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# Applications of Social Research Methods to Questions in Information and Library Science [Book Review]

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***Applications of Social Research Methods to Questions in Information and Library Science*, Barbara M. Wildemuth. Westport: Libraries Unlimited, 2009. 421 p. \$50 (ISBN 978-1-59158-503-9)**

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Dr. Wildemuth, a professor in the School of Information and Library Science, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, draws upon her extensive experience (25 entries in *Library Literature*) to describe systematically all aspects of the research process as they can be applied in information and library science. With doctoral students as co-authors for twenty-two of the thirty-eight chapters, she follows a logical progression: “The Questions Asked,” “Research Designs and Sampling,” “Methods for Data Collection,” and “Methods for Data Analysis.” An “Introduction” and “Conclusion” complete the volume. She identifies three audiences: masters and doctoral students for their research or to support the research methods course; practitioners who wish to embark upon their own studies; and experienced researchers who are considering unfamiliar methods. She does not expect the book to be read cover to cover though some chapters build upon each other and included references to related chapters.

Each chapter, except for the introduction, follows the same basic format. The author speaks directly to potential researchers in the second person as if they were undertaking a research project. After a brief introduction/definition, the chapter includes, as appropriate, how the topic fits in the research process, its strengths and weakness, steps to be taken by the researcher, and ethical considerations. One of the best features of the volume is that each chapter includes two or three examples that illustrate the topic, often based upon award winning research studies. The presentation of the examples focuses on the positive and negative aspects of the methodology and omits any discussion of the findings. The one paragraph conclusion is then followed by “works cited” in the chapter and occasionally by “additional recommended readings.” The book does not include a general bibliography but has an “index of authors of examples discussed” and a “subject index.”

Since my doctorate is in the Humanities, I have no formal training in social science research methods or statistical analysis though I have acquired reasonable familiarity through my own research, readings, and peer reviewing. I found the contents of this volume to be well organized and clearly written for the most part. My only concern was those cases in which Dr. Wildemuth expects readers to have the research paper under discussion in front of them to understand fully her points. I came away with a much deeper understanding of social research methods and believe that

students and practitioners would find this book accessible and helpful in reaching their research goals.

I have some suggestions for improvement. First, Dr. Wildemuth concentrates on the “how” of research but might pay more attention to the “why,” especially for students and practitioners. While “Understanding Academic Library Performance” (pp. 249-251) clearly has immediate practical implications, the reasons for studying “Dewey’s Discourse on the Role and Functioning of Libraries” (pp. 326-327) might merit more attention beyond the few pages in the first chapter on the role of research in practice and theory building. My second suggestion would be to add some discussion on the temporality of research. The “facts” in a historical article remain true even if new documents and new interpretations are possible, but the research on “Junior High Students’ Use of an Electronic Encyclopedia” (pp. 183-184) has limited temporal validity since both the junior high students and the electronic encyclopedia may change enough over a few years to make the initially valid conclusions inappropriate with the passage of time. My final small quibble is the decision to exclude bibliometric methods because “they are described in a number of books (p. 6). Excluding this research method seems arbitrary and detracts from the book’s comprehensiveness.

Overall, Dr. Wildemuth achieves her objectives of providing both a reference tool and a reasonably comprehensive summary of research methods in information and library science. My final comment to readers would not to be overly discouraged in undertaking their projects on account of the high standards that she sets for valid research results but to use her guidance to achieve the best possible product within time and funding constraints.