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Comments Received :

As an information professional (University of Washington MLIS '19) and former academic library patron, I oppose the plan to eliminate the Academic Libraries survey from multiple perspectives.

First and foremost, this survey represents the type of rigorous data collection that is the cornerstone of information science as a discipline. Without understanding who our patrons are, how they behave, and what they need, we cannot make informed decisions about how best to serve them. For example, when I worked at the University of Washington's Odegaard Library in the Odegaard Writing and Research Center, I employed my own digital data collection about our drop-in appointments to make recommendations to the director about shift scheduling. This data also provided her with evidence for her superiors to justify the Center's budget.

That being said, having to develop my own data collection methodology was time-consuming; if every academic library is forced to do this individually, it would represent an enormous expenditure of time and labor. Even then, without the data of other libraries for comparison, the impact would be far less than the current survey. Abandoning the Academic Libraries survey would not actually save money—it would simply shift the cost of the data collection process from the federal to the local level, while most likely also increasing the total cost due to inefficiency.

The Academic Libraries survey is essential for showing decision-makers—who likely have not set foot in any kind of library (much less an academic one) in years—that libraries are not simply warehouses for books, nor can they be wholly replaced by digital resources. Libraries are gathering places for collaboration, places of refuge from chaotic homes/dorms, learning labs, tutoring spaces, and so much more.

Ranganathan's Fifth Law of Library Science states, "A library is a growing organism," and academic libraries are no exception. Each is a unique entity, characterized by its parent institution and academic community. There is no one-size-fits-all model of what an academic library should be. A small college for art and design will have different needs than a large state university, which will in turn have different needs than one of the Ivy League institutions. In order to best serve the students, faculty, and staff that use the library, librarians need quality data, and for that, they need the Academic Libraries survey.