Empirical Legal Research Support Services: A National Survey of Law Libraries

Defining Empirical Legal Research (ELR)

The investigation of legal and justice-system related questions attempting to understand a topic through data-driven, statistically based, controlled experiments, interview responses, case studies, historical analyses or other quantitative or qualitative data collecting mechanisms.

Project Goals:

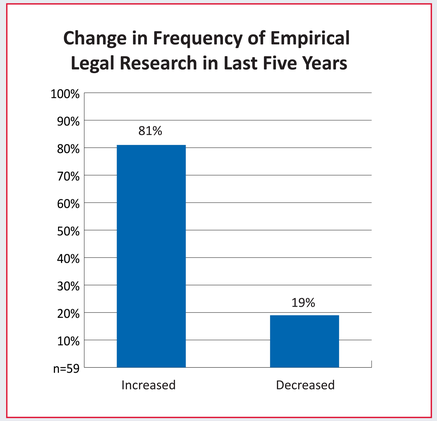
- Describe extent and nature of empirical legal research (ELR) services in academic law libraries
- Determine if support varies among ranking
- Inform peers of trends in ELR support offered

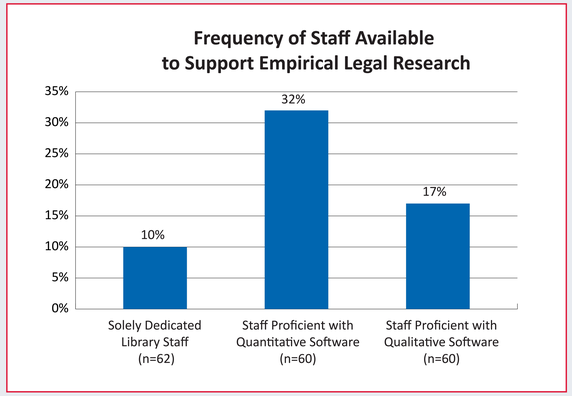
Previous Work on ELR Shows:

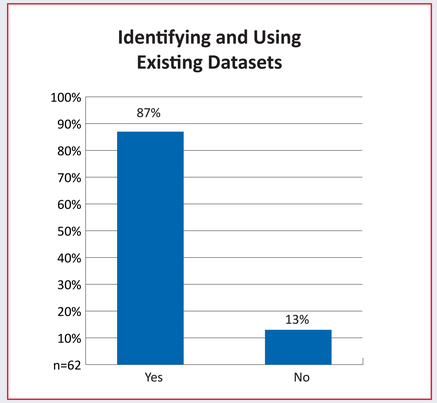
- ELR by law faculty on the rise
- Lack of studies on practice of legal research
- ELR support marketed on some websites
- Few ELR Librarian positions exist
- Many studies by academic libraries on data service offerings; nothing similar in law libraries

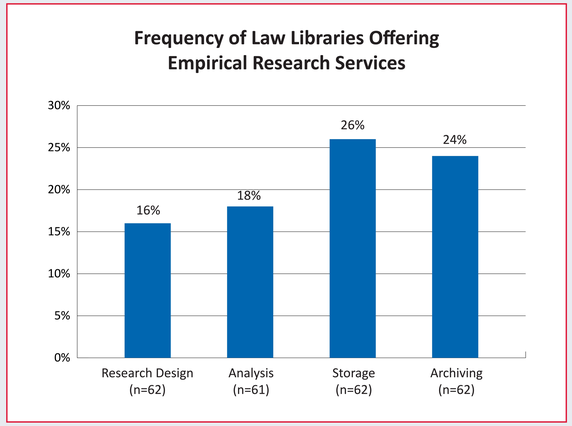
Methods:

- Nation-wide survey of academic law librarians
- Distributed January-February 2015
- Questions covered each phase of an ELR project; from inception to archiving









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Responses:

- 62 surveys available for analysis (30% of ABA-accredited law schools)
- 54 identified institution
- Divided institutions by rank to analyze differences

Conclusions:

- Empirical legal research is increasing
- Only a few faculty members at each school conduct ELR
- Law libraries most commonly assist with identifying and using existing datasets
- Sizable minority provide more in-depth services including data storage, archiving assistance, analysis, and research design; especially at higher-ranking institutions
- Few libraries have solely dedicated staff to support ELR; high-ranking schools are more likely to employ one
- One-third have staff proficient with quantitative analysis software, fewer have qualitative data proficiency
- Schools ranked 101-150 are more likely to have plans to expand ELR services

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Additional materials available at:

For continued discussion, please contact Allison at ason929@gmail.com