WHAT TO DO NEXT

The sections below outline the "Next Steps" in articulating academic library value to institutional stakeholders. Noticeably absent from this list are traditional library measures. Despite their value in internally managing services and resources, inputs, outputs, process measures, satisfaction measures, and service quality measures are not designed to demonstrate achievement of outcomes; therefore, they may be less effective in demonstrating the institutional value of academic libraries. Consequently, the steps below focus on how librarians can accelerate their efforts to demonstrate academic library value by embracing an outcomes approach that reveals the impact of libraries on users.

Get Started

The most important step is to start. Librarians who seek to create perfect value studies may be stymied, and likely let great be the enemy of good. Librarians who are feeling ambitious can partner with research experts and conduct large-scale studies on a national or international scale. But most librarians do not need large-scale studies; in fact, small-scale local studies are often more powerful within individual institutions. The latter group can start by identifying one area of impact, collecting data, analyzing the data, and reporting results, even if the results are not ideal, keeping in mind that, "assessment is an ongoing process. One need not wait for the perfect opportunity, the perfect instrument, or the perfect time" (Carter 2002, 41).

For example, a small library that wants to know whether they help their institution recruit the best possible students might seek to add questions to an admissions survey about the role of the library in prospective students' decision to submit an admissions application. Even if the library turns out not to have a significant role in students' decision making, the library can use those results to spur innovation. What might the library do to increase its contribution to the institutional goal of recruiting students? Should library tours be made a mandatory part of prospective student events? Would library user testimonials help as part of a prospective student event? Should the library consider contacting students and parents of prospective students and identify how the library can help them be successful at the institution? Once changes are attempted, future assessments may reveal a greater library impact on this institutional goal. Then, the library has demonstrated its value.

Not only can librarians get started demonstrating their value in institutional terms, they can communicate their experiences, whether they are effective or ineffective, to their colleagues. If each library identifies some part of the Research Agenda in this document, collects data, and communicates it through publication or presentation, the profession will develop a body of evidence that demonstrates library impact in convincing ways.

Once librarians commit to getting started, they can define the outcomes they wish to explore. Libraries cannot demonstrate their institutional value to maximum effect until they define outcomes of institutional relevance and then work to measure the degree to which they attain them (Kaufman and Watstein, Library Value 2008, 227). Librarians throughout higher education can establish, assess, and link academic library outcomes to institutional outcomes related to the following areas: student enrollment, student retention and graduation rates, student success, student achievement, student learning, student engagement, faculty research productivity, faculty teaching, service, and overarching institutional quality. The final outcome list should be long enough to represent the ways in which the library enables institutional goals, but short enough to be clearly communicated to stakeholders. The final outcomes should also be mapped to institution, department, and accreditation outcomes (Oakleaf, Writing Information Literacy Assessment Plans 2010). (This process may be complicated because these organizations are likely not to use the term "information literacy"; instead they may use synonyms for the concept (Oakleaf, Are They Learning? 2011).) Outcome maps reveal shared foci across and among institutions. Outcome map creation is facilitated by the development or purchase of an assessment management system.

Use Assessment Management Systems

Assessment management systems have been developed over the last several years to support higher education assessment; currently there are several commercial products available for purchase (Oakleaf, Writing Information Literacy Assessment Plans 2010; Oakleaf, Are They Learning? 2011). Assessment management systems help educators manage their outcomes (learning outcomes as well as strategic/organizational outcomes), record and maintain data on each outcome, facilitate connections to similar outcomes throughout an institution, and generate reports. Assessment management systems are helpful for documenting progress toward strategic/organizational goals, but their real strength lies in managing learning outcomes assessments. Individual librarians have assessed student learning for decades. Because assessment efforts are typically "one-shot," they tend to capture limited amounts of information, e.g., only one librarian's class, one group of students, or one assessment method. Such assessments are so limited that they are very difficult to use to demonstrate the impact of the library on student learning in a broad sense. In contrast, assessment management systems allow multiple librarians to enter assessment data, focus on different student groups (or the same groups over time), and use different assessment methods. Because they aggregate data by outcomes, they generate reports that demonstrate how well the library is achieving its outcomes as well as contributing to the mission of its overarching institution (Oakleaf, Are They Learning? 2011).

Gather New Data

Academic libraries can learn from their school, public, and special library colleagues and adapt the best of their approaches to demonstrating value. For example, school

librarians have conducted test audits to identify individual test items that measure student information skills; they have also conducted "help" studies to collect, in student voices, qualitative data about the impact of libraries on student learning. Academic librarians can pursue both of these approaches.

Public and special librarians have conducted groundbreaking studies on library return-on-investment. Special librarians in particular have explored the dichotomy of a "business" perspective and an "impact" perspective; both perspectives offer great potential to demonstrate library value. Academic librarians should also pursue two paths to library value, as their stakeholders have two different perceptions of that value.

For some academic library stakeholders, higher education is in many ways a business, and money is the bottom line. For them, library value can be calculated using cost/benefit analysis, like the one represented in the formula below. According to this

$$library\ value = \frac{benefits}{costs}$$

formula, libraries can increase their value in one of two ways. First, they can decrease costs by managing their finances well. Second, they can increase their benefits. Increasing benefits may mean bringing more money into the institutions. It could also mean offering beneficial services and resources—ideally ones that offer value that can be represented in financial terms. Of course, it is challenging to simultaneously increase benefits and decrease costs. Therefore, to reach financially minded stakeholders, librarians must demonstrate that they keep costs down, bring money into the institution, or offer benefits that have financial value. The charts included in the Research Agenda section of this report can be used to create cost/benefit analyses and calculate return-on-investment information to provide evidence of library value according to this perspective.

Other academic library stakeholders focus on the contribution higher education makes through producing learning, research, and service, rather than as a money-making enterprise. For these stakeholders, an impact-focused, evidence-gathering process is more meaningful. There are numerous methods for gathering evidence of library impact. Regardless of specific research methodology, this process involves eliciting information from users about what the services and resources librarians provide enable them to do. This second approach also may be more meaningful to librarians who are focused on what library users actually accomplish following their academic library interactions and how they might be changed for the better.

Both paths to articulating library value have potential; however, to achieve that potential, librarians need to collect new and different data. Some data is easy to capture. In other cases, data not currently collected, could be.

- Librarians can undertake systematic reviews of course content, readings, reserves, and assignments. Using this data, librarians can identify students who

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have had substantial library exposure and compare them to those who have not. Simultaneously, librarians should use this process to track the integration of library resources into the teaching and learning processes of their institution. Not only should this information be used in collections decisions, it can also be used to answer additional questions, such as: What percent of readings used in courses are available and accessed through the library? How much do these materials save students? What contributions do they make to student learning? How many assignments do students complete that require use of information skills? What do library services and resources enable students to do or do better? Are faculty assessing these skills in their own ways, and if so what have they learned about student skill levels? Of course, this type of information is also useful for designing proactive, rather than passive, library services designed to provide "just-in-time" and "just-for-me" assistance to users.

- Librarians can explore the range of products like MINES for Libraries with the potential to ask library users about how they will use the resources they find though the library. This kind of contextual information allows librarians to report, "Ten percent of the student access to business resources is attributable to company researching for interview preparation" rather than saying, "Library users downloaded 5,000 articles today." The former sentence demonstrates library impact on student job placement, an institutional goal. The latter does not provide the context necessary to show library value to the institution.

- Librarians can develop systems that will allow data collection on individual user library behavior. A number of potential correlations included in the Research Agenda section below are not possible unless librarians can identify and compare user groups with different types or levels of library interactions. For instance, until libraries know that student #5 with major A has downloaded B number of articles from database C, checked out D number of books, participated in E workshops and online tutorials, and completed courses F, G, and H, libraries cannot correlate any of those student information behaviors with attainment of other outcomes. Until librarians do that, they will be blocked in many of their efforts to demonstrate value.

Clearly, data systems need to protect the privacy of individuals by stripping individual information from records, information that is not necessary to demonstrate library value. For example, because libraries do not assign students grades, there is no need to know about information behavior of individual, named students. However, it would be helpful to know that students who have participated in three or more library instructional episodes over the course of their college career have a significantly higher GPA. Or it would be helpful to know that faculty who work with a librarian to prepare their tenure or promotion package have a 25% higher pass rate, but it may not be necessary to know what departments these faculty are in. However, cleaned data is crucial; demonstrating the full value of academic libraries is only possible when libraries possess evidence that allows them to examine the impact of library user interactions.

In some cases, potentially useful library impact data exists and is collected by nonlibrary entities, but requires effort to access and analyze. A few examples are:

- NCES institutional data and academic library data are currently maintained in different databases with separate searching capabilities. NCES could combine the Academic Libraries Survey with IPEDS data. Doing so would facilitate meaningful exploration of connections between academic libraries and institutional outcomes. When examining IPEDS data for this category, librarians can begin by investigating retention, graduation, completion, and transfer rate categories. Librarians can also investigate the utility of similar NSC data. Integrating library data with institutional data is critical; without joined data, joint analysis is not possible. Without joint analysis, libraries will find it more difficult to demonstrate their value.
- Librarians can monitor K-12 assessment efforts, including the assessment of the Common Core College and Career-Readiness Standards (Achieve 2008), as it is a "well-known phenomenon for a state legislature or governor's office to initially base any…reporting proposal for colleges and universities on what the state is already doing in K-12 education" (P. T. Ewell, 'Shovel-Ready' Data 2009, 11).
- Librarians can seek to impact current efforts to track longitudinal data across K-12, postsecondary, and workforce systems, as such databases increase stakeholder ability to ask more specific questions about student development (P. T. Ewell, 'Shovel-Ready' Data 2009, 11-12).
- Efforts to augment national surveys (e.g., NSSE, CCSSE) with information and library questions can be continued and expanded. The same is true for local surveys, especially senior and alumni surveys.

Engage in Higher Education Assessment External to Libraries

Academic librarians, in general, do not participate on a broad scale in higher education assessment activities. There are exceptions, to be sure, but academic librarians need to use their skills to remain aware of current philosophies and movements in higher education assessment, as well as to ensure that higher education is aware of library assessment. In general, higher education literature "consistently portrays librarians as ancillary to the academic enterprise" (Gratch-Lindauer, Defining and Measuring 1998), rendering the library "largely invisible" when it comes to accomplishing institutional missions (Boyer 1987; Hardesty 2000).

One way for librarians to engage rigorously in higher education assessment is to become involved in program review (Schwartz 2007) and accreditation processes, especially by influencing accreditation guidelines (Gratch-Lindauer, Comparing the Regional Accreditation Standards 2001; Rader 2004). Accreditation guidelines motivate institutions; increasing integration of information literacy into the guidelines may result in increased integration of information literacy into institutional curricula (Saunders, Perspectives on Accreditation 2008, 310). It is important to keep in mind that infusing

information literacy content into accreditation guidelines is not an effort to homogenize learning. Accreditation processes seek to encourage institutions to meet their own missions and goals, to "ensur[e]…the distinctive mission of the institution" (Bogue 1998).

In some situations, librarians may be able to influence higher education assessment initiatives (e.g., adding information skill-centric questions to national surveys and tests). For example, librarians can become involved in Tuning USA's effort to develop common postsecondary learning standards in disciplinary areas; they can also be aware of the new national "College and Career Readiness" standards that describe the learning outcomes that incoming college students should master. Librarians can also familiarize themselves with national movements, such as the VSA, VFA, U-CAN, and NILOA initiatives, as well as international efforts, such as AHELO. They can participate in these activities whenever possible; for example, several institutions are at work integrating the new VALUE information literacy rubric into their institutional assessment processes and IMLS has funded the RAILS project to address the same goal.

Furthermore, librarians can publish and present in higher education venues rather than limiting themselves to library-centric conferences and journals. In addition, select academic library journals may pursue indexing in databases that include higher education literature.

Finally, academic libraries can appoint a liaison librarian to the senior leadership of their institutions and/or their offices of assessment or institutional research. Providing top-notch liaison services to key decision makers within an institution will help contribute to efficient administrators (Neal 2009) and may make library value less abstract and, over time, indispensible.

Create Library Assessment Plans

Librarians can develop assessment plans that organize assessment efforts, keep them on track, and record assessment results and lessons learned.   Excellent resources for creating assessment plans, a topic outside the scope of this report, are available to aid librarians in their planning efforts (Kerby and Weber 2000; Maki, Developing an Assessment Plan 2002; Oakleaf, Writing Information Literacy Assessment Plans 2010; Rubin 2006; Matthews, Library Assessment in Higher Education 2007, 119).

Mobilize Library Administrators

Library administrators can move assessment forward by taking the following actions: tying library value to institutional missions (Lynch, et al. 2007, 226-227); communicating assessment needs and results to library stakeholders (Fister 2010); using evidence-based decision making; creating confidence in library assessment efforts; dedicating assessment personnel and training (Durrance and Fisher, How Libraries and Librarians Help: A Guide to Identifying User-Centered Outcomes 2005, 321-322); and fostering environments that encourage creativity and risk taking (Stoffle, Guskin and Boisse

1984, 9). Library administrators can integrate library assessment within library planning, budget (Hoyt 2009, 10), and reward structures (Dow 1998, 279). They also can ensure that assessment efforts have requisite resources. Assessment processes that have insufficient resources risk being "incomplete, wasteful, frustrating, not illuminative, or perceived as invalid" (Keeling, et al. 2008, 75). According to Keeling et al., "A process that has limited resources in money, time, and organizational commitment is likely to yield results that are narrow, and the report of that work will likely sit on a shelf or never escape the confines of somebody's hard drive" (Keeling, et al. 2008, 76). A key resource is access to professional development opportunities. Furthermore, administrators can mitigate employee anxiety by creating "psychological safety or emotional security by providing direction, encouragement, and coaching, as well as fostering norms that reward innovative thinking and encourage acceptance of mistakes" (Worrell 1995, 355). Thus, by supporting their employees in numerous ways, library administrators avoid the major pitfalls of higher education assessment: trivializing the effort, underestimating the necessary change of perspective, adding assessment duties without reassigning other work tasks (Keeling, et al. 2008, 61); under-resourcing assessment efforts, and failing to ensure that employees feel comfortable with uncertainty and complexity (Barnett, University Knowledge 2000, 420).

Engage in Professional Development

Librarians learning to demonstrate their value to their overarching institutions will require training and support to acquire new assessment skills (Oakleaf, Are They Learning? 2011). Their attendance at existing assessment professional development opportunities, such as the ARL Library Assessment Conference and the ACRL Assessment Immersion program, can be encouraged and supported. In some cases, inviting consultants, participating in webinars, and establishing assessment resource collections will be required to update librarian skills. Example assessment resource collections include: *Measuring Quality in Higher Education* (Association for Institutional Research 2010) and the American Library Association and Illinois Library Association value Web sites (American Library Association 2010; Illinois Library Association 2010).

Furthermore, librarians can participate in professional development opportunities outside the academic library sphere. For example, librarians can attend conferences that focus on higher education assessment like the IUPUI Assessment Institute. They can also benefit from general higher education assessment literature; faculty and student affairs professionals face similar assessment challenges and librarians can learn from their experiences. For instance, one student affairs resource lists the following questions as a starting point for contributing to institutional missions:

- How do I contribute to student learning [or another institutional outcome] at my institution?
- Is student learning one of my daily top priorities?
- What are the programs that I am responsible for that have been shown to have a tenuous impact on student learning?

- Have I taken the initiative to create opportunities to establish and maintain professional relationships with faculty and academic administrators on my campus?
- Have I exploited opportunities to demonstrate my interest in and support for faculty work?
- Have I thought about what I can offer faculty members to assist them in fulfilling their instructional goals?
- Do I regularly analyze institutional data on the student learning that occurs through the program and activities sponsored by my department or area?
- In what specific way can I work this year to remove a barrier that has prevented me from fostering…learning? (R. P. Keeling 2006, 50-51)

These questions, while intended to spur student affairs professionals to engage in reflective practice, can also help librarians examine how their work contributes to institutional missions.

According to Durrance and Fisher (How Libraries and Librarians Help: A Guide to Identifying User-Centered Outcomes 2005, 324), libraries should use professional development to conduct assessment skill inventories, capture librarian assessment skill gaps, continuously update librarians' assessment skills, and allocate assessment resources. Additional lists of necessary skills are also available (Keeling, et al. 2008; Oakleaf, Are They Learning? 2011). Library administrators who support this type of professional development will find themselves armed with better evidence to guide decision making and influence institutional administrators.

Leverage Professional Library Associations

Major professional associations can play a crucial organizing role in the effort to demonstrate library value. First, they can create online support resources and communities to serve as a nexus of value demonstration activities. Second, they can serve a "pulse taking" role, learning how member libraries are showing value and communicating this information to the membership. One example of this approach might be a one-question survey in *C&RL News* akin to the one-question surveys published in *Library Media Connection*, a school library publication. Third, they can orchestrate an "all hands on deck" approach to assessment, helping librarians determine which part of the Research Agenda might be best suited to their institutions and ensuring that the agenda is covered. Fourth, they can encourage library-centric publications and conferences to index their work in library and education literature databases. Finally, they can identify expert researchers and grant-funding opportunities that can partner with librarians to take on the most challenging aspects of the Research Agenda.