

# DOMINICAN UNIVERSITY



Graduate School of Library  
& Information Science

**the dominican study:**

Public Library Summer Reading Programs

Close the Reading Gap



## executive summary.

The Graduate School of Library and Information Science at Dominican University received a National Leadership Grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) for a three-year research study to answer the question: do public library summer reading programs impact student achievement? Conducted between 2006 and 2009, the study had its roots in programming that began in the late 1800s.

“The 21st century has changed how, when, and where we all learn.”

— “Museums, Libraries, and 21st Century Skills,”  
IMLS, July 2009

For over a century, public librarians have designed summer reading programs to create and sustain a love of reading in children and to prevent the loss of reading skills over the summer. Recently, however, federal and private funding agencies, along with departments of education, have challenged the effectiveness of public library summer reading programs, especially considering the large amount of resources, both financial and human, that is invested in developing and marketing summer reading programs. The concern is exacerbated, as well, by the dismal reading scores of students on standardized tests in low-performing

schools. This then begged the question as to whether public library summer reading programs, in fact, reach the stated goals and impact student achievement.

Dominican University, as the lead agency, contracted with the Johns Hopkins University Center for Summer Learning to conduct the research and also partnered with the Colorado State Library and the Texas State Library and Archives Commission to help identify possible sites. The study was piloted at three public libraries. The full study was conducted at eleven sites across the United States and was overseen by an Advisory Committee that helped shape and guide the research parameters.

The Dominican study, as it has come to be known, involved the collection of data through pretesting and posttesting of students at the end of third grade and at the beginning of their fourth-grade year. Interviews and surveys of public librarians were conducted, as well as surveys of students, their parents, their teachers, and school librarians.

### **The results of this Dominican study include the following:**

- Students who participated in the public library summer reading program scored higher on reading achievement tests at the beginning of the next school year than those students who did not participate and they gained in other ways as well.
- While students who reported that they did not participate in the public library summer reading program also improved reading scores, they did not reach the reading level of the students who did participate.
- Students who participated in the public library summer reading program had better reading skills at the end of third grade and scored higher on the standards test than the students who did not participate.
- Students who participated in the public library summer reading program included more females, more Caucasians, and were at a higher socioeconomic level than the group of students who did not participate.
- Families of students who participated in the public library summer reading program had more books in their homes than those families of students not participating.
- Students enrolled in the public library summer reading program reported that they like to read books, like to go to the library, and picked their own books to read.
- Parents of children enrolled in the public library summer reading program reported that their children spent more time reading over the summer and read more books, were well prepared for school in the fall, and read more confidently.
- Parents of children enrolled in the public library summer reading program reported that they would enroll their children in a summer reading program at the library again, made more visits to the public library with their children, and read more books to/with their children over the summer.
- Teachers observed that students who participated in the public library summer reading program returned to school ready to learn, improved their reading achievement and skills, increased their enjoyment of reading, were more motivated to read, were more confident in participating in classroom reading activities, read beyond what was required in their free time, and perceived reading to be important.
- School librarians observed that students who participated in the public library summer reading program returned to school ready to learn, improved their reading achievement and skills, increased their enjoyment of reading, were more motivated to read, were more confident in their reading abilities, read beyond what was required in their free time, and perceived reading to be important.
- Public librarians observed/perceived that students who participated in the public library summer reading program returned to school ready to learn, improved their reading achievement and skills, increased their enjoyment of reading, were more motivated to read, were more confident in their reading abilities, read beyond what was required in their free time, perceived reading to be important, were enthusiastic about reading and self-selecting books, and increased their fluency and comprehension.

### **It is time to close the achievement gap in reading for our nation's children. Based on this study's findings, we recommend:**

1. Recognizing that public libraries play a significant role in helping to close the achievement gap in school performance.
2. Promoting the powerful role that public libraries play in the education community in helping children maintain and gain reading skills.
3. Engaging families in public library programs to promote early childhood literacy.
4. Investing more money in summer reading programs—especially in public libraries that serve children and families in economically depressed areas.
5. Marketing to parents of school-age children so they understand the importance of their children participating in summer reading programs and other out-of-school library activities.
6. Ensuring that librarians in public libraries work with teachers and school librarians to identify non-readers and under-performing students and to reach out to those students in order to engage them in library activities.
7. Reaching out to boys to get them involved in reading.
8. Expanding the definition of reading beyond books to include magazines, graphic novels, etc.
9. Providing more books and reading material at the public library for children in economically depressed neighborhoods since their more advantaged peers may have better access to reading materials in their homes and in their local public libraries.
10. Helping children in lower-income areas build home libraries by partnering with non-profit organizations such as First Book and Reading Is Fundamental.
11. Having librarians assume a role in influencing a child's love of reading and lifelong learning.
12. Encouraging and supporting studies that continue research in this area and that offer effective means for closing the reading achievement gap.

## DOMINICAN UNIVERSITY MISSION

As a Sinsinawa Dominican-sponsored institution, Dominican University prepares students to pursue truth, to give compassionate service, and to participate in the creation of a more just and humane world.

## GRADUATE SCHOOL OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE MISSION

We educate leaders in the library and information science professions who make a positive difference in their communities. This service-oriented education takes place within the larger context of the university's commitment to values-centered student development and is guided by relevant professional standards and core competencies. We provide our students with an excellent graduate education leading to a meaningful work life. We firmly believe that diversity inspires creativity, productivity, and growth.



Graduate School of Library  
& Information Science

7900 West Division Street  
River Forest, IL 60305  
Phone: (708) 524-6845  
Fax: (708) 524-6657  
Email: [gslis@dom.edu](mailto:gslis@dom.edu)  
Web: [www.gslis.dom.edu](http://www.gslis.dom.edu)



The Institute of Museum and Library Services is the primary source of federal support for the nation's 123,000 libraries and 17,500 museums. The Institute's mission is to create strong libraries and museums that connect people to information and ideas.

This project was made possible by a grant from the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services. National Leadership Grant LG-06-06-0102-06.

June 2010