Fondren Library Research Award

Fondren Library provides a wealth of information to Rice University’s academic community, and its role in this project was no exception. This research focuses on a systematic synthesis of literature in an important and topical area: cross-cultural training. Given the highly-charged sociopolitical climate today, it is critical to understand how researchers and academics can foster harmonious and diverse working environments, including through personnel development. However, despite a growing interest in intercultural issues, the literature remains atheoretical and idiosyncratic; there needs to be a universal, guiding framework. To this end, researchers in the Department of Psychology at Rice undertook a qualitative review of the relevant literature in order to identify key competencies of cross-cultural training. Per evaluative criteria of the grant (italicized below), this project capitalized on Fondren Library’s resources to successfully complete its goals.

In a literature review, it is critical that researchers have access to both breadth and depth of information in order to ensure comprehensiveness. Through Fondren’s complete library database collection, we were able to accomplish the necessary steps of determining needs and evaluating and analyzing information. First, we combined several library databases (Business Source Complete, MasterFile Premier, and PsycINFO) using Fondren’s intuitive A-Z library interface) to search for potential articles of interest, using search engine-specific terms. This generated an exhaustive list of over 2,000 articles for review. While most of these were available in full-text, we were able to request any missing documents through the ILLiad service. Fondren’s services were thus crucial in helping us build out a foundation for this literature review.
We were also able to manage, organize, and synthesize information using many of the tools supported by Fondren Library. In order to coordinate large volumes of data, we used Zotero bibliographic software, upon which Fondren has provided instruction. This was especially useful in generating a database of articles. We were able to easily indicate articles that remained eligible after applying exclusion criteria, ultimately resulting in a collection of 39 articles for review.

Having effectively collected, managed, and partitioned an extensive collection of articles, we were thus able to conduct qualitative analyses using Atlas.TI software. From each of these documents, we extracted relevant information about cultural competencies and applied and communicated through a novel framework for future trainings, described both in text and through tables. Finally, this information was responsibly used through proper citations, including through a table summarizing the reviewed studies, a References section, and use of American Psychological Association formatting throughout the manuscript.

Overall, during each step of this manuscript, we relied upon Fondren’s expansive services – from using its database aggregator, to obtaining information through its interlibrary requesting services, and to receiving assistance in using bibliographic software. This research also applies atypical, information-based methodologies – using systematic, qualitative processes, commonly used with human subjects data, with peer-reviewed texts – to generate theory based in empiricism. It charts new territory on ways that we can use library services and catalogued information to aggregate and synthesize scientific insights.