

Librarian Perspectives on the Factors Influencing Research Confidence and Competence among Tenure-Track Academic Librarians: A Pilot Study

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A Crisis of Confidence

The researcher has worked as an academic librarian since 2010 but accepted her first faculty librarian position with publication requirements in 2023. Once in the position, she realized her MLIS degree and past professional experience had not adequately prepared her to engage in scholarship at the level necessitated by the new position's RTP (retention, tenure, and promotion) requirements, prompting an interest in discovering which research supports are most useful for increasing new faculty librarians' research confidence and competence.

About Faculty Status for CMU Librarians

- Librarians at CMU Libraries fall into two categories: P&A Librarians (Professional & Administrative) and Faculty Librarians.
- 12 Faculty Librarians at CMU Libraries
 - 5 librarians on the tenure track.
 - 7 tenured librarians, 2 in the last 5 years
- For CMU's faculty librarians, achieving Retention, Tenure, and Promotion (RTP) requires conference presentations and peer-reviewed articles.

About the Survey

A 20-question survey (multiple choice, 5-point Likert scale, and open-ended questions, plus an option to share additional questions or comments) was created to assess which research supports CMU faculty librarians received during their early careers, which they found most effective, and why.

It was distributed to 11 librarians (all CMU faculty librarians minus the researcher)

9 responses were received: 4 from tenure-track librarians, 2 from recently-tenured librarians, and 3 from librarians tenured for over 5 years.

Full survey: <https://tinyurl.com/3bpzf29n>

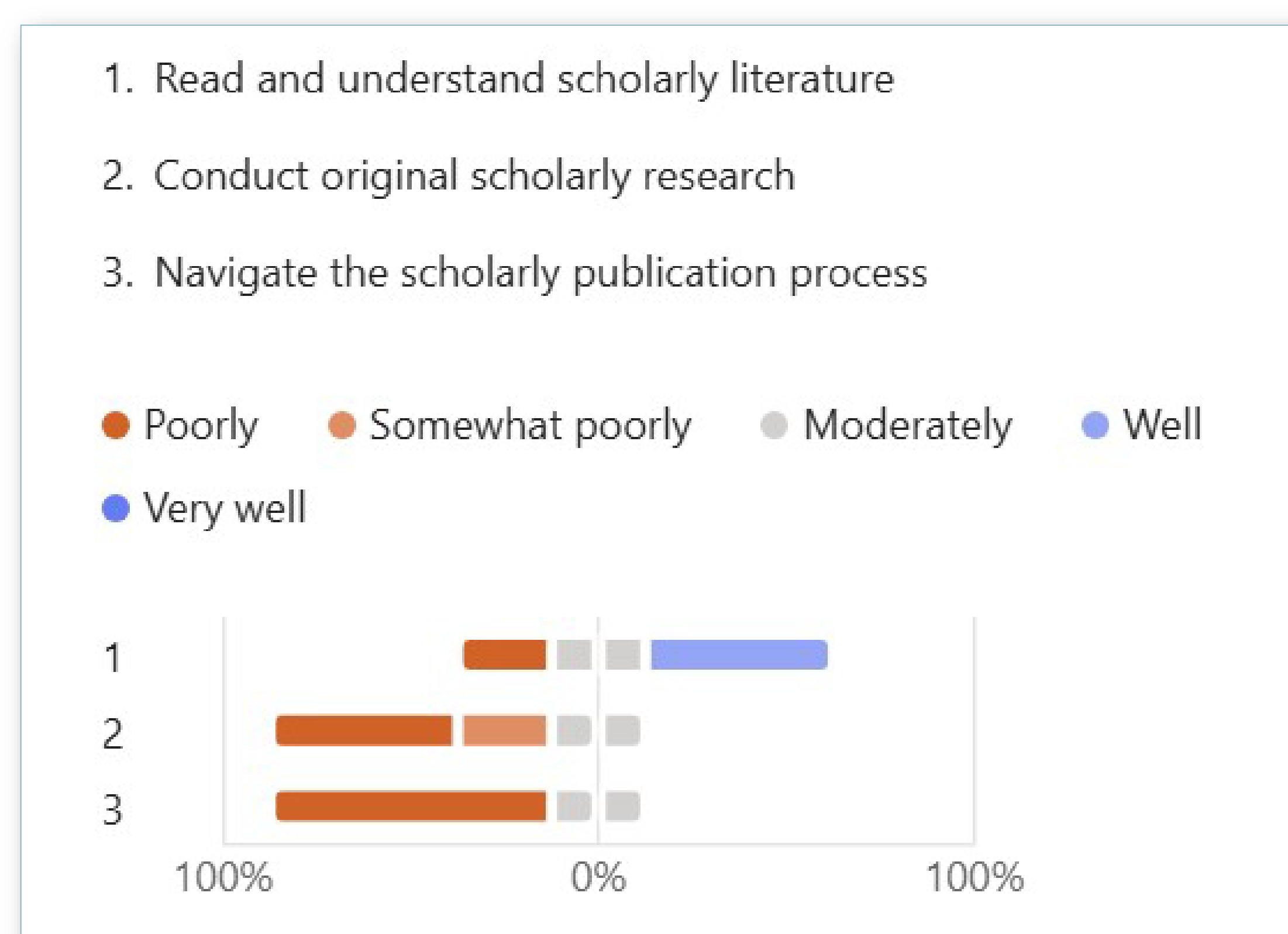
Pilot Survey of CMU Faculty Librarians

LIS Research Methods Courses

Kennedy & Brancolini (2012, 2018) reported that librarians felt that their LIS degrees prepared them adequately to read and understand research articles, but not well enough to actively engage in original research.

CMU faculty librarians who completed a research methods course during their MLS felt it prepared them *Well* or *Moderately* to read and understand scholarly literature, but that it inadequately prepared them to conduct original research or to navigate the scholarly publication process,

Q7: If you completed a research methods course as part of your Library Science degree, how well do you feel it prepared you to:



Additional Advanced Degrees

Most CMU faculty librarians (8 of 9 respondents) have one or more advanced degrees beyond their MLS. (A second advanced degree is required for promotion at CMU.)

Three (3) librarians specifically mentioned their non-MLS advanced degrees when asked:

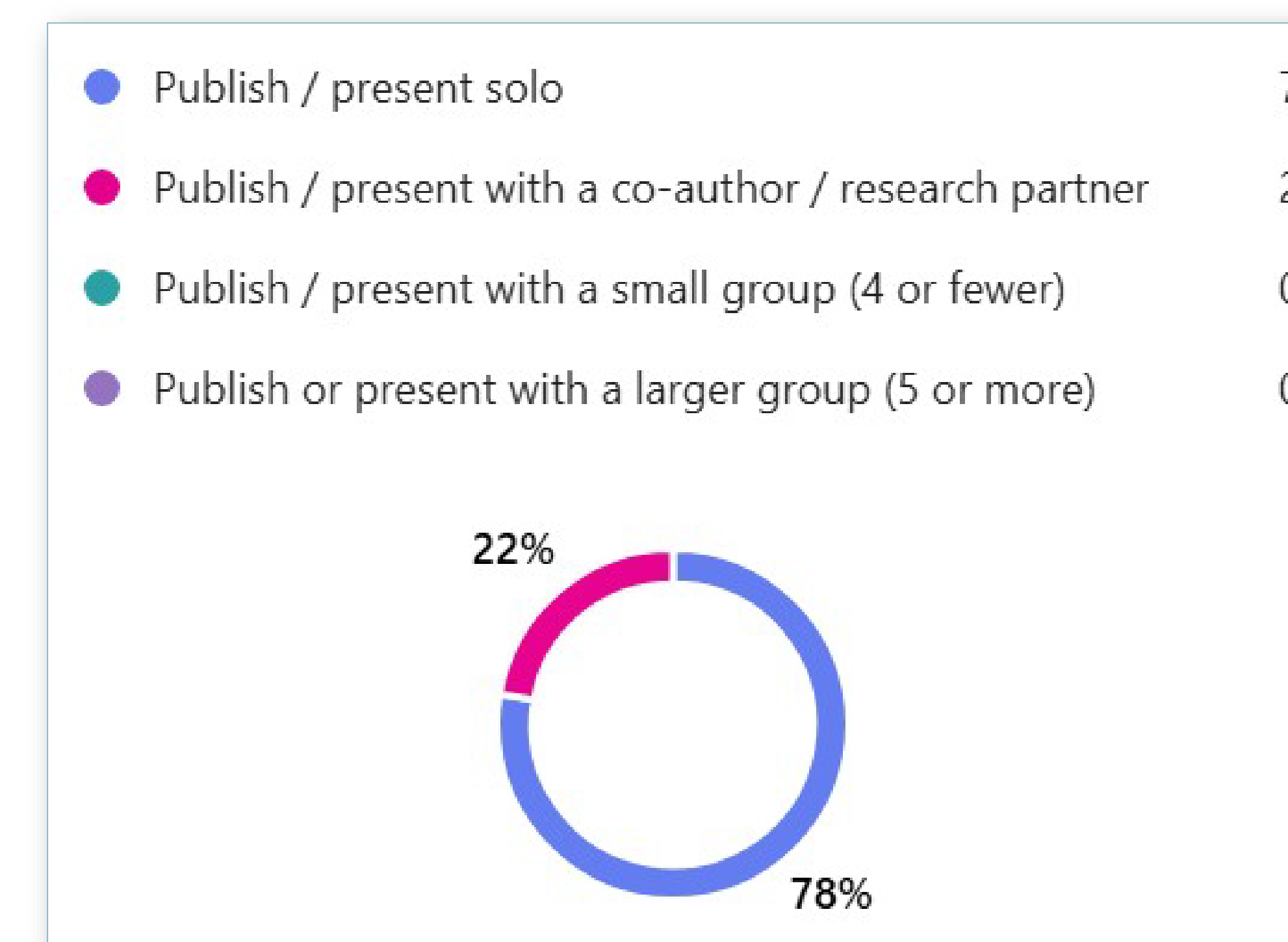
Q14: Which of the research development activities / research supports you participated in pre-tenure or during the first 5 years after tenure do you feel were the *most* effective at building your research confidence and / or competence?

Mentorship Matters, Research Partnership Varies

Of all listed support options, the greatest number of CMU faculty librarians took advantage of informal mentorship, either at CMU (6) or outside (5). Four (4) Librarians partnered with more experienced librarians at (3) CMU or outside (1) CMU to conduct research.

Despite these mentorships and partnerships, CMU Librarians published most of their early career research solo (7) or with a single co-author (2).

Q19: In terms of scholarship (posters, presentations, book chapters, grants, articles) produced while you were on the tenure track / within 5 years of achieving tenure, were you most likely to:



No One Best Option

Ackerman, et al. (2018) found that no single support worked best for everyone and recommended providing a variety of options, since the form of support a new researcher needs varies by individual and situation.

Even among CMU faculty librarians offered the same types of support, experiences varied. For example, nearly half of CMU librarians reported receiving support from CMU's Statistical Consulting Center, but in open-ended questions, one librarian indicated it was the most useful support they received, while another found it "not entirely useful."

Future Plans – What's Next?

The researcher plans to revise and expand the pilot survey question set, rewording ambiguous questions, integrating additional research supports suggested by CMU faculty librarians in pilot survey responses, addressing any MiALA attendee comments, and adding more detailed questions about research partnerships and proportional credit.

Pending IRB review, she anticipates distributing the finalized survey nationally in mid-to-late Fall 2026 and using the results to inform a peer reviewed article.

Selected Readings

Ackerman, E., Hunter, J., & Wilkinson, Z. T. (2018). The availability and effectiveness of research supports for early career academic librarians. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 44(5), 553–568.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2018.06.001>

Hoffmann, K., Berg, S., Brancolini, K., & Kennedy, M. (2023). Complex and varied: Factors related to the research productivity of academic librarians in the United States. *College & Research Libraries*, 84(3), 392–427.

<https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.84.3.392>

Kennedy, M. R., & Brancolini, K. R. (2012). Academic librarian research: A survey of attitudes, involvement, and perceived capabilities. *College & Research Libraries*, 73(5), 431–448. <https://doi.org/10.5860/crl-276>

Kennedy, M. R., & Brancolini, K. R. (2018). Academic librarian research: An update to a survey of attitudes, involvement, and perceived capabilities. *College & Research Libraries*, 79(6), 822–851.

<https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.79.6.822>

Kennedy, M. R., Brancolini, K. R., & Kennedy, D. P. (2020). An exploratory study of accomplished librarian-researchers. *Evidence Based Library and Information Practice*, 15(1), 179–217.

<https://doi.org/10.18438/ebliip29655>

What Do You Think?

Have questions or suggestions?

What types of research support did you find most useful as an early-career academic librarian?

<https://tinyurl.com/2342e8zw>



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