

Revisiting the Academic Library Value Research Agenda: An Opportunity to Shape the Future

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Introduction

Academic librarians are confident that libraries in higher education contexts impact student recruitment, retention, graduation rates, job placement, civic engagement, and quality of life as well as faculty productivity and professional development, but the rigorous assessment and articulation of academic library contributions is not simple nor straightforward. In 2010, ACRL produced a research agenda that included key questions such as “How can we assess library impact? How can we demonstrate this impact? How can we partner with our institutional colleagues to increase our impact?” Since the publication of the *Value of Academic Libraries: A Comprehensive Research Review and Report*--a document that sought to summarize existing academic library value research, set the course for future work in the field, and articulate an initial academic library value research agenda--much has been achieved. Even so, in a continuously evolving higher education environment, libraries must constantly monitor and assess existing progress and anticipate future pathways to the demonstration and growth of academic library value. Recognizing this, ACRL has recently called for an update of the research agenda outlined in the *VAL Report* and selected OCLC Research to produce a new “Action-Oriented Research Agenda on Library Contributions to Student Learning and Success.” The new document is intended to provide a progress report on academic library value research and outline relevant research questions that remain unanswered.

As the author of the *VAL Report* and a former program director for assessment at the Association of Research Libraries, we eagerly anticipate the work of this esteemed group of colleagues and look forward to the production of a document that will move the value of academic libraries initiative into the next stage of development. We also recognize and appreciate the opportunities and challenges they will encounter as they take on the new “Action-Oriented Research Agenda on Library Contributions to Student Learning and Success.” Among those opportunities and challenges are: 1) maintaining disciplined focus, 2) guiding the composition of inquiry questions, and 3) providing support for overcoming potential obstacles.

Opportunity/Challenge #1 - Maintaining Disciplined Focus

Academic library value can be conceptualized in a variety of different ways: the inherent value of library services, expertise, and resources (SERs); measures of inputs and outputs; user satisfaction levels; service quality metrics; the use and utility of library SERs; the worth of the library as a commodity, perhaps measured against competing alternatives; a return-on-investment; and more (see Figure 1).

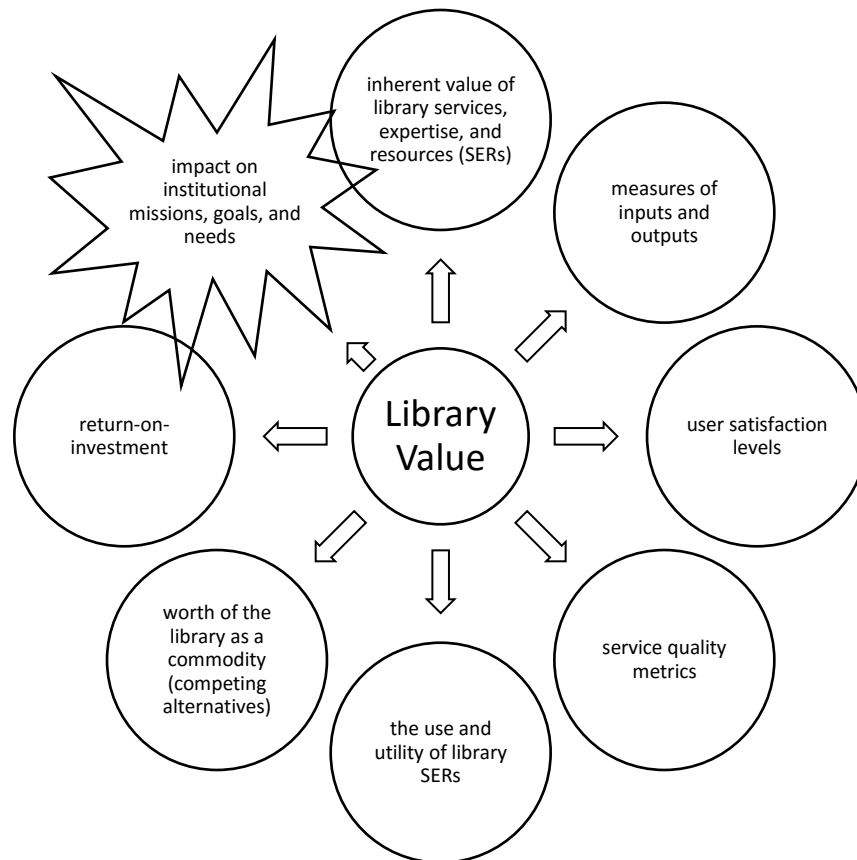


Figure 1. Facets of Academic Library Value

The ACRL value of academic libraries initiative emphasizes yet another library value concept: impact on institutional missions, goals, and needs. The 2010 *VAL Report* focused on the latter idea exclusively and zeroed in on two core questions:

1. What differences do academic libraries and librarians make in the lives of students, faculty, their overarching institutions, and other stakeholders with regard to things that matter to them?
2. How do we capture the difference made—the impact of the library—and how do we assess it, share it, and increase it?

Toward these ends, the *VAL Report* explored a vast range of literature, articulated a multi-faceted conceptualization of academic library value, outlined a detailed research agenda, and spearheaded the work of the academic library profession on defining, demonstrating, and communicating the ways in which the academic library supports its institution, including student recruitment/enrollment, retention, completion/graduation, success (e.g., internship/career placement, earnings outcomes, acceptance to graduate/professional schools, or attainment of marketable skills), achievement (e.g., GPA, test scores), learning (outcomes), experience; faculty teaching, research productivity, grant-seeking; and institutional reputation or prestige (see Figure 2).

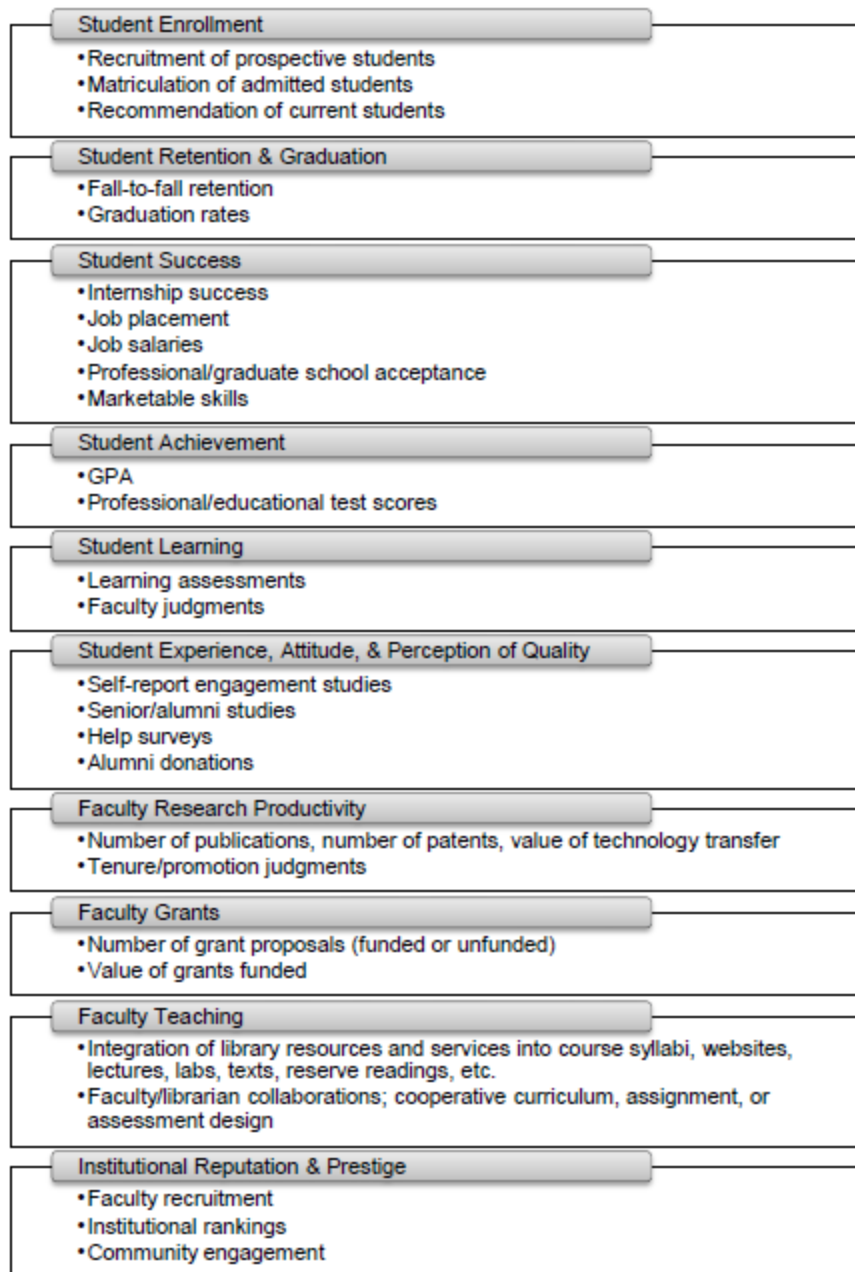


Figure 2. *VAL Report Focus Areas*

In the last five years, higher education institutions have both continued to pursue these areas, as well as committing to additional areas of focus (see Figure 3) and efficiencies (see Figure 4).

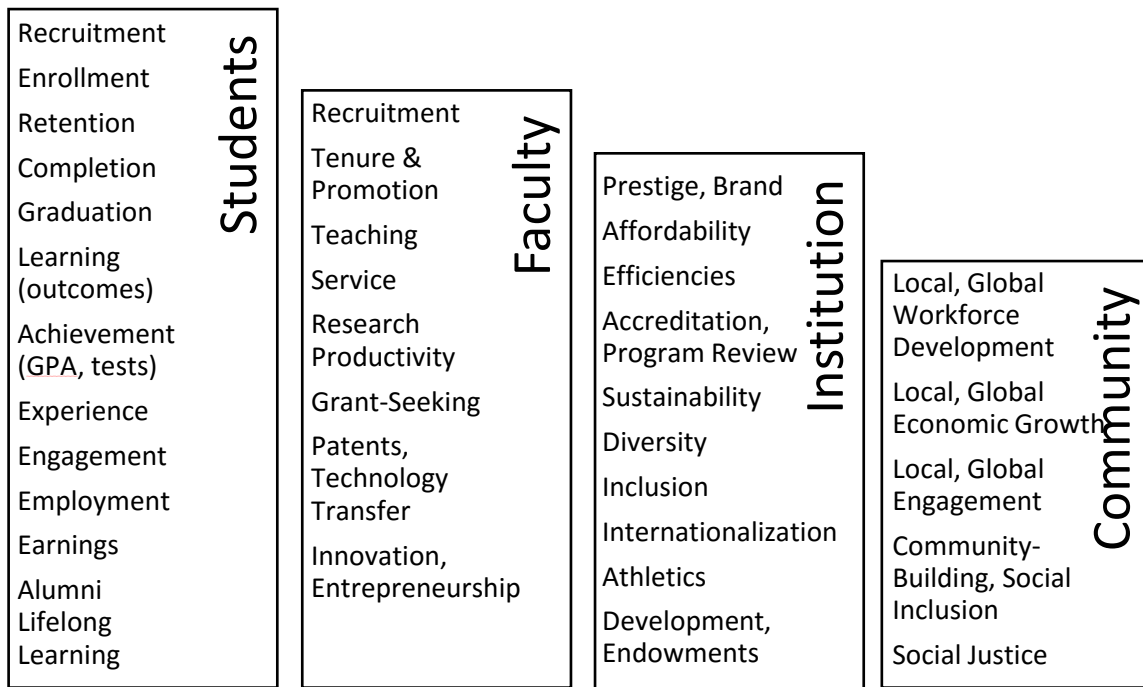


Figure 3. Common Focus Areas of Higher Education Institutions



Figure 4. Academic Library Contributions to Institutional Efficiencies

Many of these focus areas are supported by academic libraries, in ways large and small. As a result, the definition, demonstration, and communication of an individual library's value to its institution has exploded with potential. Furthermore, many academic libraries have also recognized that they serve organizations and communities beyond their immediate institutions, including K-12 schools, public libraries, governmental entities, business communities, medical institutions, military installations, culture- or faith-based organizations, and so on. Academic libraries with additional community and organizational ties may also find that their value resides in an increasingly diverse impact profile. If stakeholders from these bodies have missions, strategic priorities, and values (articulated or tacit) (Bell, 2016), librarians should weigh their appropriateness as part of the overall library value picture. For example, academic libraries that serve public library users may take on public library focus areas (see Figure 5). In developing an impact profile, academic libraries should begin by casting a wide net, exploring the needs and goals of their overarching institution, as well as other organizations and communities they serve, before narrowing and prioritizing a short list of focus areas that have the potential to generate the most impact.

Public Libraries
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student learning • Early education • Family cohesion • Social inclusion • Social capital • Community building • Community capacity building • Independent living • Employment • Small business support • Local economic development • Literacy development • Democracy support, voter education • Economic value, i.e. decreased family spending (on recreation, learning materials, etc.) • Problem solving • Community resilience • Safety

Figure 5. Public Library Focus Areas

When the potential impact of both individual academic libraries and academic libraries taken as a whole is so diverse, maintaining focus on one aspect of library value is a challenge. Each new higher education development, educational technology initiative, or value strategy embraced by school, public, or special libraries can inspire advances in academic library value creation, assessment, improvement, and dissemination. It's an exhilarating period in academic librarianship!

While pursuing a plurality of academic library value trajectories is a necessary strategy for creating new ideas and knowledge, a more disciplined and precise pursuit of academic library value along pre-determined paths is also important, practical, and useful. In commissioning the "Action-Oriented Research Agenda on Library Contributions to Student Learning and Success," ACRL has narrowed the emphasis of academic library value, setting the scope to focus on the library's impact on "institutional priorities for improved student learning and success (i.e., retention, persistence, degree completion)" (ACRL, 2016a). This narrowed approach will provide a detailed treatment of the topic and will likely result in an intense examination of what are arguably the most significant aspects of library value in the current higher education environment. Early reports from OCLC Research indicate that researchers have maintained this precise focus in the literature search and subsequent content analysis of documents, making the most of this opportunity to conduct a disciplined investigation into the last six years of research on the impact of academic libraries on student success.

Yet, the creation of a research agenda is as much art as science. It is as much about seeking synergies, inviting inspirations, and anticipating and predicting the future as it is a careful analysis, encapsulation, and extrapolation of the past. As a result, the OCLC Research team must negotiate a complex challenge—balancing disciplined focus while leaving room for epiphany—to make the most of the opportunity the updated research agenda provides.

Opportunity/Challenge #2 - Guiding the Composition of Inquiry Questions

A central focus of the “Action-Oriented Research Agenda on Library Contributions to Student Learning and Success” is the identification and articulation of 10-15 “inquiry questions.” According to ACRL, inquiry questions are: “future-focused key outstanding research questions that are essential for academic libraries to explore...and address challenges that the higher education sector is facing” (ACRL, 2016a). These questions will serve as impetuses for future research and as examples that will inspire the creation of additional inquiry questions.

Because inquiry questions will serve as model questions, OCLC Research is presented with an opportunity to demonstrate effective inquiry questions that contain easily understood components, employ simple structures, lead to research of significance, and have implications of practical utility. Although the composition of inquiry questions that fulfill these criteria may appear straightforward, it can, in fact, be quite challenging.

Though there is no “wrong” way to pose an academic library value research question, the inclusion of certain components and structures can help both researchers and research-consumers easily understand a proposed study, project, or other type of inquiry. Because the “Action-Oriented Research Agenda on Library Contributions to Student Learning and Success” is focused on the ways in which academic library SERs impact student success outcomes, those three components form the basic structure of a simple inquiry question: 1) academic library SERs, 2) impact, and 3) student success outcomes (Oakleaf, 2014b). In its most basic form, inquiry questions exploring this topic might be structured as in Figure 6.

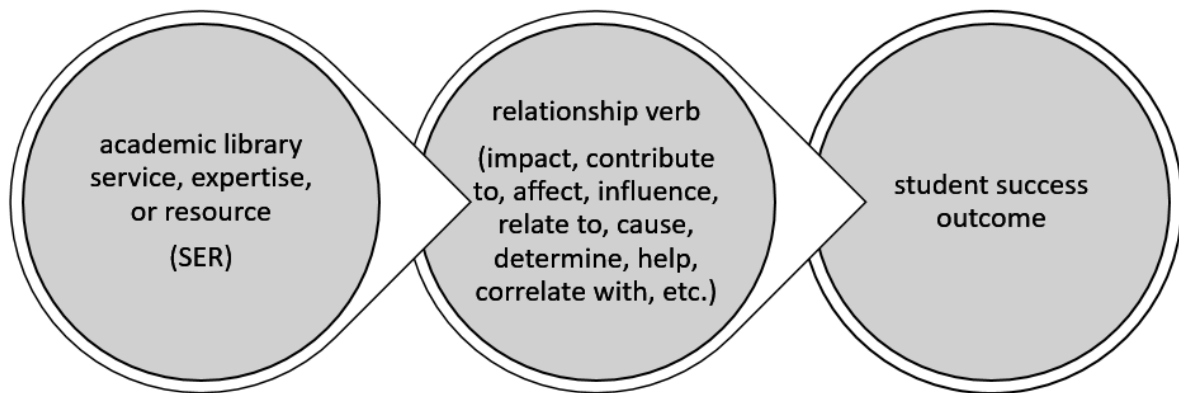


Figure 6. Academic Library Value Basic Inquiry Question Components

Each of these components must be replaced with more specific content (e.g., particular surrogates and data, evidence, or measures for the first and third elements), and the three component list can be phrased interrogatively, but the essential structure remains the same (see Figure 7).

Reference

- Do reference services contribute to increased student learning?
- Does student use of virtual reference service impact GPA at graduation?
- Are students who attend reference consultations more likely to earn higher course grades?

Instruction

- To what extent does information literacy instruction impact achievement of learning outcomes sought by employers?
- Is increased use of library resources correlated with student employment at six months post-graduation?
- Does supplying students with the company profiles provided by common business databases affect the hiring outcome of on-campus internship interviews?

Reading & Resources

- Does library coordination of digital reading lists and course packs influence the diversity or quality of curricular choices of faculty members? or
- In what ways does provision of reserve readings or e-textbooks help first year students be retained to sophomore year?
- Do “free” library-provided course resources influence students’ perception of college affordability?

Learning Analytics

- Does inclusion of library data in institutional learning analytics systems lead to greater precision in identifying at-risk students?
- In what ways do librarians serving as intervention touchpoints through an Integrated Planning and Advising System (IPAS) influence student retention from first- to second-semester?
- Do personalized academic support messages from librarians, delivered via IPAS or learning analytics systems, increase students’ feelings of connectedness and engagement?

Figure 7. Example Academic Library Value Inquiry Questions

Structuring inquiry questions using this basic model ensures that the research investigates the relationship between library SERs and the achievement of institutional missions, purposes, goals, strategic priorities, etc. The formula also ensures that the research avoids narrow, library-centric thinking and maintains connection with the academic library value lens of the ACRL initiative: student success markers as defined by higher education institutions. The inquiry components are readily understandable, concrete, and replicable. Most importantly, inquiry questions structured in this manner pass the “so what” test; researchers and research consumers can easily perceive the importance of the proposed inquiry and imagine the ways in which the results would lead to improvements in both the library SERs and the student success outcomes included in the question--which is the primary purpose of academic library value investigations.

In addition to offering 10-15 well-structured inquiry questions, OCLC Research has an opportunity to provide supplementary guidance to the librarians who seek to investigate them. For each inquiry question, they might include the following:

1. example variants of the inquiry question,
2. overarching or underpinning theories,
3. suggested research designs and methods,
4. potential data sources,
5. relevant tools,
6. population/sampling options,
7. recommended/required collaborations and partnerships,

8. potential funding sources,
9. related literature,
10. applicable learning, professional, or accreditation standards,
11. potential limitations,
12. ethical, privacy, and IRB considerations,
13. suggestions for communication of results to library and institutional stakeholders,
14. suggestions for involving stakeholders in using results to make decisions and take actions,
15. potential dissemination venues including conferences and journals, and
16. decision trees to assist librarians in navigating their options.

Supplying this additional information can help librarians anticipate and negotiate the choices confronted and decisions made by academic library value researchers.

Opportunity/Challenge #3 - Providing Support for Overcoming Potential Obstacles

OCLC Research also has an opportunity to provide support to librarians who may face obstacles commonly encountered in academic library value research. While potential obstacles in any new field of research are plentiful, some of the most important include: 1) navigating the correlation vs. causation (contribution vs. attribution) divide; 2) negotiating the student learning “surrogate problem,” including negotiating a transition from the *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* (ACRL, 2000) to the *Framework for Higher Education for Information Literacy* (ACRL, 2015); 3) bridging inter-institutional research issues, 4) replicating and disseminating research results, and 5) conducting research without sufficient resources.

Obstacle 1: Navigating the Correlation vs. Causation Divide

Since the publication of the *VAL Report*, librarians have struggled with the desire to demonstrate that academic libraries have direct and independent impacts on student success. Librarians have repeatedly attempted to show that “substantial learning results from one-time, isolated interactions with librarians or link...other outcomes (such as retention or graduation, student success, achievement, or career advancement) definitively to the library and the library alone” (Oakleaf, 2015). When their research results fall short--establishing correlations between library interactions and learning or other outcomes, but not causal relationships--librarians often seem disappointed or disheartened. This reaction is understandable, but not merited:

“Indeed, many scholars believe, particularly in social science research fields, not only that correlation does not imply causation, but also that demonstration of causation is impossible, because there are too many unknown and uncontrollable factors. The problem of unknown and uncontrollable factors is especially significant in educational settings, where students are potentially influenced by endless prior and concurrent experiences that impact research results, and randomized control studies, usually considered the gold standard of experiment research, are not typically feasible. Other scholars acknowledge that while definitive causation cannot be proven, that given consistently strong correlations, a theoretical model that supports a causative connection, and research that controls for all other factors and alternative explanations, it may be reasonable to argue that a causative relationship exists and to act on that assumption. If a librarian subscribes to the first idea (that causation is not demonstrable), then strong, positive correlations are a suitable end goal for research and the results of such research can be communicated and employed to make decisions and take actions. If a librarian is persuaded by the second

position (that correlations bolstered by proven theory and shown to be free of all other influencing factors are equivalent to causation), then strong, positive correlations must be contextualized within a larger theory and additional factors and explanations must be ruled out before the results of such research can be declared causative and then shared and used to make decisions and take actions. (Note: In the second scenario, librarians should also be prepared to explain their claims of causality to those who subscribe to the first idea of causation.)

Arguments about causation aside, strong, positive correlations are the stuff of action for librarians. When librarians determine that particular library activities or interaction are correlated with positive learning or other outcomes, those correlations point the way for librarians to plan improvements to library services and resources. If students who exhibit a particular library interaction behavior or set of behaviors are more likely to demonstrate learning gains or other positive outcomes, then it seems reasonable for librarians 1) to instruct and encourage students to adopt these behaviors, 2) to ensure that the library services, resources, and systems students encounter as they engage in these library interaction behaviors are streamlined, effective, efficient, and rewarding, 3) to communicate the success of students who engage in these behaviors to stakeholders including but not limited to faculty, administrators, parents, and the students themselves, and 4) to engage additional research to learn more about the interconnectedness between these behaviors and positive student outcomes.” (Oakleaf, 2015)

Bearing this in mind, OCLC Research can leverage the new “Action-Oriented Research Agenda on Library Contributions to Student Learning and Success” to communicate this idea to librarians once again: correlation results are significant and exciting, and causation cannot be demonstrated easily—or perhaps at all—depending on one’s perspective. The latter is not required for the demonstration of the value of academic libraries, and the former points the way to a successful articulation, assessment, and communication of library impact.

Obstacle 2: Negotiating the Student Learning Surrogate Problem

Nationally, higher education is struggling to find a balance between responding to large-scale, broad-stroke calls for accountability and affordability and the granular and authentic pursuit of student learning. Ideally, institutions of higher education should provide students with rich and deep curricular and co-curricular experiences that lead to meaningful, life-changing, and employer-appreciated learning outcomes. And ideally, that learning should be affordable for students and demonstrable to stakeholders, including institutions, communities, employers, accreditors, governments, and of course the students themselves. However, the current climate may have separated these goals. Indeed, affordability and accountability efforts--which are intended to ensure quality and accessible learning for all students--have led to pressure on higher education institutions to produce student retention, completion/graduation, and job placement/salary data benchmarks. The Gates and Lumina foundations have shaped the higher education conversation to focus on this data (Engle, 2016; Weathers, 2016). While those data points are critically important surrogates for student learning, taken alone they are *partial* surrogates, and many experts are concerned that their pursuit comes at a cost, namely, lack of attention on actual learning outcomes attainment. Linda Suskie articulates this conflict clearly, stating:

“The Gates and Lumina Foundations have been driving the American higher education agenda for a number of years and are likely to continue to do so. They have had the ear of the federal government, so their focus on what they call “student achievement” and “student success”—namely, retention, completion, job placement rates, and starting salaries—will continue to be a focus of the federal government, and therefore accreditors, as well. Yes, the recent Gates Foundation report *Answering the Call* (Engle 2016) mentions learning outcomes, but they are buried in a chart as one of about two dozen recommended measures of institutional effectiveness....On one hand, these trends represent issues that American colleges and universities should be paying more attention to....On the other hand, however, I worry about the tendency of policymakers to focus on a few numbers that often don't tell a complete or accurate story about many colleges and universities. I also worry about a future in which, because of the focus on completion, we graduate a lot of students who haven't learned much. Then the pendulum of emphasis will swing back from completion to learning outcomes, and we'll all get blamed for not focusing enough on learning outcomes.” (Suskie, 2016)

As Suskie acknowledges, the Gates and Lumina Foundations recognize the importance of actual learning outcomes (Strategy Labs, 2016) and acknowledge and support work in these areas. Even so, the tension between learning surrogates and actual learning continues.

Given the current political climate, this difficult balancing act does not seem likely to dissipate. Rather, the focus on retention, completion/graduation, and job placement/salary data will probably increase. In the coming year(s), the Higher Education Act is awaiting reauthorization; it is already overdue. Senators from both sides of the aisle, led by Lamar Alexander (R-Tenn.) and Patty Murray (D-Wash.), are seeking to use the opportunity to make changes that will impact student loan debt, accreditation, and federal educational data collection (Douglas-Gabriel, 2016; Stratford, 2015), all of which may contribute to an emphasis on learning-surrogate data, rather than actual-learning data. For example, in an effort to address staggering student debt, legislators have proposed requirements for higher education institutions to “risk-share” in the debt their students accrue. They propose that institutions pay back portions of the debt when their students default (Senate Committee, 2015b). Because approximately 70% of students who default on their debt are students who did not complete their programs, this type of government decree would substantially increase the “skin-in-the-game” for institutions and heighten the focus on retention and completion/graduation data. Furthermore, legislators support the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) which focuses on enrollment and award (program or degree completion) status of students (IPEDS, 2016) and recommend emphasizing degree completion, outstanding debt and default, post-graduation careers, and earnings outcomes as student success measures (Senate Committee, 2015a). Again, it seems reasonable to believe that legislators also care about actual student learning, but learning surrogates—because they are more accessible, understandable, and digestible—are currently receiving the lion's share of governmental attention.

For academic librarians seeking to demonstrate library value, the balancing act between investigating learning surrogates versus actual learning outcomes is an important problem to negotiate, and OCLC Research has an opportunity to help guide practitioners in doing so. Thus far, most academic library value research has investigated surrogates for student learning, including GPA, course completion, retention, and completion/graduation. For librarians who are satisfied with a learning surrogate approach to academic library value inquiries, OCLC Research may provide suggestions for aligning with data currently collected and scrutinized on

a national level or expanding their surrogate list to include job placement, earnings outcomes, or other post-graduation career information.

OCLC Research has an even greater opportunity to guide librarians to examine the impact of the library on actual student learning outcomes. Librarians who seek to identify the library's effect on student learning outcomes must engage the rich, detailed, rewarding, and sometimes messy work of determining how student library interactions contribute to learning outcome gains. To do so, they will need to rely on learning assessments of various types and/or faculty judgments of those learning assessments that double as assignments. Learning assessments that lend themselves to this type of investigation include authentic, integrated performance assessments such as research journals reflective writing, "think alouds," self or peer evaluations, research drafts or papers, open-ended question responses, works cited pages, annotated bibliographies, speeches, multimedia presentations, and other artifacts of student learning (Oakleaf, 2010). Learning analytics and assessment management systems can also provide valuable information; even tests and other quantitative assessments may prove valuable to librarians seeking to correlate library SERs with increases in achievement of student learning outcomes.

Librarians who seek to assess actual learning outcomes can benefit from an additional layer of guidance from the OCLC Research team. Earlier this year, ACRL "adopted for use" the *Framework for Information Literacy in Higher Education*, a document which replaced the *Standards for Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education*, a seminal publication that guided information literacy instruction for well over a decade. The new *Framework* differs substantially from the *Standards*—in conceptual underpinnings, areas of emphasis, document structure, and level of detail. In many academic library circles, the *Framework* has been accepted as an exciting development in an ongoing evolution of the information literacy; other librarians have been reticent to accept the new document for a variety of reasons. One significant concern is the ability to transition existing information literacy assessment efforts that were predicated on the *Standards* to new approaches that embrace the *Framework*. Since 1999, the *Standards* had formed the basis for many library-, institution-, and even association-level assessment initiatives (AAC&U, 2010). Over time, the librarians will likely accept the new *Framework* and recognize that they possess the assessment skills required to both adapt old processes to the new document and develop new assessment strategies for the future (Oakleaf, 2014a). However, in the short term, OCLC Research can provide vitally important guidance to aid librarians in transitioning from the investigation of library impact on information literacy learning based on the *Standards* to the *Framework* as the profession's new foundational document. They might also lay the groundwork for the reexamination of related higher education assessment initiatives, such as the revision of the AAC&U VALUE rubric for information literacy anticipated in 2017.

Obstacle 3: Bridging Inter-Institutional Research Issues

To date, most academic library value research has focused on impact investigations that are conducted within the confines of a single institution. In the future, librarians can explore ways in which these institution-bound studies can help libraries bridge inter-institutional issues and expand academic library value research projects to include multiple campuses, consortia, and even national or international landscapes. Inter-institutional research is challenging, and the OCLC Research team has an opportunity to guide librarians as they envision and deploy such research. While each higher education institution is a unique and complex entity, there are common structures that may be leveraged to unite certain types of institutions. Identifying these institutional structures, especially in relation to service towards undergraduate students, is a

challenge. As a starting point for inter-institutional academic library research focused on student success, OCLC Research could provide research suggestions that incorporate the following structural commonalities:

- marketing efforts and the targeted populations they aim towards for recruitment
- demographics of the student body they attract
- relationship with advanced high school summer offering programs
- programs they make available to students based on disciplinary focus
- programs they make available to students based on achievement
- faculty resources they make available to students
- support services they offer to students including the dimensions of library service
- service learning opportunities and study abroad programs
- employment and post-graduation career counseling
- lifelong learning and alumni relations programs

Using these structures as a basis, the OCLC Research team could launch a trajectory for inter-institutional academic library value research. Furthermore, they might a) suggest ways to assess the effects of library programming in the context of other institutional characteristics as key components for inter-institutional explorations of library value; b) explore the notion of financial success in the context of the economic realities of the environments students come from and go to after degree or program completion, thereby identifying gaps in the understanding of the economics of financing undergraduate education and support services like libraries, or c) recommend additional areas of inquiry that will confirm or dispel long held librarian beliefs about student learning and success. As Mark Twain famously opined, “It ain’t what you don’t know that gets you in trouble. It’s what you know for sure that just ain’t so.”

Obstacle 4: Replicating and Disseminating Value Research

In the years following the publication of the *VAL Report* and the subsequent proliferation of academic library value research, academic librarians have sought effective ways to communicate the value of the library to stakeholders including students, institutional leaders and resource allocators, and others. The ACRL Value of Academic Libraries Committee has supported this effort through the creation of posters and statements articulating library value, and individual librarians have sought to propagate communication strategies through conference presentations and publications (Tolson and Lewis, 2016; Albert, 2014). One persistent obstacle in value communication is dissemination of research results. For example, the ACRL posters designed to share ground-breaking library impact research proclaim: “Studies indicate that...” but these phrases were followed by correlations discovered by a single research study, with one citation listed (ACRL, 2014), an incongruity that could undercut the message with some audiences. The ACRL *Value of Academic Libraries Statement* cited more studies, but was also met—even within academic library circles—with concerns that the document overstated or oversimplified the connection between libraries and student success (ACRL, 2016b).

Such communication tensions and responses are understandable given the early stage of academic library value research. In their development of the “Action-Oriented Research Agenda on Library Contributions to Student Learning and Success,” OCLC Research has an opportunity to make necessary advances in the development of a deeper research field that can be shared with stakeholders and to counsel librarians about the advantages of and the need for replication research that will systematically build a large body of academic library research results on which to build convincing value communications. They can also advise librarians

about best practices in creating replication studies, adapting them to individual campus contexts, and, ultimately, disseminating and communicating a growing body of defensible, explainable, and influential research results.

Obstacle 5: Conducting Research without Sufficient Resources

A final obstacle that OCLC Research can help librarians overcome is the challenge of engaging in academic library value research when resources are limited. Many librarians are intrigued and inspired to investigate the impact of their libraries on student success, but are stymied by the same resource constraints that affect many assessment or research projects: too little time or too few resources (financial, personnel, etc.); lack of knowledge, skills, or conceptual framework; lack of process coordination, structures, expectations, and rewards; and/or difficulties managing expectations (Bresciani et al., 2009). While OCLC Research cannot solve these issues in individual libraries, they have an opportunity to share suggestions for inquiry questions, methods, and/or strategies that are feasible even with resource shortages. When more librarians from a wider variety of academic libraries and higher education institutions contribute to the development of a body of academic library value research—irrespective of resource plentitude or paucity—all academic librarians benefit. The development of the “Action-Oriented Research Agenda on Library Contributions to Student Learning and Success” offers a unique opportunity to excite, enlist, and mobilize librarians nationwide that hail from institutions of all types and sizes.

Conclusion

The OCLC Research team, in partnership with ACRL, has a window of opportunity to use the “Action-Oriented Research Agenda on Library Contributions to Student Learning and Success” to propel the academic library value research agenda into a new phase of productivity and proliferation. With that opportunity, however, comes challenges. OCLC research must 1) maintain a disciplined focus without stymying generative thought, 2) craft inquiry questions that will both guide and inspire the academic library profession, and 3) offer librarians suggestions and support for overcoming a number of potential hindrances. Possible obstacles include navigating the correlation vs. causation divide, negotiating the student learning “surrogate problem,” overcoming inter-institutional research challenges, replicating and communicating research results, and pursuing under-resourced academic library value research. In short, ACRL and OCLC need to seize this chance to build upon the existing academic library value research agenda by asking the right research questions, pointing the way to the right data and evidence to answer those questions, and insisting that libraries do the right thing with the research results: using them to not only prove—but more importantly improve—the impact of the academic library on their institutional missions, especially student learning and success.

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