table 2).

Other methods used offered limited insight into the assessment of PLPs. Reference transactions such as email responses and consultations were used to examine student engagement with PLPs. Other assessment metrics included page views and event statistics but were not always reported consistently. Melançon included an assessment goal of increasing librarian knowledge of issues Indigenous students face (Melançon and Goebel 2016).

The most commonly reported positive findings from the assessments included:

- Positive anecdotal feedback from students, librarians and campus partners
- Increased attendance at library events and workshops
- Survey responses indicated students appreciated the program
- Students appreciated knowing more clearly who to contact in the library
- Programs often led to increased reference activity

The negative findings included:

- Low response rates
- Too many emails
- Emails not being relevant
- Include an opt-out option
- Program success can be difficult to measure

Challenges became apparent while examining the assessment data. Reporting was not consistent amongst the studies with many mentioning assessment but not reporting on results. Assessment was also limited by low response rates and the challenges of keeping detailed statistics. While many authors reported multiple methods of assessment, the main findings of their examinations into the programs were not easily parsed out, with many studies relying heavily on anecdotal evidence. Unsurprisingly, program facilitators often indicated that they felt that program success was linked to the level and breadth of promotional efforts.

The objective of the program is an important factor in determining both the programmatic elements to be implemented and the choice of assessment methods. For example, in the University of Richmond program there was only one component, a welcome letter, and the program had one goal which was to make students feel welcome (Dillon 2011). Given this objective, no assessment was planned. In another program, the goal was to help librarians “get involved with the house communities and experiment with different types of programming in this new outreach initiative” (Barrett and Harding 2017, 425); however, the program elements

were social in focus, and designed to increase engagement in this external space. Therefore, when designing a program, one should examine the intended objectives of the program, and then consider how achievement of those objectives can be measured.

Discussion

The authors undertook the current study to determine the types of personal librarian programs, programming elements, goals, and assessment measures as a way of discovering the commonalities of these initiatives to aid librarians who may be developing PLPs for their institutions. Many programs used similar elements such as emails and events, but some were creative in the ways that they tried to engage students by including unique features such as trading cards or videos. Given that the general purpose of a PLP is student engagement and curating personal connections with the library, these components mimic what would be expected of other personalized services similar to a personal banker, as has been used as an analogy (Dillon 2011). New students, and especially undergraduates, do not often think to ask librarians for help. Jameson, Natal and Napp found in their survey of primarily undergraduate students that almost half had never asked a librarian for help because they did not know how to find or contact a librarian, or did not want to bother the librarian (Jameson, Natal, and Napp 2019). The research also identified major barriers to asking for help such as, an inability to identify librarians, library anxiety, and lack of awareness of what help is available. Also, studies have shown students' library use is tied to improved learning outcomes so academic libraries must continue to explore new student engagement programs both to decrease student uncertainty and improve their success (Goodall and Pattern 2011; Montenegro et al. 2016).

The PLP surged in popularity between 2012-2015 when the majority of the included programs were initiated. All institutions chose a specific audience with over half focusing on undergraduates. In terms of scalability, this may help libraries balance workload issues with providing student-centered services. Workload is a major concern prior to implementation and literature suggests programs add anywhere from four to six hours of work per librarian per year (Bisko et al. 2019). Another program reported a workload of zero to three hours per month per librarian (Yang, Appleby, and Vine 2013). Response rates of included programs have not overwhelmed participating librarians and therefore appear to be manageable in terms of workload. It is also important to have a team of engaged librarians to support the program, so offering librarians a choice regarding participation can be helpful in ensuring that the program is promoted actively (Bisko et al. 2019). Providing clear program details and training will help support librarians staffing the program. In Moniz's summary, typically "the advantages for the students that the program provides outweigh any possible negative effects that the library staff might feel" (Moniz and Moats 2015, 25).

While measures such as email-related metrics, email responses, number of reference interactions, and survey responses were the most common assessments reported, there is less assessment data available in the literature than expected. Without more detailed assessment data, it is difficult to determine whether this program works best for first-year students, targeted groups, or whether it works for all students new to an institution regardless of year of program, including new transfer students and new graduate students. Each unique type of student background presents unique challenges for library engagement. Transfer students, for example, can feel behind in terms of catching up with local campus knowledge, leading to stress and

confusion (Harrick and Fullington 2019). Returning students have been shown to visit the library, the library website, and ask a librarian for help more than new or incoming students, reinforcing that new incoming undergraduates are a student group that require focused library engagement such as through a PLP (Ismail 2010).

With the limited assessment data available and the heterogeneity in the programs and their respective goals, it is difficult to draw overarching conclusions about the impact of particular program elements. However, based on the authors' examination of PLPs, these programs can offer specialized services in a manageable way. And, although more assessment data is needed, these programs are highly rated by both students and librarians. It is essential to include a plan for assessment as part of program development. Prior to data extraction, the authors excluded publications that were embedded models, so some PLPs exist as hybrid models. Future research in this area may include examining what aspects of PLPs are most impactful to students, how programs can increase engagement, or how academic library service models differ globally.

This study has curated and highlighted important information for the study team to develop a new personal librarian program at their own institution. The new program included unique aspects including an equity, diversity and inclusion component designed to facilitate library relationships and connections with student groups who may face additional barriers to success (Murphy 2021). It also included a student opt-in approach as this study indicated students are less likely to engage with widespread emails they do not sign up for. Finally, it builds off existing liaison librarian connections, instead of introducing a different librarian for

students' first years. This aspect depends on the nature of the university environment and whether students declare their major at the beginning of their studies, or in their second year. Further research could explore whether having multiple librarians during a degree may confuse students, or whether the added contacts facilitate greater connections for students with the library and its experts.

Finally, future research could explore how well existing PLP models have served to engage with students, and—with shifting student information needs as well as institutional priorities—whether new PLP models such as introduced above may more effectively suit the current and emerging needs of campus communities.

Implications for Practice

In summary, for an academic library considering implementation of a personal librarian program, the authors propose these questions as key to successful program development:

- What is the program timeline?
- Who is the target audience?
- Will students have the option to opt out of the program?
- Who will staff the program?
- What will the student/staff ratio be?
- What programming components will be included?
- What are the program goals?
- How will these goals be assessed?

Based on the examination of assessment data, intentional and targeted assessment of PLPs and their impact would benefit future program development. Therefore, the authors encourage future publication of the assessments and impact of PLPs.

Limitations

The authors searched library and information sciences databases, education databases, and two multidisciplinary sources. They did not include blog posts, websites, or LibGuides. Therefore, programs that exist but were not formally published in either journals or presented at conferences were not captured. This review reports on scholarly articles, book chapters and conference presentations about PLPs which included details on implementation or programmatic components and included either a reflection or assessment. However, there are other PLPs that were not captured in this data. Some programs called themselves PLPs, but upon investigation, were examples of an embedded model. These programs were excluded upon full-text screening.

Conclusion

Personalized services in academic libraries appear to be here to stay. Developing information literate students is a key to fostering a lifelong love for learning. Before embarking on a program such as a PLP, the library should have a defined plan for assessment to ensure that the program can evolve with the changing needs of students. Outreach is a key element of academic librarianship, and a personal librarian program is one successful method of increasing and maintaining connections with students.

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Appendix A: Database Search Strategies

Table A1: Annotated search strategy used in Academic Search Complete database.

#	Query	Annotation
S12	S10 NOT S11	Book reviews excluded
S11	S1 OR S9 Limiters - Document Type: Book Review	Limit to book reviews
S10	S1 OR S9	The results from S10 OR records with "personal librarian"
S9	S5 AND S8	Concept 1 AND concept 2
S8	S6 OR S7	Combination line for post-secondary concept
S7	TI ((universit* or college* or academic* or postsecondary or "post-secondary" or "higher education" or undergraduate* or graduate* or doctoral or freshmen or freshman or student*)) OR AB ((universit* or college* or academic* or postsecondary or "post-secondary" or "higher education" or undergraduate* or graduate* or doctoral or freshmen or freshman or student*)) OR KW ((universit* or college* or academic* or postsecondary or "post-secondary" or "higher education" or undergraduate* or graduate* or doctoral or freshmen or freshman or student*))	Keywords for postsecondary or students
S6	((DE "ACADEMIC libraries") OR (DE "UNIVERSITIES & colleges" OR DE "AGRICULTURAL colleges" OR DE "ART colleges" OR DE "BUSINESS schools" OR DE "COMMUTER colleges" OR DE "JUNIOR colleges" OR DE "LAW schools" OR DE "LIBRARIES & colleges" OR DE "LIBRARY schools" OR DE "MEDICAL schools" OR DE "PUBLIC universities & colleges" OR DE "RESEARCH universities & colleges" OR DE "TECHNICAL institutes" OR DE "TERTIARY colleges" OR DE "HIGHER education" OR DE "POSTSECONDARY education"	Subject headings for post-secondary
S5	S2 OR S3 OR S4	Combination line for all terms other than S1
S4	TI student* N5 assign* N5 librarian* OR AB student* N5 assigned* N5 librarian* OR KW student* N5 assigned* N5 librarian*	Keyword combination to capture phrases such as "student was assigned to a librarian"
S3	TI ((personal* or individual*) N5 librar* N5 (service* or program* or experience* or outreach)) OR AB ((personal* or individual*) N5 librar* N5 (service* or program* or experience* or outreach)) OR KW ((personal* or individual*) N5 librar* N5 (service* or program* or experience* or outreach))	Keywords to capture personalized library services, etc.

S2	TI librarian* N3 assign* N3 student* OR AB librarian* N3 assign* N3 student* OR KW librarian* N3 assign* N3 student*	Keyword combination to capture phrases such as “librarian was assigned x number of students”
S1	TI "personal librarian*" OR AB "personal librarian*" OR KW "personal librarian*"	Exact term – we want all records that use this

Table A2: Search strategy used in the Web of Science Core Collection databases.

#	Query
# 1	TOPIC: ("personal librarian*")
# 2	TOPIC: (librarian* NEAR/3 assign* NEAR/3 student*)
# 3	TOPIC: ((personal* or individual*) NEAR/5 librar* NEAR/5 (service* or program* or experience* or outreach))
# 4	TOPIC: (student* NEAR/5 assign* NEAR/5 librarian*)
# 5	#4 OR #3 OR #2
# 6	TOPIC: ((universit* or college* or academic* or postsecondary or "post-secondary" or "higher education" or undergraduate* or graduate* or doctoral or freshmen or freshman or student*))
# 7	#6 AND #5
# 8	#7 OR #1 Indexes=SCI-EXPANDED, SSCI, A&HCI, CPCI-S, CPCI-SSH, ESCI Timespan=All years

Table A3: Search strategy used in the Library and Information Science Source database.

#	Query
S1	TI "personal librarian*" OR AB "personal librarian*" OR KW "personal librarian*"
S2	TI librarian* N3 assign* N3 student* OR AB librarian* N3 assign* N3 student* OR KW librarian* N3 assign* N3 student*
S3	TI ((personal* OR individual*) N5 librar* N5 (service* OR program* OR experience* OR outreach)) OR AB ((personal* OR individual*) N5 librar* N5 (service* OR program* OR experience* OR outreach)) OR KW ((personal* OR individual*) N5 librar* N5 (service* OR program* OR experience* OR outreach))
S4	TI student* N5 assign* N5 librarian* OR AB student* N5 assigned* N5 librarian* OR KW student* N5 assigned* N5 librarian*

S5	S2 OR S3 OR S4
S6	DE "Academic libraries" OR DE "Academic departmental libraries" OR DE "Community college libraries" OR DE "Junior college libraries" OR DE "Technical college libraries" OR DE "Undergraduate libraries" OR DE "Universities & colleges" OR DE "Libraries & colleges" OR DE "Library schools" OR DE "Virtual universities & colleges"
S7	TI (universit* OR college* OR academic* OR postsecondary OR "post-secondary" OR "higher education" OR undergraduate* OR graduate* OR doctoral OR freshmen OR freshman OR student*) OR AB (universit* OR college* OR academic* OR postsecondary OR "post-secondary" OR "higher education" OR undergraduate* OR graduate* OR doctoral OR freshmen OR freshman OR student*) OR KW (universit* OR college* OR academic* OR postsecondary OR "post-secondary" OR "higher education" OR undergraduate* OR graduate* OR doctoral OR freshmen OR freshman OR student*)
S8	S6 OR S7
S9	S5 AND S8
S10	S1 OR S9

Table A4: Search strategy used in the Education Research Complete database.

#	Query
S1	TI "personal librarian*" OR AB "personal librarian*" OR KW "personal librarian"
S2	TI librarian* N3 assign* N3 student* OR AB librarian* N3 assign* N3 student* OR KW librarian* N3 assign* N3 student*
S3	TI ((personal* OR individual*) N5 librar* N5 (service* OR program* OR experience* OR outreach)) OR AB ((personal* OR individual*) N5 librar* N5 (service* OR program* OR experience* OR outreach)) OR KW ((personal* OR individual*) N5 librar* N5 (service* OR program* OR experience* OR outreach))
S4	TI student* N5 assign* N5 librarian* OR AB student* N5 assigned* N5 librarian* OR KW student* N5 assigned* N5 librarian*
S5	S2 OR S3 OR S4
S6	DE "ACADEMIC libraries" OR DE "ACADEMIC departmental libraries" OR DE "COMMUNITY college libraries" OR DE "JUNIOR college libraries" OR DE "UNDERGRADUATE libraries" OR DE "UNIVERSITIES & colleges" OR DE "AGRICULTURAL colleges" OR DE "ART colleges" OR DE "BUSINESS schools" OR DE "COMMUTER colleges" OR DE "JUNIOR colleges" OR DE "LAW schools" OR DE "LIBRARY schools" OR DE "MEDICAL schools" OR DE "PUBLIC universities & colleges" OR DE "RESEARCH universities & colleges" OR DE "TECHNICAL institutes" OR DE "TERTIARY colleges" OR DE "HIGHER education" OR DE "POSTSECONDARY education"
S7	TI (universit* OR college* OR academic* OR postsecondary OR "post-secondary" OR "higher education" OR undergraduate* OR graduate* OR doctoral OR freshmen OR freshman OR student*) OR AB (universit* OR college* OR academic* OR postsecondary OR "post-secondary" OR "higher education" OR undergraduate* OR graduate* OR doctoral OR freshmen OR freshman OR student*) OR KW (universit* OR college* OR academic*

	OR postsecondary OR "post-secondary" OR "higher education" OR undergraduate* OR graduate* OR doctoral OR freshmen OR freshman OR student*)
S8	S6 OR S7
S9	S5 AND S8
S10	S1 OR S9

Table A5: Search strategy used in the Library and Information Science Abstracts database.

#	Query
S10	S1 OR S9
S9	S5 AND S8
S8	S6 OR S7
S7	TI ((universit* or college* or academic* or postsecondary or "post-secondary" or "higher education" or undergraduate* or graduate* or doctoral or freshmen or freshman or student*)) OR AB ((universit* or college* or academic* or postsecondary or "post-secondary" or "higher education" or undergraduate* or graduate* or doctoral or freshmen or freshman or student*)) OR IF ((universit* or college* or academic* or postsecondary or "post-secondary" or "higher education" or undergraduate* or graduate* or doctoral or freshmen or freshman or student*))
S6	MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Academic libraries") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Colleges & universities") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("College libraries") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Art libraries") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Business schools") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("College campuses") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("College education") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Community colleges") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Junior colleges") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Community college education") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("LAW schools") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("LIBRARY schools") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("MEDICAL schools") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("HIGHER education") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("POSTSECONDARY education")
S5	S2 OR S3 OR S4
S4	TI student* N5 assign* N5 librarian* OR AB student* N5 assigned* N5 librarian* OR IF student* N5 assigned* N5 librarian*
S3	TI ((personal* or individual*) N5 librar* N5 (service* or program* or experience* or outreach)) OR AB ((personal* or individual*) N5 librar* N5 (service* or program* or experience* or outreach)) OR IF ((personal* or individual*) N5 librar* N5 (service* or program* or experience* or outreach))
S2	TI librarian* N3 assign* N3 student* OR AB librarian* N3 assign* N3 student* OR IF librarian* N3 assign* N3 student*
S1	TI "personal librarian*" OR AB "personal librarian*" OR IF "personal librarian*"

Table A6: Search strategy used in the ERIC database.

#	Query
S10	S1 OR S9
S9	S5 AND S8
S8	S6 OR S7
S7	TI ((universit* or college* or academic* or postsecondary or "post-secondary" or "higher education" or undergraduate* or graduate* or doctoral or freshmen or freshman or student*)) OR AB ((universit* or college* or academic* or postsecondary or "post-secondary" or "higher education" or undergraduate* or graduate* or doctoral or freshmen or freshman or student*)) OR KW ((universit* or college* or academic* or postsecondary or "post-secondary" or "higher education" or undergraduate* or graduate* or doctoral or freshmen or freshman or student*))
S6	DE "ACADEMIC libraries" OR DE "COLLEGE libraries" OR DE "UNIVERSITIES" OR DE "COLLEGES" OR DE "COLLEGE environment" OR DE "LIBRARY services" OR DE "LIBRARY schools" OR DE "LIBRARY science" OR DE "USERS(INFORMATION)" OR DE "USER satisfaction (INFORMATION)" OR DE "USER needs (INFORMATION)" OR DE "LIBRARY personnel" OR DE "BUSINESS schools" OR DE "COMMUTER colleges" OR DE "TWO YEAR colleges" OR DE "LAW schools" OR DE "UNDERGRADUATE study" OR DE "MEDICAL schools" OR DE "RESEARCH libraries" OR DE "TECHNICAL institutes" OR DE "HIGHER education" OR DE "POSTSECONDARY education"
S5	S2 OR S3 OR S4
S4	TI student* N5 assign* N5 librarian* OR AB student* N5 assigned* N5 librarian* OR KW student* N5 assigned* N5 librarian*
S3	TI ((personal* or individual*) N5 librar* N5 (service* or program* or experience* or outreach)) OR AB ((personal* or individual*) N5 librar* N5 (service* or program* or experience* or outreach)) OR KW ((personal* or individual*) N5 librar* N5 (service* or program* or experience* or outreach))
S2	TI librarian* N3 assign* N3 student* OR AB librarian* N3 assign* N3 student* OR KW librarian* N3 assign* N3 student*
S1	TI "personal librarian*" OR AB "personal librarian*" OR KW "personal librarian*"

Appendix B. Included Personal Librarian Programs Extraction Data

Study (Author year)	Institution & Country	Dates of program reported	Number & Target student group	Program staffing	Ratio of librarian/student (average)	Program components	Some findings from assessment or reflection
Adkins 2014	University of San Diego USA	2013	1500 first years (incoming)	15 librarians (not just reference librarians)	100 students/librarian	Mailed letters, emails, library events	Workshop pre-registration went from 44 in the fall 2012 semester to over 222 in the fall 2013, with the only difference in marketing being the personal librarian program.
Bailey 1984	Sam Houston State University USA	1983/1984	Graduate students engaged in research	4 librarians	# of students not stated	Interview with librarian during matching process, consultations	Student appreciated how quickly things which were “totally unfamiliar fell into place” (p.1821). Students know who to reach out to for assistance and do not have to worry about imposing.
Barrett 2017	Dartmouth College USA	2016	All students, assigned by a house system in residence	7 librarians	1 librarian/house	In-library and external events	Reflection: Must be able to explicitly show value of the program to potential partners, understand time limitations for librarian participation, and develop strategies for measuring impact.
Boudinot 2018	University of Victoria Canada	2014	4000 first year students	30 librarians	120-140 students/librarian	Emails	Low response rate (under 10%). Survey results showed “scope, purpose, and expectations for the students” needs to be clearer (p.5), offer an opt-out, shorter emails, & promote subject-specific resources.
Buchansky 2015	University of Toronto Canada	2012	1000 first year students	10 librarians	100 students/librarian	Emails	Greater response early in the semester, and most clicked links were the assignment calculator and PL info page. >50% of survey respondents felt emails were helpful and learned about new services/resources.
Conor 2017	Reed College USA	2011	First year students	7 librarians	50 students/librarian	Mailed letter, emails, library event	Anecdotal evidence: the program was well-received by administrators, faculty and students who opt-in. Low response but felt that the program resulted in

							meaningful connections with FY students.
Custer 2018	Case Western Reserve University Law Library USA	Fall 2015	First year J.D. students, then expanded to all new students	13 total (9 librarians & 4 library assistants)	Number of students not reported	Emails, optional events	Low response rate, but anecdotal evidence from students who said the emails were useful. The effectiveness of the program is still undetermined. Plan to gather student feedback in the near future.
Dillon 2011	University of Richmond USA	2000-2010	780 freshman students in pilot year	11 librarians in pilot year	Pilot: 71 students/ librarian. 2009: 1 librarian/ FY seminar	Mailed letter/ postcard	Anecdotal evidence: students mentioning the letter to librarians. The objective of the letter was to make students feel welcome, which they think was achieved.
England 2018	Washington State University USA	2015-2017	13 Graduate distance EdD students/ cohort X 2 cohorts	1 distance education librarian	26 students/ librarian	LibGuide, consultations, workshops/ orientation	Survey responses showed that all students felt that the program increased their research capacity and increased their confidence in meeting expectations. They appreciated being able to contact the librarian when needed.
Estelle-Holmer 2011	Yale Divinity School USA	Fall 2009	Incoming students. Y1: 150 students Y2: 300 students Y3: 400 students	7 individuals (librarians, library director, & director of Ministry Resource Center)	Y1: 22 students/ individual Y2: 43 students/ individual Y3: 57 students/ individual	Mailed letter, emails, library and external events, flyers, bookmarks	Email correspondence and spoken testimonials showed that the program was positively received. Students appreciated monthly updates and the prompt responses to their emails, as well as the opportunity to consult with a library expert.
Ferer 2018	Drexel University Libraries USA	V1: 2010-2015 V2: 2015-2016 V3: 2016-2017	First years	V1: 16-25 librarians V3: 1 librarian	Number of students not reported	Mailed letter, emails	Email open rate was higher in the earlier months of each semester. Final stated outcome was that students could identify sources of support within the library and feel positively about the library.
Freedman 2010	Barnard College USA	Not reported	First years but allocated by subject/ advisor. Also had a faculty PLP	Not reported	100 students/ librarian 50 students/ Part-time librarian	Emails, participation at faculty event	Greater student interaction happened mid-semester around the time that their first assignments were announced. Students seemed to rely on their PLs and

					10 students/ other staff		were hesitant to approach the reference desk if their PL was not available.
Gillum 2018	University of Central Florida College of Medicine USA	2013 (launch) -	120 first year medical students	6 librarians (including library director)	20 students/ librarian	Events, emails, course-integration	Average of 28 interactions/librarian, with highest demand in December and April. Led to some "strong" connections with students. 83% of 1st Year students and 68% of 2nd year students who responded to a survey question found the PLP to be an adequate service.
Gontshi 2015	Rhodes University South Africa	2013	1300 first year students	13 librarians	100 students/ librarian	Emails	755 active students. According to a needs assessment survey, students wanted: friendliness, guidance for research and learning, assistance locating information, & practical/technical assistance such as photocopying, printing, loans, etc.
Henry 2012	Texas Tech University USA	Not reported	All students	14 liaison librarians	Not reported	Videos, Webpage/vcard, QR codes, roving reference/event	YouTube videos had 2207 views over 2 years, with an average 230 views/video. Librarian consultations increased (2008: 260; 2009: 561; 2010: 756). Roving reference numbers increased each year.
Lafrance 2017	Santa Clara University USA	Pilot- Winter 2015 Program implemented- Fall 2015	Transfer students	Pilot - 2 librarians. Full program - 11 librarians	15 students/ librarian	Emails, introductory meeting	36.4% active users (responded at least once). Student survey (15 responses) showed 66% would recommend the program & 12 respondents rated the help received as useful/extremely useful.
MacDonald 2017	University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill USA	2013-2016	800 incoming transfer students	40 librarians from diverse roles	20 students/ librarian	Emails, mailed letter, external event	3.9% response rate over 2 years. Student survey had 12 responses; responses were positive regarding impact, connectedness, comfort, likelihood of future contact, etc. Thank you emails/ anecdotal evidence were very positive.
Melançon 2016	University of Alberta Canada	2014-2015	179 First-year undergraduate students self-identifying as Indigenous	6 - librarians and people from other campus departments.	30 students/ librarian	Webpage, emails	58.6% email open rate with greater uptake early on. 33 responses to student survey. Students reported that the PL program led them to visit and use the library more effectively.

Natale 2016	Miami University USA	2014	293 opt-in or first year students	4 librarians	73 students/librarian	Handout, emails, UNV 101 course-integration, new student LibGuide	They had an 82.3% open rate for one of the weeks emails. In a random assessment of 60 students with and without a PL, the average # of engagements per student was 20.48 for students with PL versus 14.40 without PL. Reported that UNV 101 students had higher GPA.
Spak 2007	Cushing/Whitney Medical Library, Yale USA	1996-2007	100 medical students (MD)	5 reference librarians. Coordinated by Education Services Librarian	20 students/librarian	Website, library tour, emails	According to the survey (146 responses), students are extremely satisfied with the program, the amount of communication, and generally welcomed more contact from the PL.
Sullivan 2016	Alfred University USA	2014-2015	Y1: First year undergraduate Y2: Added transfer & graduate students	n/a	503 students. Librarian number not reported	Mailed letter, trading card, brochure, LibGuide, posters, emails, event	Survey results: 22% students had contacted their PL but 36% of students did not know who their PL was. Big takeaway from the survey was to publicize the program more.
Yates 2018 Yates 2017	Brock University Canada	2014-2018	2015/16 - 3045 mostly undergraduate 2016/17 - 2726 undergraduate, upper level & graduate students 2017/18 - 5044 transfer students	2015/16- 9 librarians 2016/17 – 8 librarians 2017/18: 9 librarians	2015/16: 338 students/librarian 2016/17: 340 students/librarian 2017/18: 560 students/librarian	Emails	2015-16/2016-17: Survey each year with response rates of 7 and 9% (total 360 responses in 2 years). 79% said they contacted their PL. 71% found emails from PL (mostly or a great deal) helpful, 62% said the PL program increased their confidence using the library (mostly or a great deal). 2017-18: 474 transfer students specifically had 35% and 35% open rate.
Ziegler 2017	University of West Florida USA	2013	Over 2500 online graduate learners	4 librarians	600 students/librarian	Emails	2013/14: 200 interactions between students and PLs. Reflections included the need to explore ways of collecting statistics specific to PLP.

Figures

Figure 1: PRISMA flow diagram.

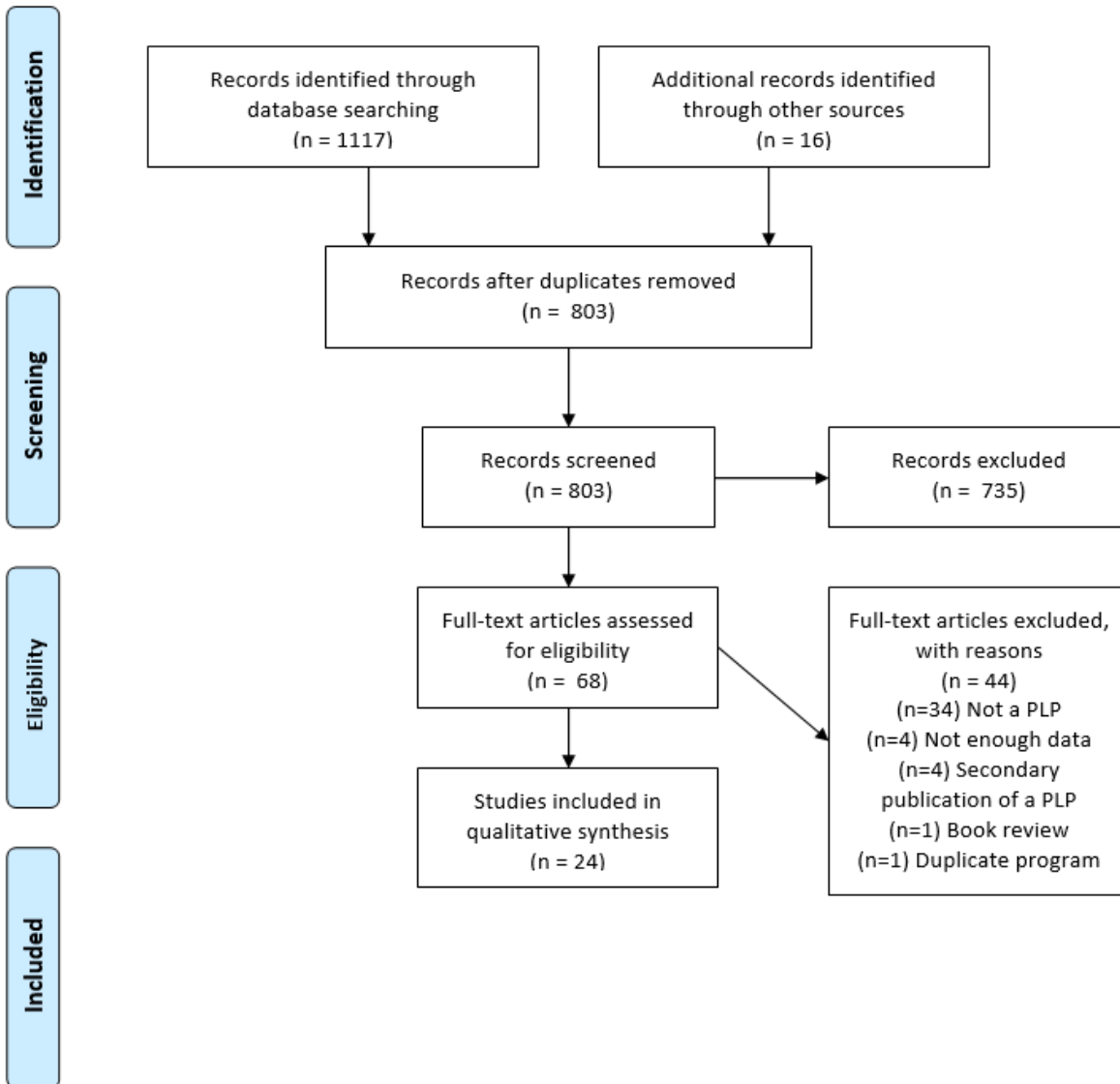


Figure 2: Percentage of included personal librarian programs per country.

Percentage of programs, by country

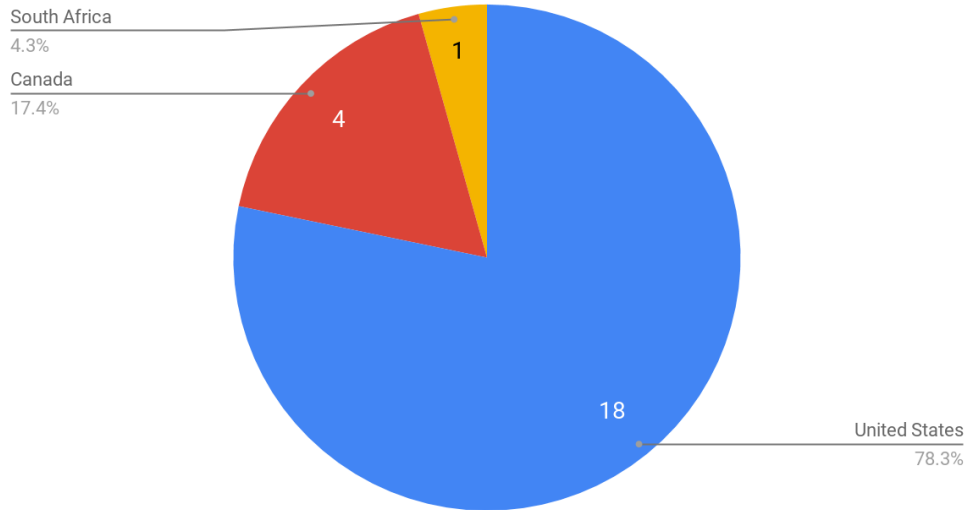


Figure 3: Publication year of included personal librarian program articles, from 1984 to 2018.

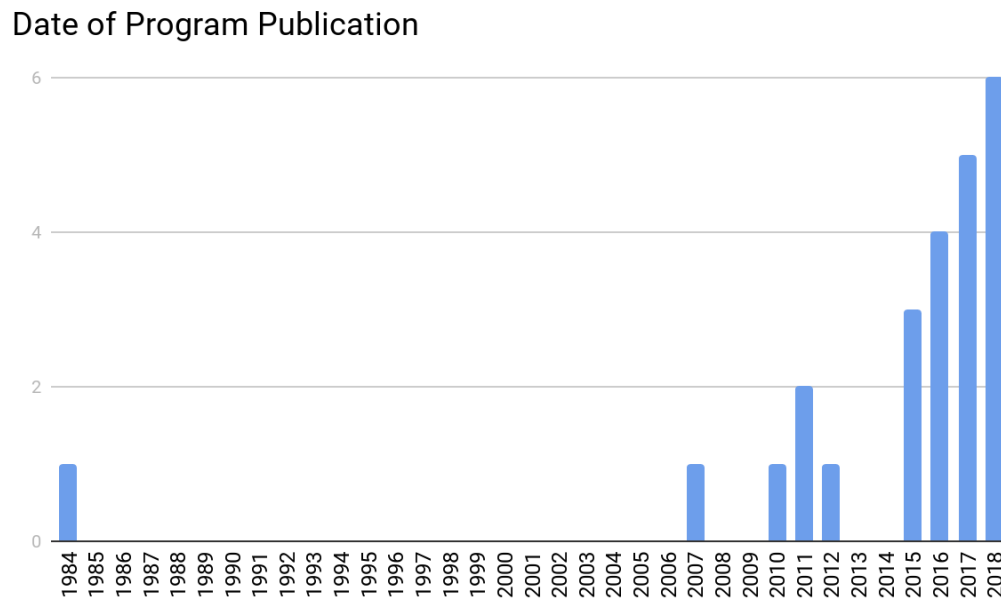


Figure 4: Year of initial operation of included personal librarian programs, from 1984 to 2018.

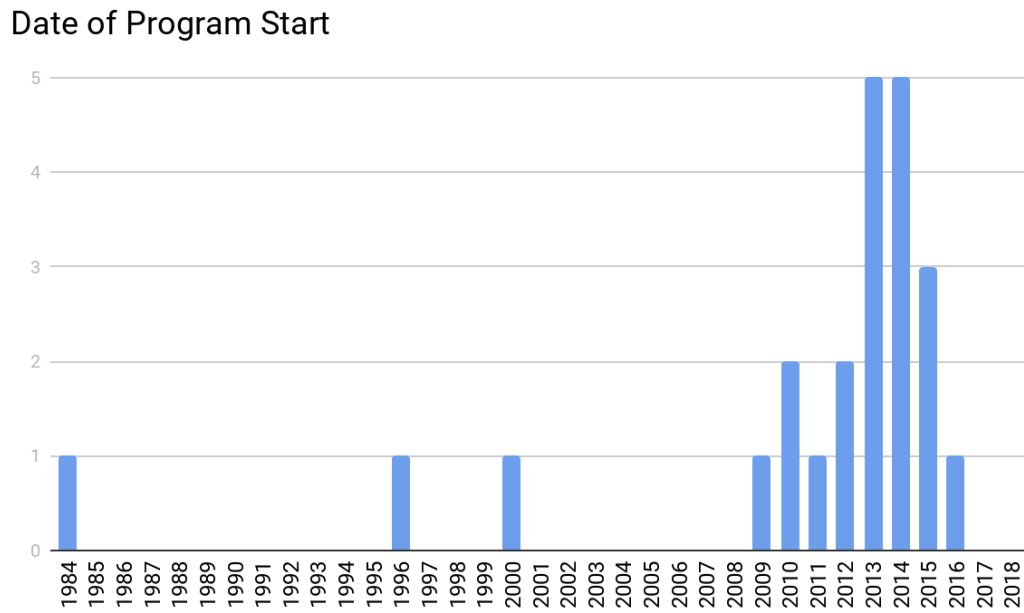


Figure 5: Target audiences of generalized PLP programs.

General Program Target Audience

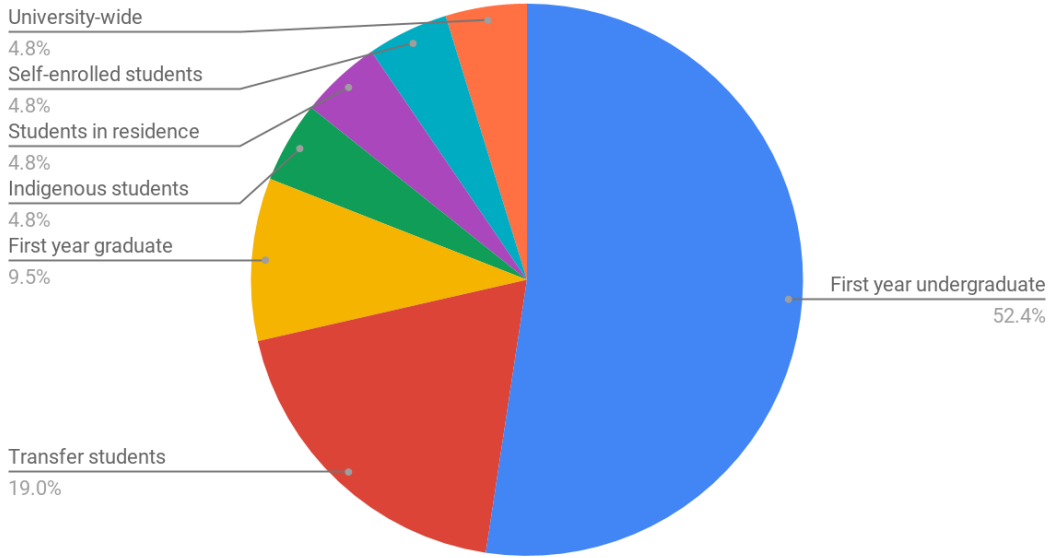


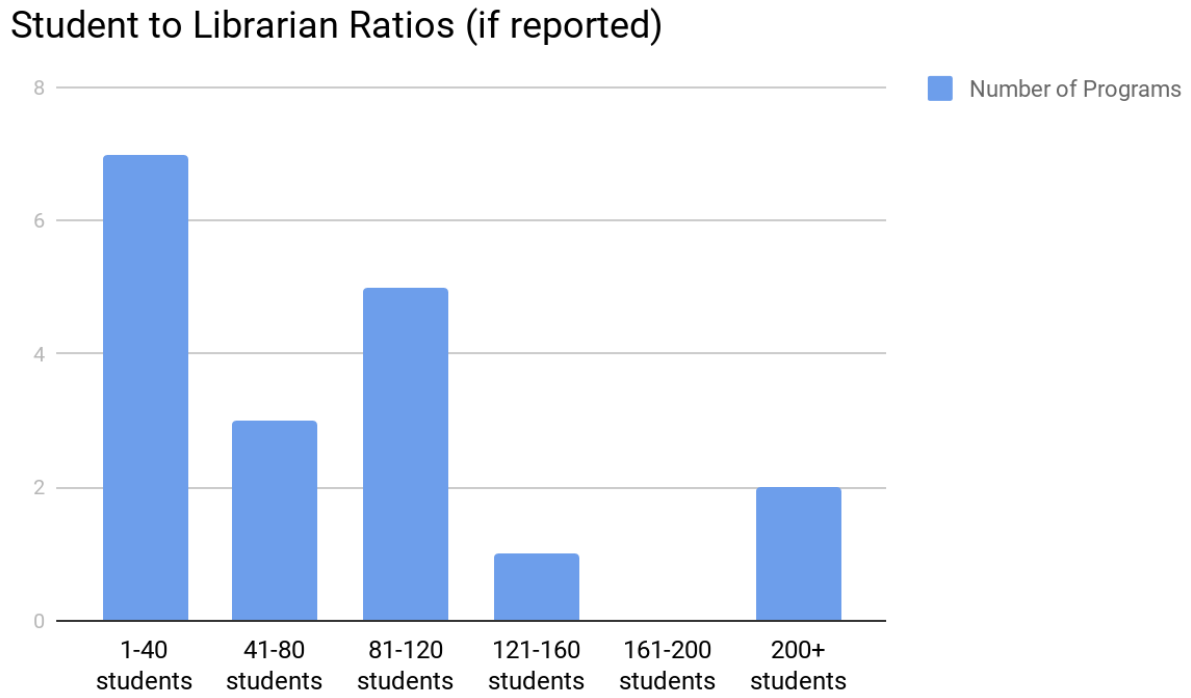
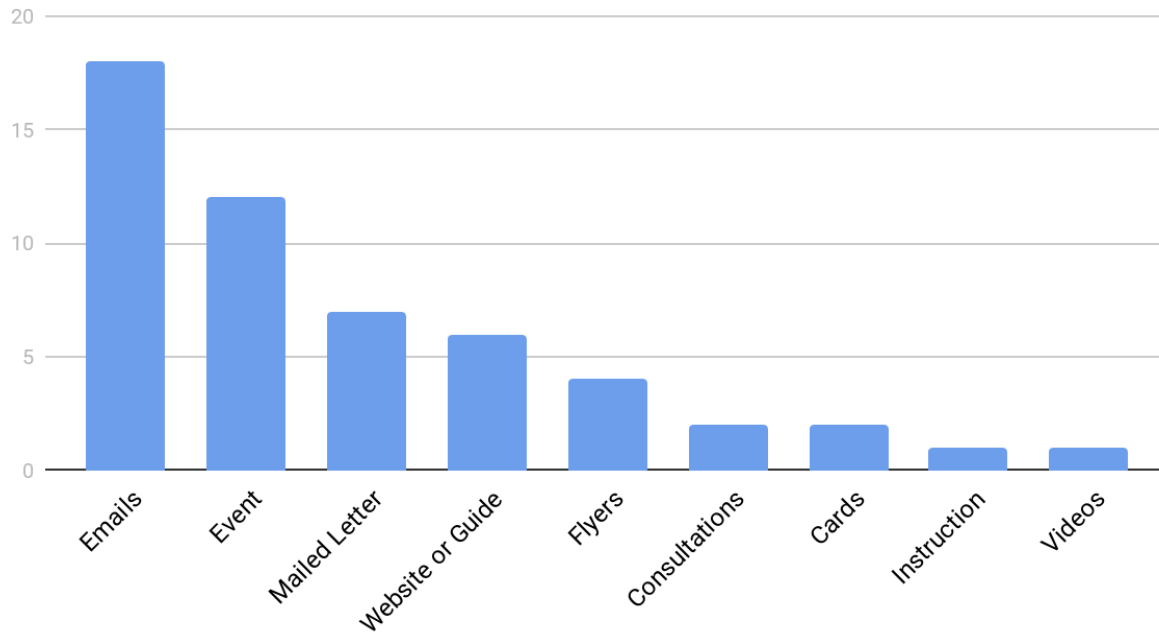
Figure 6: Student to librarian ratios in personal librarian programs.

Figure 7: Frequency of program components in included PLPs.

Usage of PL program components

**Table 1: Specialized PLPs within departments or schools, and their audiences.**

Specialized Library Program	Target Audience
Case Western Reserve University, School of Law	2015: New 1st year J.D. students 2016-2018: All new students in School
Washington State University	Ed.D Students
Yale Divinity School	All new students in School
University of Central Florida College of Medicine	New 1st year medical students
Cushing/Whitney Medical Library, Yale	New 1st year medical students

Table 2. Assessment methods utilized by personal librarian programs.

X indicates assessment method mentioned and reported.

(X) indicates assessment method mentioned but not reported.

First author, year	Email statistics (open rates, click rates)	Email responses	Number of interactions (reference, consultations)	Events-related statistics (internal or external)	Survey(s)	Page or guide views	Social media engagement	Student feedback or anecdotal evidence
Adkins, 2014		X	X	X				X
Bailey, 1984								X
Barrett, 2017								X
Boudinot, 2018		X		X	X			X
Buchansky, 2015	X	X			X	X		X
Conor, 2016	(X)				(X)			
Custer, 2018			(X)		(X)			
Dillon, 2011								X
England, 2018					X			X
Estelle-Holmer, 2011								X
Ferer, 2018	X		(X)			(X)	(X)	
Freedman, 2010								X
Gillum, 2018	(X)	X	X		X			X
Gontshi, 2015	X				X			X
Henry, 2012			X	X	X		X	X
Lafrance, 2017		X	X		X			
MacDonald, 2017			X		X			X
Melancon, 2016	X	X	X		X			X
Natale, 2016	X	X	X		(X)			X
Spak, 2007					X			X
Sullivan, 2016					X			X
Yates, 2017/2018	X	X	X		X			X
Ziegler, 2017			X		(X)			