Information Outlook, March/April 2014

Special Libraries Association

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MEASURING VALUE USING RESEARCH PRODUCTIVITY AND LEARNING OUTCOMES
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The Very Essence of Association

SLA connects you with thousands of other information professionals. What better way to strengthen that connection than by attending the SLA 2014 Annual Conference?

BY JANICE LACHANCE, SLA CEO

As I write this column, the calendar says March, but at SLA headquarters, all thoughts—well, most thoughts—are on June and the SLA 2014 Annual Conference & INFO-EXPO. We’re putting the finishing touches on the Conference Preview, which provides an overview of the conference and highlights some of its key events. By the time you read this, the Conference Preview will be available online on our Website. Be sure to review it and start planning how to make the most of your time in Vancouver.

If you haven’t already, I encourage you to register for SLA 2014 before the early bird registration period ends on April 11. Registering now will save you $170, which is how much the price of a full member registration will increase on April 12. Frequent attendees will tell you that you really cannot put a price tag on the educational, networking, business and fellowship opportunities available at SLA conferences, but the sooner you register, the more you’ll save. Go to www.sla.org/attend/2014-annual-conference/ and register now!

Like every SLA Annual Conference, SLA 2014 will offer some innovations and improvements that build on feedback from previous conferences. For example, the agenda for Vancouver includes nine “Spotlight Series” presentations that will take the individual “Spotlight Sessions” from past conferences to a new level. These nine presentations will address three themes—embedded information services, digital content and big data, and leadership in the human age—that reflect trends and issues of high interest to conference attendees and their organizations. The sessions are as follows:

- **Academic Libraries: Supporting Innovation and Entrepreneurship**
- **A.D. (After Digitization): Managing and Marketing Your Digital Content**
- **Data for Dinner: Data Mining from Farm to Table**
- **Developing and Leading a Knowledge-Sharing Culture**
- **Disruption, Alignment and Embedded Librarianship: Connecting the Dots and Avoiding the Traps**
- **Information Overload: Taking Advantage of Taxonomies**
- **It’s a Brave MOOC World: Challenges and Opportunities for Librarians**
- **State Government: Information and the Copyright Conundrum**
- **Working across Cultures**

SLA 2014 will also feature several “Quick Takes,” which are short but intense 15-minute learning sessions on a variety of topics. The titles of these sessions run the gamut, from “Altmetrics: The Basics” to “Top 5 Tips for Developing Powerful LinkedIn Profiles” to “Technology Tools for Instruction.”

For those of you interested in research, SLA 2014 will feature 12 contributed papers, four of which will be presented each day. The papers are becoming more popular each year and have generated a growing following among SLA members. If you’ve never attended a contributed papers session, make room in your conference agenda for one of them.

By the time we gather in Vancouver in June, we’ll know the results of the 2014 member survey, which closed on February 28. The survey results are important for several reasons, most notably the fact that they will help us identify new programs and benefits we can offer to make SLA membership more rewarding. It has been eight years since we last surveyed our members, and much has changed during that time—in 2006, Twitter had just been founded, and most of you had little or no familiarity with Facebook and LinkedIn, let alone smartphones, the cloud, and other technologies. The current survey will tell us how SLA members have evolved since 2006, the challenges you consider most important today, and how SLA can help make you more agile and productive and better prepared to capitalize on opportunities that arise.

The SLA Annual Conference creates a feeling of connection—to our profession, our values, and our special role in society—that cannot be duplicated in a Webinar or through a discussion list.
Of course, the primary benefit of membership in SLA is reflected in our name—the Special Libraries Association. Information professionals join SLA because they want to associate with and learn from their peers and help advance the information profession and its values. Vendors partner with us because they have a vested interest in the success of our members and the information profession. Organizations like the Institute of Museum and Library Services and the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions collaborate with us on special projects because they want to benefit from the special expertise and knowledge that our members possess.

The SLA Annual Conference & INFO-EXPO is the very essence of association. It brings together, under one roof, information professionals and the sponsors, vendors, and outside communities that partner and affiliate with us. It creates a feeling of connection—to our profession, our values, and our special role in society—that cannot be duplicated in a Webinar or through a discussion list. So I’ll close this column as I opened it—by urging you again to register now for SLA 2014. I promise you’ll be thinking of Vancouver long after the conference ends. SLA
Perry Fills Vacant Spot on SLA Board of Directors

Valerie Perry has joined the SLA Board of Directors as past division cabinet chair, filling a spot left vacant by the recent passing of Ann Koopman.

The director of branch libraries at the University of Kentucky, Valerie joined SLA in 1998. She has been especially active in the SLA Kentucky Chapter and the Food, Agriculture, and Nutrition (FAN) Division, serving as president of the former and chair of the latter. She has also served in leadership roles in the Science-Technology Division and as a division conference program planner.

Along with the current division cabinet chair, Tara Murray, and the chair-elect, Juliane Schneider, Valerie will liaise with SLA division leaders and help them guide their units and integrate their initiatives into the association’s overall mission.

Loyalty Guide and Webinar Now Available on SLA Website

A multi-year initiative designed to help SLA and its units build and maintain more loyal relationships with members, vendors, sponsors and others that has culminated in the publication of a 150-page primer.

The SLA Loyalty Field Guide, available on SLA’s Website, explains the three principles of loyalty—belonging, purpose and trust—and shows how they apply to the five groups targeted by the Loyalty Initiative. That initiative, launched in 2010, was led by James Kane, a leading expert on loyalty who launched in 2010, was led by James King presented a Webinar that provided an overview of the Loyalty Initiative. He delivered a brief history of the initiative, described the benefits and key components of loyalty, discussed the five focus areas of the initiative, and outlined some practical steps on how to implement a loyalty perspective in SLA units. The Powerpoint slide deck and GoToWebinar recording (WMV) have been uploaded into the Resources section of the Loyalty Initiative Website.

“This was, and remains, a living, breathing initiative,” the Field Guide states, “with a singular goal—to reinforce a culture of loyalty within SLA where members, leaders, volunteers, sponsors, vendors, and strategic partners feel welcomed, appreciated, and valued, and where the association offers more than a repository of resources and collection of services, but a special sense of community, as well.”

For more information, visit the SLA Loyalty Initiative site. SLA
Mobile Devices Becoming More Widespread, Survey Finds
Slightly more than one-third of American teenagers and adults now own all three of the leading mobile devices—tablets, smartphones and laptops—a 42 percent growth over the previous year and a reflection of the continuing adoption of tablets (up 33 percent) and smartphones (up 18 percent).

Deloitte Consulting’s annual Digital Democracy Survey (formally known as the State of the Media Democracy) also found that women comprise a growing share of these so-called “digital omni-vores.” They now account for 45 percent of this group, up from 35 percent two years ago.

Other key findings of the survey include the following:

- The share of American consumers who stream content increased from 17 percent in 2012 to 32 percent in 2013, a trend that is even more pronounced among trailing Millennials (those aged 14 to 24).
- More than four in five survey respondents (86 percent) multitask while watching television at home, with Millennials engaging in an average of four activities at once. Fewer than one-quarter (22 percent) of multitasking activities are directly related to the programs that consumers are watching.
- More than half (54 percent) of U.S. consumers check their social networks daily, some as often as 10 times a day or more.
- Respondents spend almost a quarter (23 percent) of their gaming time on smartphones and tablets, a trend that is even more pronounced among younger consumers and especially young women.

More information about the survey is available from Deloitte.

Moral Rights at Center of Publishing Dispute
A publisher’s requirement that authors waive their “moral rights” is raising concerns within the academic community, with one university librarian calling it a “bizarre clause” and “a serious threat to core academic values.”

Kevin Smith, director of the Office of Copyright and Scholarly Communication at Duke University, noted in a blog post that the Nature Publishing Group’s License to Publish contains the following language: The Author(s) hereby waive or agree not to assert (where such waiver is not possible at law) any and all moral rights they may now or in the future hold in connection with the Contribution and the Supplementary Information.

“Moral rights are recognized by most countries of the world (including the U.K., where NPG has its corporate offices) and usually include two basic rights—the right of attribution and the right to preserve the integrity of one’s work,” Smith wrote in his blog post.

“This is not an incidental matter; the clause is carefully structured to attempt to get authors even from the countries that do not allow the waiver of moral rights—they are considered that important—still to promise not to assert those rights (whether or not that would be enforceable in those countries). Nature actively does not want its authors to be able to insist that their names always be associated with their work. Why? Does NPG imagine reusing articles it is given to publish in other ways, without providing proper attribution? If this seems like a remote possibility, it remains the only conceivable reason that NPG would insert this bizarre clause.”

Grace Baynes, Nature Publishing’s head of communications, defended the waiver requirement in a post on the company’s blog.

“We take seriously our responsibility towards the integrity of the scientific record,” she wrote. “The ‘moral rights’ language included in our license to publish is there to ensure that the journal and its publisher are free to publish formal corrections or retractions of articles where the integrity of the scientific record may be compromised by the disagreement of authors. This is not our preferred approach to dealing with corrections and retractions, and we work with authors and institutions to try [to] seek consensus first. We believe researchers should be credited for their work, and as a founding member of ORCID [an initiative to provide a registry of unique researcher identifiers and a transparent method of linking research activities and outputs to those identifiers], we have implemented ORCID integration on nature.com to foster dis-ambiguated accreditation.” SLA
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Measuring Value Using Research Productivity and Learning Outcomes

BY IDENTIFYING AND ENCOURAGING BEHAVIORS THAT PEOPLE USE TO FIND INFORMATION, LIBRARIANS AND INFORMATION PROFESSIONALS CAN INCREASE THEIR VALUE.

BY STUART HALEs

R ecessions always cause belt tightening and prompt close scrutiny of expenses, but the current economic slowdown—now in its sixth year—has called into question some assumptions that previously were considered sacrosanct. For example, a college degree, long seen as a necessity for obtaining a good job and ensuring a successful career, is now being viewed more skeptically by teenagers (and their parents) who are wary of assuming too much debt. Businesses, meanwhile, are hoarding cash while reducing spending on research and other “non-essential” functions as they await the return of more favorable economic trends.

These developments have had repercussions on libraries and information centers and especially on their attempts to justify their budgets and operations. Academic libraries, which once boasted of the size of their physical collections, now are eager to trumpet their impact on students’ improvements in areas such as grades and graduation rates. Corporate information centers, meanwhile, have shifted from tracking information requests and using other number-based metrics to providing “softer” value measures such as narratives of how they provide assistance to important research projects.

Such approaches, while not without some merit, may ultimately prove counterproductive in the long run. As the theme articles in this issue of Information Outlook argue, librarians and information professionals are more likely to make positive contributions to students’ and researchers’ performance when they create environments that enable their clients to succeed rather than attempt to manage or direct their clients’ success.

What would such an environment look like? Jenny Emanuel Taylor, who led a team of University of Illinois librarians working with Dow Chemical to collect data to help the company improve its research tools and services, says the secret is to watch your clients search for information, then talk to them about their experience. You will quickly learn how they prefer to conduct research and can use that knowledge to create an environment that accommodates their needs.

“Watching someone search for information, either in person or virtually, will give you insights that you will never acquire through any other method,” she writes in her article. “By observing people using their computer, you can see exactly the processes they use to conduct research, which is eye opening once you experience it. After you finish observing your users, interview them about their search habits. Frame the interview as a conversation—ask them how they conduct research, find out what they like and dislike about the research services and tools they use, and ask them to talk honestly about the
services you offer.”

At Dow, Taylor and her team administered a survey, then conducted follow-up interviews. They found that the researchers they studied wanted the following:

• Easy access to the full text of articles through a link from a database;
• Short (1-2 minutes) training videos that were specific to their needs;
• A deeper understanding of Boolean logic, subject headings, controlled vocabularies, and search options so they could build upon their existing search tactics; and
• A resource similar to federated searching or discovery systems, which are common among academic libraries.

What they did not want, Taylor discovered, was personal help. Their priorities were better search tools and the training to use them efficiently so they could be more productive.

“The study participants wanted to become more efficient researchers, learn advanced Google tricks, and understand how to organize information with citation management software and document organizers,” she writes. “They also wanted to search for information independently and not turn to a librarian every time they needed information.”

In keeping with this sentiment, Taylor cautions information professionals who study their own organizations not to confuse their professional interests with those of their clients. “It is often difficult to remain quiet and listen when an information user is talking about her struggles with searching or is doing something you think is wrong,” she writes. “As librarians, we like to jump into conversations to help, but you cannot do that when conducting user research.”

Similarly, Megan Oakleaf urges academic librarians not to let their professional ambitions cloud their better judgment when trying to prove their value to university officials.

“’Librarians … may be derailed by the desire to demonstrate that the use of library SERs [services, expertise, and resources] and learning are not simply correlated—i.e., when one factor (library SERs use) increases, the other one (learning) does as well—but rather are causally linked,’ she writes. “For example, instead of seeking to show that students who participate in library instruction obtain higher grades on a course assignment, librarians may try to prove that the library instruction causes the student to earn a higher grade.”

Like their counterparts in research organizations, then, academic librarians should focus on the behaviors of their clients. They can then create an environment that facilitates those behaviors that lead to better outcomes.

“Instead of seeking to establish causal links, librarians should consider the identification of correlations a worthy goal,” Oakleaf writes. “When librarians know that a particular set of student behaviors are associated with learning outcomes attainment, they can encourage students to emulate more of those positive behaviors, which in turn should result in increased achievement of learning outcomes.”

Over time, Oakleaf says, academic librarians can expand their research on library SERs to determine whether they affect outcomes such as internship and job placement. Ultimately, such research will result in improvements in both the outcomes and the SERs.

“When correlation research is continuous, librarians can reflect on both the SERs librarians provide and the differences they make in the lives of students, then take action based on their findings,” she writes. “After all, the point of correlation research is not to prove that library SERs impact student learning. The goal, in the end, is to improve them both.”

To learn more about how information professionals and librarians can enhance their value by facilitating student learning and research productivity, turn the page.
Studying Your Users to Improve Services

SURVEYS OF, AND INTERVIEWS WITH, INDUSTRY RESEARCHERS REVEALED LESSONS THAT INFORMATION PROFESSIONALS IN ALL SECTORS CAN APPLY TO THEIR ORGANIZATIONS.

BY JENNY EMANUEL TAYLOR, EDD, MSIS

In 2011, the Dow Chemical Corporation reached out to several universities in an attempt to create research partnerships. One project that evolved from this effort was a partnership between the University of Illinois libraries and Dow’s Technical Information Services (TIS) unit.

The primary aims of this project were to study how employees conduct research at Dow and to use the collected data to influence the development of future internal search tools and improve the research services offered to Dow’s workforce. As the primary university investigator on this project, I was interested in studying a group of information users who normally are not accessible to me and whose research needs differ from those of faculty and students in an academic setting. Also, I wanted to identify the research skills that were important to scientific researchers working in industry, especially the skills that graduate students should learn if they desire to work for a large research-oriented corporation such as Dow.

Over the next two years, my colleagues and I studied researchers at Dow using surveys and observational interviews. What follows is a summary of what we did and what we learned, and some tips on how others could conduct a similar study within their organization.

Study Methodologies

The study consisted of three phases: an initial overview survey, semi-structured observational interviews, and a follow-up survey to obtain feedback on changes that were made based on data collected during the first two phases. The initial survey, conducted in the first half of 2012, provided us with an overview of how research is conducted at Dow and included questions about the resources and technologies used, the preferred training methods, and the demographic characteristics of the workforce. A survey link was sent by e-mail to members of Dow’s Research and Development Division; employees who received the e-mail were told that if they participated in the survey, they would have the opportunity to win a $50 gift card to Amazon.com. Approximately 1,000 employees participated in the survey, providing the project team with valuable information about the individuals who use TIS tools and services as well as the tools they use.

The survey asked researchers if they were willing to participate in a follow-up interview. These interviews, which took place during the latter half of 2012, provided us with richer data than the survey because we were able to ask more specific questions. A graduate student at the University of Illinois performed the interviews remotely using teleconferencing software, which allowed us to view and record the researchers’ computers while they searched for information online.

Before conducting the interviews,
we developed question prompts (e.g., “search for information on a chemical compound”) because we were unsure whether the participants would already have a topic in mind. However, almost all of the researchers were eager to show us—usually in great detail—how they had found information for one or more specific projects. They also had plenty to say about the research tools available to them.

We followed up on this “show and tell” by asking the interviewees to talk about search tools (for both their personal and professional use) and specifically what they like and do not like about these tools. We also asked them to describe their ideal scholarly search tool and how they would like to be trained to use this tool. All told, we conducted 27 interviews, averaging 45 minutes in length. Each interviewee received a gift card to Amazon.com for participating.

After the interviews, TIS made several changes to its research services, revised its section on Dow’s intranet, and created training videos. We decided to get feedback on these changes, so in 2013 we surveyed the same users who had participated in the original survey. The 2013 survey focused on the new tools and services and specifically what they like and do not like about them. Each interviewee received a gift card to Amazon.com for participating.

“On demand” was a term used frequently by study participants. They want to get fast help at their point of need. Many turned to YouTube tutorials for help.

Lessons Learned

Although Dow only wanted to make improvements to its specific services, my team of academic researchers learned a variety of things that are of interest to the special library community at large.

Lack of awareness. Most of Dow’s researchers possessed very basic research skills; they had learned (usually from colleagues) a few “survival skills” to search for information. Some knew when and where to ask for assistance, and they did so when they felt that missing information would have negative consequences for their projects. Almost all wanted to improve their searching skills and believed that their lack of such skills could be detrimental to their careers, but many did not know where to turn and were unaware of the scholarly services and resources available to assist them.

Marketing is a challenge all libraries face and an important consideration to keep in mind in light of this project’s findings. Many users stated that their participation in the study marked their first experience with TIS, but they were glad to have the opportunity to learn more about what TIS does. Several study participants requested that research skills and resources be included in the orientation for new employees.

Barriers to access. The Dow researchers cited numerous barriers to accessing scholarly information. Many of them desired products and services that were available from academic institutions; most importantly, they wanted easier access to scholarly resources when they were away from work. Access through a VPN was slow and unreliable, and remembering passwords for each resource was an extra burden. More than one researcher expressed the need for a service such as OCLC’s EZproxy, which allows seamless access to all resources through a single login tied to an organization’s centralized login service (e.g., Microsoft’s Active Directory).

We found that many researchers would bypass the subscription resources offered to them in favor of Google products. They preferred the simplicity and thoroughness of Google, although they expressed concern that Google is easily influenced by advertisers and may not always have the most unbiased and accurate information. They also said that accessibility was an important consideration, and Google’s full-time, global availability was viewed favorably.

Researchers also wanted easy access to the full text of articles. They wanted a way to link from a database to the full text, as is provided by the OpenURL framework of products such as 360 Core and SFX. These products aggregate all journal subscriptions, providing an A-Z list of journal titles, and link from a scholarly index or Google Scholar directly to the full text of an article. They can also link to a document delivery service to easily request other articles.

Ultimately, there was a strong desire for a Google-like tool that would allow users to search multiple resources and data types through a single interface, with only a few clicks needed to access the full text. A handful of users knew about federated searching or discovery systems, which are commonplace among academic libraries, and these users indicated they would like to have a similar resource available.

Training. Information users want to be better researchers and are likely to participate in training activities if they know what is being offered and the training is easily accessible. They do not want to sit through a lecture (either in person or virtually) and watch a librarian talk about the features of a particular resource. They want to be trained on their schedule, using a hands-on format, and want to approach things in a more advanced way.

“On demand” was a term used frequently by study participants. They want to get fast help at their point of need. Many turned to YouTube tutorials for help and wanted more short (1-2 minutes) videos specific to their needs.
Watching someone search for information, either in person or virtually, will give you insights that you will never acquire through any other method.

Videos can easily be created with programs such as Camtasia, uploaded to YouTube or a company intranet, then linked from within an electronic resource or from the Website that users visit to access all information resources. TIS implemented its own video trainings in response to the survey and interviews and received very positive feedback.

Especially in the case of longer trainings, researchers wanted a hands-on format. In an ideal training session, researchers would bring their laptops to a centralized location and have the trainer search for real-world examples while explaining how the resource works and the features that are available. This would be followed by an open period, during which time users would conduct searches on their own while the trainer remained available for questions and assistance.

Finally, study participants expressed a desire for training to focus on more advanced topics. They believed they could enter search terms into an electronic resource and get something relevant; however, they wanted to build upon basic search tactics with an understanding of Boolean logic, subject headings, controlled vocabularies, and more advanced search options. Not understanding these advanced features made researchers believe they were not doing something correctly or missing important information. They also wanted to search for information independently and not turn to a librarian every time they needed information.

Another need voiced by the researchers was training in advanced research skills that are not specific to a particular tool. The study participants want to become more efficient researchers, learn advanced Google tricks, and understand how to organize information with citation management software and document organizers.

**Studying Your Own Users**

If you want to conduct a similar study at your organization, you do not need a lot of specialized expertise. More than anything, you need time and the ability to listen objectively to your information users. Incentives for participants are nice, but not necessary—many employees will participate if they understand that the results will directly help them do their jobs better. However, incentives may help recruit users who do not have strong opinions (which is fine, as you want to elicit a variety of views).

As mentioned previously, objectivity is extremely important. It is often difficult to remain quiet and listen when an information user is talking about her struggles with searching or is doing something you think is wrong. As librarians, we like to jump into conversations to help, but you cannot do that when conducting user research.

When I conduct interviews, I often bring up points at the end that I think will help users address their problems. “I see you struggled with finding the full text,” I will say. “If you click on this link, you’ll get it.” But I will also note that because finding the full text was extremely difficult, there may be a design issue that needs to be brought to the attention of the vendor or covered in training.

A survey is an extremely basic tool that can give you an overview of how information users work with research tools. Survey questions must be kept simple—for example, asking users to select the activities they perform, rate the services and tools they use, and answer demographic questions. Surveys can be created with a variety of tools, but I prefer Survey Monkey, which is inexpensive, includes robust analytical tools, and requires no statistical knowledge to crunch the data.

I strongly encourage you to observe your users in their “native” environment. Watching someone search for information, either in person or virtually, will give you insights that you will never acquire through any other method. By observing people while they are using their computer, you can see exactly the processes they use to conduct research, which is eye opening once you experience it.

After you finish observing your users, interview them about their search habits. Frame the interview as a conversation—ask them how they conduct research, find out what they like and dislike about the research services and tools they use, and ask them to talk honestly about the services you offer. You can take notes throughout the interview process, or you can use screen-recording software such as Camtasia or (more complicated) usability software such as Morae.

The biggest obstacle to making your library more valuable to researchers is getting started. It can be intimidating to interact with your users, especially if they do not have positive things to say. But studying users qualitatively is very rewarding, and you will learn so much about them and about your resources and services that you will enhance the value of your library or information center far into the future. **SLA**
Correlating Library Services, Expertise, and Resources with Student Learning

IDENTIFYING LIBRARY BEHAVIORS THAT APPEAR TO BE CONNECTED TO POSITIVE LEARNING OUTCOMES IS A REALISTIC RESEARCH GOAL AND A USEFUL MEASURE OF VALUE.

BY MEGAN OAKLEAF, MLS, PHD

The quest to demonstrate academic library value is not new, but it is certainly resurgent. Since the Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL) published *The Value of Academic Libraries: A Comprehensive Research Review and Report* in 2010, academic librarians have redoubled their efforts to show that their libraries contribute to the missions of their overarching institutions.

Although institutional missions are multifaceted and complex, one goal is emphasized at nearly all institutions: student learning. As a result, academic librarians nationwide have embraced the challenge of connecting their libraries with student learning. Indeed, many librarians have moved beyond asserting that their libraries enhance student learning and have started using data to correlate student use of library services, expertise, and resources (SERs) with learning outcomes. In other words, librarians are beginning to demonstrate that students who engage more with library SERs may learn more. (see Figure 1)

Although connections between libraries and learning may seem intuitive, In fact, librarians seeking correlations between libraries and learning have a number of challenges to surmount.

**Getting the Questions Right**

One major challenge many librarians face is the difficulty of designing a workable research question to guide their correlational investigations. Questions of this nature have three main components: (1) Do library SERS (2) correlate with, contribute to, affect, influence, help, cause, determine, or relate to (3) student learning?

Sample research questions might include the following:

- Does the (1) physical and digital/virtual reference desk (2) contribute to (3) improved GPA scores at graduation?

![Figure 1: Library SERs Lead to Student Learning](image)

**MEGAN OAKLEAF** is an associate professor in the iSchool at Syracuse University in New York. She speaks and writes frequently about assessment, evidence-based decision making, and information literacy instruction. She can be reached at moakleaf@syr.edu.
MEASURING VALUE USING RESEARCH PRODUCTIVITY AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Does (1) engagement in library instruction (2) impact (3) students’ ability to use information, as measured by student test scores?

- Does the (1) use of interlibrary loan services (2) help students contribute to the (3) use of quality information resources in senior capstone projects and theses?

To build questions with these three components (see Figure 2), librarians need to perform a number of tasks. To address component #1, librarians must identify which library SERs may impact learning. To do so, they need to investigate the mission, goals, and strategic priorities of their institutions and determine which learning goals are most important and valued. Then, librarians need to determine which library SERs align (or could align) with those institutional learning goals. Next, they must identify which students use the SERs under consideration. Finally, librarians need to collect impact-focused data and evidence about those SERs.

For component #3, librarians must identify useful measures of student learning, but finding rigorous and valid measures of learning can be difficult (Oakleaf 2008). Surveys supply self-reported data, and many students dramatically under- or over-report their own learning. Fixed-choice tests are ill-suited for measuring complex and contextualized constructs like information literacy. Performance-based assessments can be difficult for librarians to obtain, since most are submitted directly to course instructors.

Even when librarians have access to performance assessments, they vary considerably from student to student and course to course. As a result, rigorous rubrics are needed to obtain reliable data. Furthermore, students are not always motivated to complete assessments that are distributed and required by librarians (rather than course instructors). Even when they work with course instructors to collect assessment data, librarians may be confronted with a host of curriculum integration and logistical difficulties.

Finally, librarians must consider component #2—the relationship between library SERs and student learning. Librarians posing research questions may be derailed by the desire to demonstrate that the use of library SERs and learning are not simply correlated—i.e., when one factor (library SERs use) increases, the other one (learning) does as well—but rather are causally linked. For example, instead of seeking to show that students who participate in library instruction obtain higher grades on a course assignment, librarians may try to prove that the library instruction causes the student to earn a higher grade.

When librarians seek to show that library SERs cause learning—and that there is no other factor contributing to that learning than those SERs—they place themselves in a very difficult position. Educational assessment does not occur in a closed environment, and the randomized control trials used in other disciplines to prove causality are not typically possible. In an open environment, it is difficult or impossible to account for all other possible influences and explanations for a change in learning, and it is likely that additional, uncontrolled factors are at play.

Instead of seeking to establish causal links, librarians should consider the identification of correlations a worthy goal. Finding correlations enables librarians to identify behaviors that appear to be connected to positive outcomes. When librarians know that a particular set of student behaviors is associated with learning outcomes attainment, they can encourage students to emulate more of those positive behaviors, which in turn should result in increased achievement of learning outcomes.

Thus, it is enough for librarians to know that students who use more library SERs attain higher grades. Of course, there may be other factors contributing to the higher grades, but determining that increased use of library SERs is part of a successful formula for students is both a realistic research goal and a useful result for librarians seeking to support students’ academic achievement.

Acquiring the Necessary Skills

In addition to posing good research questions, librarians must possess additional skills in order to correlate library SERs and student learning. First, they should develop their ability to think at a macro-level rather than confining themselves to a narrower, more traditional, library-centric vision. They must be mindful of higher education conversations taking place nationwide and globally, particularly those focused on the role of higher education and the importance of student learning. They need to understand how these conversations shape the missions, goals, and strategic priorities of their individual institutions. And they should make conscious connections between those institutional missions, goals, and priorities and the SERs offered by their libraries.

By adopting a macro-level perspective, librarians will be better prepared to see the “big picture” necessary to conduct and communicate the results of correlation research.

In addition to macro-level skills, librarians also need micro-level skills. Because impact occurs to one student at a time, impact data must be recorded at the individual level, not in the aggregate. Thus, librarians should develop the skills required to document individual student use of library SERs and link that use to individual student learning outcomes, all the while using secure data practices and maintaining a personally identifying information private. Although the use of individual-level data is sometimes daunting, librarians must...
overcome the challenge of gathering and analyzing micro-level data while upholding strict privacy standards.

After acquiring macro-level and micro-level skills, librarians seeking to conduct correlation studies also need to learn a number of practical research and assessment skills. Librarians should learn the rules and requirements of human subjects research as well as strategies for partnering with other campus units and individuals interested in student learning (including educational assessment and institutional research professionals). Other important skills include a facility with assessment tools and techniques as well as the technical ability to manage data, conduct statistical analyses, and interpret the results. A more detailed skills list is included in Academic Library Value: The Impact Starter Kit (Oakleaf 2012).

Communicating with Research Stakeholders

Communication is a third significant challenge for librarians engaging in correlational research. Librarians need to include their stakeholders (students, faculty, administrators, resource allocators, assessment professionals, parents, employers, and others) as research partners who are integral to each stage of the process.

Early on, librarians should elicit information about stakeholder priorities. Stakeholders should also be included during the research process, as participants if possible. Most importantly, librarians must communicate the results of their research (as well as the actions taken based on those results) to stakeholders in ways that are appropriate and of interest to each group.

Addressing the Usual Barriers

Of course, correlational research is not immune from the challenges that plague many other library initiatives. Common challenges include too little time and too few resources to conduct desired projects. Other difficulties may arise, such as a paucity of support structures like acknowledged assessment experts to act as “point” people or an assessment committee to provide guidance or advice. Additional barriers might include a lack of clear expectations, mandates, or rewards for conducting correlation research. In some cases, there may not be enough support for the risk-taking required to investigate linkages between library SERs and student learning.

Learning from the Past

To deal with these challenges, librarians should familiarize themselves with past correlational research and use that knowledge to inform future research efforts.

The Value of Academic Libraries: A Comprehensive Research Review and Report (ACRL 2010) lays the groundwork for the correlational research currently being conducted in libraries. The report summarizes existing library value research in all types of libraries, including academic, special, public, and school libraries. It also provides a research agenda outlining “next steps” in library value research and numerous ideas for possible correlations between library SERs and institutional missions, goals, and outcomes.

Since the report’s publication, correlation research has proliferated. In the United Kingdom, the Library Impact Data Project was an early effort linking student library use with student achievement. In Australia, the “Library Cube” connected library use with student performance. At the University of Minnesota, librarians correlated library use with both student success and retention. Additional examples of research correlating library SERs with student learning are listed in Appendix A.

The rapid increase of correlational research focused on student learning is matched by similar investigations of faculty productivity. The publications listed in Appendix B are also relevant to librarians seeking to engage in correlational research.

In addition to published research, librarians planning to correlate library SERs and student learning can participate in professional development supported by ACRL and the Association of Research Libraries, including Assessment Immersion, Assessment in Action, and the Library Assessment Conference.

Moving into the Future

What does the future hold for librarians seeking to correlate the use of library SERs with student learning? Certainly, they must overcome a number of significant challenges. Librarians intending to conduct future correlation research need to do the following:

• Align library SERs with institutional missions.
• Identify library SERs that may impact student learning.
• Write effective research questions.
• Collect evidence of the use of library SERs on an individual level.
• Gather data about student learning on an individual level.
• Determine means for protecting individual level data.
• Recognize the utility of correlational connections instead of limiting themselves to the pursuit of elusive causal relationships.
• Attain practical research skills (e.g., follow human subject research practices, establish campus partnerships with educational assessment or institutional research professionals, gain facility with assessment tools/techniques, increase statistical analysis skills, craft effective reporting mechanisms, etc.).
• Communicate and partner with stakeholders.
• Overcome typical project challenges.
• Build on past library correlation research.

Once they surmount these challenges, librarians will likely find that many library SERs correlate with student learning. Determining where those correlations are strong and identifying the library SERs that have the most potential impact on learning will enable...
librarians to begin to demonstrate and then communicate library value.

As librarians continue conducting correlation studies, they can expand their analyses, collaborate with institutional and library colleagues, share their findings, and build a long-term, nuanced understanding of library value.

Future correlation studies offer opportunities to include additional data in each research cycle. As librarians amass data about library SERs and student learning, they can replicate their initial results and then conduct more rigorous and probing research. For example, librarians may broaden their focus to include more or different library SERs. They can also collect more data at an individual level by adding swipe-cards to library service points, implementing transaction surveys like MINES for Libraries®, or requesting more detailed data from library resource vendors.

Librarians can also expand the student learning data they gather. For example, librarians could broaden their conception of student learning beyond the current data points (GPA, retention, and graduation) to outcomes revealed by student academic work, professional/educational test scores, engagement survey responses, internship/career placement measures, and so on. They could also investigate the impact of library SERs on a variety of student groups: first-year students, first-generation students, at-risk students, transfer students, international students, graduating students, students with specific majors, and students who participate in particular programs, to name a few.

Gathering student data for such detailed research will likely require librarians to increase their collaboration with institutional research professionals. Librarians will also need to decide whether to request and include institutional data in their in-house analyses or add library data to large-scale institutional data warehouses and participate in campus-wide efforts. The latter option could create opportunities for librarians to take active roles in campus assessment conversations and initiatives and, perhaps, be included more significantly in institutional and accreditation metrics. Librarians may also decide to share, or even compare, their findings within a consortium, with a peer group of libraries, or with the larger professional community. By communicating their findings, librarians can learn from each other and establish best practices.

Most importantly, when correlation research becomes a part of regular library or institutional data collection, librarians will be able to move beyond the limitations of one-time, episodic approaches and engage in longitudinal studies that investigate library SERs and student learning over time and across institutions. Indeed, correlation research that is iterative, cyclical, and ongoing leads to the greatest benefits. When correlation research is continuous, librarians can reflect on both the SERs librarians provide and the differences they make in the lives of students, then take action based on their findings. After all, the point of correlation research is not to prove that library SERs affect student learning. The goal, in the end, is to improve them both.

REFERENCES

APPENDIX A: Research Correlating Library SERs with Student Learning

APPENDIX B: Additional Correlational Research of Interest to Librarians
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10 Questions: Barbara Burton

SHE’S WORKED WITH INFORMATION AS A SELLER, A CONSUMER, A STUDENT, AND A TEACHER, BUT AT HEART SHE’S A LIBRARIAN WHO’S ALWAYS OPEN TO OPPORTUNITIES.

BY STUART HALES

For all the concern about too much information, much of what’s available (especially on the Web) is simply content that has been repurposed—that is, it has been altered to give it a fresh perspective, different purpose, or new format that may appeal to a selected audience. Repurposing enables content producers to lower their costs, expand their reach, and enhance their investment in the information that underlies the content.

Barbara Burton has mastered the art of repurposing, but she’s done it with her career, not with content. After earning a library degree from Rutgers University, she started working for information vendors in a variety of capacities, notably marketing, communication, sales, and education. Through it all, she thought of herself as first and foremost a librarian, even though she wasn’t performing duties associated with that role.

“I’ve rarely acted like a true librarian,” she says, “but I still tell people I’m a librarian. It’s an identity—it’s something that sticks to you that people understand.”

Now she’s back where she started, at Rutgers, this time pursuing a doctoral degree. This is a repurposing of sorts as well—she had thought about someday earning a doctoral degree in history, her undergraduate major, but instead is earning one in library and information science.

Information Outlook caught up with Barbara shortly after she took her qualifying exams and asked her about her career, her role in SLA, and why she considers Andrew Carnegie an inspiration for information professionals.

When did you decide to become a librarian, and why?

I have a bachelor’s degree in history, and history has always been my first passion. But when I got my degree, I realized that if I wanted to do something with history, my career was heading toward a PhD. I was ready for a break from academia at that point, and my mother, who was a trustee of our local library here in Westfield, said, “Why don’t you go to library school?” So I looked into it, and it seemed like a good thing to do.

I realized also that when you looked in the classified ads, even back then, there was nothing under H for historian, but there were things under L for librarian. So it gave me a focus and a way of getting into the workforce and trying things out.

I’ve rarely acted like a true librarian, because my career went immediately into the vendor side of information, but I still tell people I’m a librarian. It’s an identity—it’s something that sticks to you that people understand.

You seem to have a lot of itches to scratch—you’re a part-time university lecturer, you’re pursuing a doctoral...
degree, you’re an amateur historian and a student of the early library movement, you’ve entered local essay contests, and you’ve worked in positions involving marketing, sales, writing, and training in addition to information and library science. Are you someone who just never really figured out what she wanted to do when she grew up?

I think that’s pretty typical in the current environment—you have to be flexible. My career never followed a particularly straight path.

When I first started my library school program, I wanted to be a reference librarian in a special library. That seemed like it would be an interesting environment to be in. Then, when that didn’t happen, I ended up interviewing with the New York Times Information Bank, which was a new venture at that time. They were computerizing the morgue, which is what they call the clipped files of the newspaper, and they were looking for people to be abstractors and indexers.

So I thought, well, I’m not coming up with anything as a reference librarian in a special library, so I’ll give this a try. That kind of started my career off on a very different path than I had planned, but I enjoyed the work and kept doing it. As opportunities come up, you take advantage of what’s in front of you. It’s hard to stay with a script these days, especially with the information field changing so rapidly.

When and why did you join SLA, and how has membership in SLA enhanced your career?

When I started my first job with the New York Times Information Bank, they were exhibiting at the SLA conference, so I had my initial exposure then. Somewhere along the line—I don’t know if it’s still in my membership files somewhere—I became a member of the association. Since I identified myself as a librarian, it seemed like the place for me to be.

It’s turned out to be great for my career. I ended up going to many of the annual conferences as a vendor, and I developed a lot of friendships over the years with people who are on the other side of the table. Later I became president of the New Jersey Chapter, and I really enjoyed that a lot. I found running for office to be a good personal experience, because you meet a lot of people, and also a good professional experience, because it really gets you back to your profession, which is important. So I’m a fan of SLA in terms of the things you can learn and the people you can meet in the organization.

What did you do during the four years after you left Dow Jones and began your doctoral program at Rutgers?

As is the case with a lot of people who are made redundant, I was hired by Dow Jones as a consultant to perform some of the work that still needed to be done but now there was no employee to do. (laughs) So I worked on the newsletter and some of the other marketing efforts I had been involved with as an employee.

At that time I also had some family responsibilities—aging parents and two high school teenagers—so it seemed like a good time for me to give more time to my family, which I’m glad I did. I also got more involved in my community, in the Westfield Historical Society and the Westfield Historic Preservation Commission, and I was able to do some volunteer work that I really enjoyed.

Although you never pursued a PhD in history, you’re now enrolled in a doctoral program in library and information science. What made you decide to get a doctorate in library science?

What happened to my career at Dow Jones was that in 2005, after about 20 years, I was laid off. I was made redundant, as they say in England. It sounds so much nicer that way. (laughs)

A PhD was something I had kept thinking about after I finished my degree in history as an undergraduate. I liked the idea of going back to school and pursuing a PhD. So I was teaching at Rutgers and saw a flyer about the PhD program, and this little bell went off in my head and I thought, maybe now’s the time to pursue that.

I enjoy the academic environment, so I decided to give it a try. I’ve always been interested in the idea of conducting original research and contributing to knowledge in some small way, and it seemed like the moment was there to do it. So I applied to the program, and I started school in the fall of 2009.
At Rutgers, you’re teaching undergraduates and graduate students; in some of your previous jobs, you delivered training programs to corporate customers. Would you rather instruct college students or adult workers, and why?

There are certainly a lot of similarities between the two in terms of presenting information and trying to get it across to people. There are also similarities in the content. The course I teach primarily at Rutgers, in the MLIS Program, is called Principles of Searching, and there’s a lot of material that’s related to what I was doing in the corporate world.

One major difference is that when you’re working with students, they’re concerned with their grades; when you’re working with adults in business, that element is not there. The students also bring a lot of energy to the classroom setting because I enjoy the personal interaction.

You’ve entered essay contests conducted by your local newspaper, and in 2006 and 2007 you won awards for your essays. Is there a novel or autobiography in your future?

I would hope so. The next thing I’ll be doing in my PhD program is my dissertation, and I think it would be nice to create a dissertation that could be turned into a book. Information is such a fascinating topic right now; it’s so incredibly important in today’s world. There are physicists who are saying that information is the basis of reality, and there’s a lot of discussion going on in terms of the definition of information and what it means to us. So I’d love to create a dissertation that could be the basis of a book about what information is and why it matters so much.

I wrote the pieces for the newspaper because they were asking for people to write about Westfield’s history, and that’s one of the things I’m passionate about. I wrote one essay about the beginning of the Westfield library. It was slightly fictional—I created a couple of fictional characters and talked about how the library began. For the other piece, there had been a racetrack in Westfield at one time, so I took that topic and turned it into an essay.

Writing these essays was really for my personal enjoyment, because I like to write. That’s one of the things about the PhD program at Rutgers—it syncs well with my interests. It involves a lot of writing and reading, and those are things I enjoy doing.

In addition to SLA, you’ve been a member of the Church and Synagogue Library Association, which represents librarians in religious congregations. If you were a full-time church librarian, would you join SLA, and do you think SLA should try to reach out to information professionals who work in religious institutions?

I think it would make sense to at least have a conversation with church and synagogue library associations. I don’t know what synergies there might be—maybe we could create a division for them.

I think a lot of the librarians in churches and synagogues are volunteers, but that doesn’t mean they wouldn’t want to have the benefits of a professional association like SLA—the ability to talk to other people who are doing the same kind of work and the chance to network and share problems and resources. So if there were a division in SLA that could reach out to librarians in churches and synagogues—I don’t know what would happen, but I think it would be something worth trying. They are clearly special libraries; they are very different than public libraries.

One of the things that I find interesting about SLA is that we have a retired members’ caucus. Back in the day, when you became a librarian, you were a librarian for your entire career. Today, with people moving around so much...
and changing jobs and doing different things, that professional identity doesn’t always carry through to your retirement. Joining an association like SLA helps give you that focus.

Speaking of identities and careers, what insights did you gain while working on the vendor side of the information industry that have helped you in your information career?

As you know, there’s a saying that information wants to be free. It’s attributed to Stewart Brand, but the entire quote—I have it in my head because I used it recently for a paper I was writing—is, “On the one hand, information wants to be expensive because it’s so valuable. The right information in the right place just changes your life. On the other hand, information wants to be free because the cost of getting it out gets lower and lower all the time. So you have these two fighting against each other.”

Selling information as a commodity puts you opposite the people who think information should be free. It gives you a perspective of trying to put a monetary value on it, and doing that can create a sense of importance in some people’s minds. Buying something can make people feel like they’re getting something valuable. And when information can be freely passed from person to person, you start to ask yourself whether that, in some way, cheapens it.

Having said that, I am an advocate of free information and Creative Commons and Larry Lessig and all of the stuff he’s doing in terms of making information free, but the fact remains that information does cost something to create. Yes, you have Google, the ultimate source of free information, but they’re making it up on advertising and through other avenues. You have to account for the cost in some way.

As information has gotten more plentiful, the supply has been outstripping the demand. A while ago, I heard a quote about the Internet that it was like a cocktail party where everyone is talking, but nobody is listening. And on top of that you have copyright laws that turn information into property that can be sold, and the copyright period keeps getting extended. It’s now 70 years after the death of the author, which is quite far from what the original clause in the Constitution was meant to do. Copyright was originally intended to be a short-term thing to help the author recoup some of his costs, but now it has become a cash cow for publishing companies and people who may not even have had a hand in creating the information in the first place.

So you hit this barrier of copyrighted stuff that you can’t get.

Right now at Rutgers, I have access to all of those expensive databases that would be completely impossible for me to get to if I were a “regular” person. That’s where Creative Commons and those other initiatives come in, and I support them.

You’re earning credits toward a certificate in historic preservation, and you presented a paper a few years ago about early public libraries in New Jersey and especially those started by Andrew Carnegie. What’s the most important lesson that today’s librarians and info pros could learn from taking a tour of an early public library?

I’m a big fan of Andrew Carnegie. He was a proponent of the idea that people could educate themselves, as he had done. He wanted to give something back to society after making his fortune, and in some ways he is the father of modern philanthropy.

Carnegie started to give away his money later in life, and one of his pet projects was public libraries. But he also wanted to make sure that the local community would support the library, so when he gave a library grant, the community had to agree to support the ongoing maintenance of the building and pay librarians’ salaries. He wanted a commitment from the local community. That led to the laws we have now, where your taxes support public libraries.

Some people think of these Carnegie libraries as fancy relics of the past, but he didn’t want fancy buildings. He just wanted people to be able to educate and improve themselves by using the library. I sometimes wonder what he would think if he were alive today and saw all of these historic preservationists wanting to save these libraries, because I don’t think he cared about the buildings. His mission was providing people with the means to educate themselves, so today he might be setting up high-speed Internet access if that were the best way to achieve his goal of getting information to people.

I think the same thing holds true for librarians and information professional in our current environment—the goal is to get information to people so they can help themselves. The means isn’t what’s important; the end is what matters. SLA.
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At the SLA 2013 Annual Conference, newly named SLA Fellows and Rising Stars teamed up to deliver presentations on selected industry topics and trends. Beginning with this issue, the Fellows and Rising Stars will summarize their presentations in Information Outlook. In this issue, 2013 Fellow Mary Talley and 2013 Rising Star Aileen Marshall discuss how collaboration can open doors for information professionals to fill roles and provide services that are not traditionally associated with librarianship.

If you look back over the past 15 years or so at the shrinking job market for librarians and information professionals, it’s tempting to blame it on technology and especially the Internet. Certainly, technology has affected our profession dramatically—not just in terms of jobs, but also the way we work and the way others perceive us. Technology has stripped away many of the outward characteristics of our profession, technology has also done us a favor by eliminating many of the physical and psychological barriers that used to isolate us from our information users. This has allowed and encouraged us to develop more intimate and collaborative relationships with others, relationships that can help us get our expertise recognized and give our information users “aha” moments, as in “Aha, they can do this!”

But by removing these outward characteristics of our profession, technology has also given us a new and different approach to the way we work, the way we think, and the way we interact with others. It has allowed us to be valued and recognized outside our traditional roles and physical characteristics. Collaboration can help us by introducing us to new markets. Following are examples of how each of us has opened new markets through collaboration.

Mary: My first experience with new markets and collaboration was in the late 1970s, in my first professional position. I was working as a technical services librarian at a major university when I applied to be an instructor in a pilot program to teach research to undergraduates in a for-credit class. Although this would not be considered a new market today, at that time it was a pretty revolutionary concept. It was a revolutionary idea for me as well, because I had never taught a class before and wasn’t even a reference librarian.

The class was the brainchild of the dean of the university’s Library School, who selected me to be one of two librarians to teach the first class. Together, the other librarian and I planned the structure and content. The dean encouraged and respected our ideas and shared her experience and insights, but never dictated to us. It was a true collaboration—we developed a new, interactive approach that ended up being a collaboration of sorts with the students as well.

The dean was taking a risk, because the program’s future depended on how well we performed. But I believe our collaborative work gave us all confidence. I’m proud to say that the feedback from our classes secured the program to teach research to undergraduates in a for-credit class. Although this would not be considered a new market today, at that time it was a pretty revolutionary concept. It was a revolutionary idea for me as well, because I had never taught a class before and wasn’t even a reference librarian.

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I learned from this experience not to let a job description or function define who I was or could be. It gave me the confidence and courage to take on more challenging roles and open new markets for myself.

Today, I help information professionals develop strategies to better position themselves to provide value and wield influence in their organizations. My...
Consulting work has always involved collaborating with library managers and directors, but the way I collaborate has changed dramatically over the last 10 to 12 years. When I started out, I would work with management to assess the situation, write up my recommendations, hand them off, and leave. That was the traditional role of a management consultant, and that’s what was expected of me. Sometimes, however, my recommendations weren’t implemented the way I expected. When that happened, I felt I hadn’t done my job properly. I learned that my clients needed me to help them create a path to their future, not dictate what that path should be. The future my clients are hoping for is unique and personal, and it’s theirs, not mine. Now, I don’t just hand off recommendations—I collaborate with my clients to facilitate the strategic process, but the strategy itself is something they own. Change can only happen when my clients own both the challenges and the solutions.

**Aileen:** My first experience with collaborating to explore new markets was working at a regional jail as a correctional librarian. This experience was vastly different from working at a public or academic library because of the restrictions under which I had to operate. For example, I could not give the inmates every piece of information they asked for because of the way they might try to make use of certain information. Most of the time, they would use it to sue the jail if they could.

As a result, collaboration with the security staff was very important. They did not exactly share my perspective on the importance of educating inmates and giving them information so they could work toward a better future after being released. I really had to collaborate with the security staff, and it was a give-and-take process to get them to accept me and support me while I tried to understand their values and how they saw the inmates.

Being skilled in collaboration has also helped me in my current job. Knowledge management, as many information professionals know, is often met with suspicion. Being able to understand people’s concerns, listen to their opinions, and find common ground with them—skills I learned while working at the jail—have been instrumental in helping me overcome this suspicion.

Working in a new market, especially one that people don’t associate with your degree, forces you to prove yourself. You have to overcome the mindset that you are “just” a librarian. Once you manage that, collaborating with co-workers is a lot easier because they respect you and your abilities.

Working in a new market also forces you to get out of your comfort zone and take on tasks that you may not have performed before. As a knowledge management analyst, which is my current role, I’m doing something that librarians aren’t necessary trained to do, which is in-depth analysis. I had to convince myself that I could do it. I overcame the barrier by sitting down and thinking about how I had conducted analyses in the past, such as analyzing the use of a library collection for a small library. That gave me confidence that I could do a lot more than what I was trained to do.

**Mary:** The big question is how to get started. I often hear information professionals say, “My organizational structure keeps me from collaborating.” Granted, certain organizational structures can be inhibiting. But developing relationships is something you can do in any type of organization.

Face-to-face relationships, built slowly and steadily, are always possible. Steven Abram, in the November/December 2013 issue of *Information Outlook*, suggested the elevator speech as a way to begin. Volunteering at work in different capacities is another good way to get started on relationship building. You need to be present to build relationships and establish credibility and trust. Start with small victories to build courage and self-confidence.

**Aileen:** I agree with Mary that volunteering is the way to learn leadership skills, build your network, branch out, and get a glimpse into other people’s worlds. I started volunteering in the Virginia Library Association by serving on their Continuing Education Committee. Then I joined SLA and some of their advisory councils, and in 2013 I chaired the Government Information Division. Looking back, I realize that I’ve grown over time and done quite a bit, especially with the support of the SLA community. All of this contributed to me mustering the courage to start my own business together with my former co-worker and friend, Rosalyn Alleman.

**Mary:** Collaborating is a way of taking our career paths into our own hands. We’re not waiting for someone to recognize our expertise, but putting ourselves in a position so it will be recognized.
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Measuring Value Using Research Results and Learning Outcomes

Models exist within the academic environment that can help quantify the value of our instruction and training.

BY DEBBIE SCHACHTER, MLS, MBA

Although we frequently discuss how to measure value, the fact is that it is difficult to do so with library and information services. It is possible, however, to create models that use research results and learning outcomes to provide measures to employ when reviewing, improving, and reporting on services.

In environments where teaching or instruction are occurring (whether through workplace training or formalized academic instruction), learning outcomes are now a standard way of identifying and measuring the results. Whether you create learning outcomes for students to self-evaluate, to improve the instruction process, or for other purposes, a structured approach to measuring the value of your instruction is necessary. This will help ensure you are being effective as an instructor and provide evidence of the benefits of the proposed training to your students.

Formalized learning outcomes and the requirements to create measures of success based on these outcomes are perhaps more critical in a corporate or training environment than in an academic setting. Trying to quantify learning and how to apply that learning in the workplace can be a challenge, but there are methods that will help measure the value of the instruction or training. Models from the academic environment are useful for this purpose.

For example, when developing your curriculum, it is critical that you identify the expected outcomes and make them clear to your students. Examining what you hope to achieve will often raise questions about whether you are teaching the students what they want to learn versus what you think you need to teach them. When providing training in the workplace, it is essential to start by providing what the students expect, to which you need to add what you, as a professional, see as critical skills or knowledge. You may be surprised by the discrepancy in what people think they need to learn versus what an expert knows they need to learn.

On a departmental level (rather than a course or instruction level), the goal of measuring learning impact has long posed problems, even as expectations of developing and implementing quantifiable measures have increased. Those of us who work in the academic environment are creating new qualitative surveys to ascertain whether students feel they are attaining the outcomes they anticipated from the services they receive from the library. My college’s peer tutoring service, the Learning Centre, has long done this, as well as used a more rigorous approach to identifying expected outcomes prior to tutoring students. In the library, we don’t have an ongoing service that is comparable to tutoring, but we can gather data prior to providing a service. For example, if we ask a student to fill out a brief assessment prior to attending a one-on-one session with a librarian, then conduct one or two follow-up assessments (one after the session and another later in the semester), we will begin gathering new data that will improve our value measures.

Longitudinal studies are ideal, but with so many factors at play that make it difficult to isolate the value of our services in students’ overall success, and given the length of time it takes to conduct an effective study, we need to use more immediate tools. Creating a more formalized way of identifying user expectations before and after a

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Helping users see and recognize the value of the services that we provide is fundamental.

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Information Professionals and Scalability

To meet our clients’ growing information needs, we must learn to set priorities, train our end users, and take other steps to scale our services.

BY STEPHEN ABRAM, MLS

So, what's the biggest problem you face? If you filled out a simple three-question survey with two “forced” choices, which answers would you choose?

1. I need more: Time Money
2. I need more: Technology Money
3. I need: Better Stronger Questions Relationships

Have you ever asked for more hours in the day? Tried to serve clients that span the globe and all time zones? Are you a solo librarian or part of a very small team with big expectations for service? Do you feel you're under-used for the best stuff and overused for simple research? Feeling buried under “administrivia” and information overload?

If this sounds like your situation, you're not alone. Our services are designed around personal contact, relationships and service, but the need for information is so great that we're often a bottleneck to effective information strategies.

So, how do you scale your services when you're the only one and you care enough to make a difference?

Be realistic. Start by realizing that you can’t do it all. Simply put, any one organization’s information needs dwarf any one information professional’s abilities. So, prioritize, prioritize, prioritize! Base your priorities on strategic alignment, mission criticality, and decision-making impact, as these criteria trump efficiency and cost concerns every time. My useful metaphor is the parent with the messy house and happy, balanced children—it shows a fundamental understanding of priorities. So, focus less on the trivial and more on the important.

Scalability Tip: How do you scale priority setting? It's simple, really—you build relationships with those who set the priorities for your unit or enterprise. Your boss might be one such person, but she likely isn’t the only person. You’re an information professional, and you have a valid reason to interview and seek out advice from the key people in your organization. Ask for the time to talk to them.

After discussing organizational needs and priorities in the context of your organization’s mission and vision and your own personal role, you’ll have a much better insight into which of your efforts actually matter. Never neglect conversations with people who matter.

Get to the user, not the desktop. What can we put out there to help end users serve themselves, and how? Find out, then do it. Intranets, internal systems, and knowledge and information portals are already a great opportunity for librarians and information professionals. Sadly, these are often developed with an “If we build it, they will come” approach, and they tend to be framed as desktop initiatives. Align your internal sites and systems with workflow and decision-making processes as opposed to simply providing generic research sources.

Scalability Tip: Are your portals and intranet sites organized around work and decision flows, or do they resemble lists of digital and print resources, catalogs, or bibliographies? The distance between lists and user needs is a wide chasm that cannot be bridged by the end user in two short jumps.

The best way to scale is to align the information with the core critical decisions that need to be underpinned with great, quality information in your enterprise context. You can have a professional portal where you keep everything for reference, but when addressing end-user context, you can scale more successfully by aligning with work flows and not generic research tasks.

Consider this strategy as one where you offload volume to focus on making an impact on your organization’s strategic research agenda.

Train, and train well. It’s essential to train your end users about searching and also about the research process in general. Critically, these training sessions need to go beyond what’s on the portal or intranet and focus on the users’ needs in their work context.

Scalability Tip: In recent years,
technology has transformed training. Scalability of training is, by definition, being able to train and coach more users more often and with greater, measurable impact. With that in mind, what do the opportunities inherent in the following technologies mean for your training strategies?

- Skype
- Google Hangouts
- e-Learning
- WebEx/AdobeConnect, etc
- Self-directed training (23 Things)
- Overviews (LibGuides, Paths, etc.)

All of these technologies can help put the librarian back into the research equation and support research negotiation, training, skill transfers, reference interviews, and more. Otherwise, your digital presence may be merely a fancier bibliography.

**Get thee to the cloud.** The cloud provides opportunities to do things that hitherto have been a pain in the butt. The detritus of frustrating and detailed tasks involved in maintaining infrastructure seem to multiply over time. It’s an expensive undertaking, and the management tasks involved in justifying and performing them create a ripple effect on your time that just doesn’t provide enough value to compensate for the effort. Upgrading servers and justifying the same is a time sink; installing and upgrading software can be a treadmill, especially when customization and localization are involved. Stop the insanity.

**Scalability Tip:** Move your infrastructure to the cloud with the best service-level agreement you can get. Now you’re always up to date on software, and your server and connection speeds are scaled beyond your capacity as a sole site. You lose little or nothing in flexibility and gain a lot of time in TCO (total cost of ownership). Don’t value your own time at zero in these analyses, since time is more valuable than money and in much more limited supply.

**Don’t just have mobile, be mobile.** Today’s successful information pros are where the user is, or they’re accessible from wherever the user or the information expertise is. Mobile devices are no longer optional in our work, and the reference desk is no longer the prime paradigm—it’s merely an anchor for service points.

**Scalability Tip:** Do your job by walking around. Be where your users are. Get the best apps for your mobile devices and be really good at smartphones and tablets. Be the model researcher you’re supporting.

Mobility aligns with your goal of building relationships by enabling you to easily go to your users rather than requiring them to come to you. Your key collections and services are digital, and your client users are more mobile than ever before. Align.

**Use your filters and alerts.** E-mail is a drudge task. It feels like a productivity suck and steals time from more important work. At its worst, it creates the impression of “busyness” while actually diverting your time and attention from the important tasks of being effective and having an impact. Indeed, falsely confusing the urgent with the important is a symptom of trouble to come.

**Scalability Tip:** Obviously, you can’t stop being digitally connected through e-mail and social media. You want and need to engage in two-way dialogue with your clients and be permissioned into “friend” relationships on an entry-level basis. That said, you’ll be more strategically aligned if you schedule your use of e-mail and social media.

Go so far as to put them on your calendar until you develop better habits. Maybe use e-mail two or three times a day and RSS feeds once in the morning, while dipping into social media twice at work instead of all the time. You’ll gain in focus what you lose in long, immersive conversations.

That said, get really good at using your e-mail filters strategically. The ability to file e-mail messages in folders and color the links and rank the messages is not only useful, it also enhances productivity. For example, you can identify your most important users (your boss, team leader, etc.), rank them high in importance, color them red, and read them first. E-mails from your association and volunteers? Send them to a folder and deal with them all at once. You’ll benefit from seeing entire threads. Messages about special projects or from friends and family can be pre-organized for more productive reading, and you can time that reading for home or office.

I live on my RSS feeds (I use the Feedly reader and app). You can organize your feeds based on your own needs—I organize mine to separate my family blogs and personal interests (like politics and news) that I can read at my leisure from special projects and library stuff that I schedule to align with my work. I love my iPad and find the Flipboard app for my RSS feeds, social media (like Facebook and Twitter) and magazine reading to be so much more effective than keeping a native site open on my desktop.

**Meetings, bloody meetings.** Meetings seem to take up too much time and so often seem to go nowhere. Reframe your attitude: If you’re in a meeting and you fail to participate, you’ve missed an opportunity AND you’ve failed. If you view a meeting as nothing more than an event where information is transferred, don’t go—just read the minutes or documentation and ask questions. Alternatively, go to a meeting and see it for the gift it is.

**Scalability Tip:** The gift of a meeting is to do much more than merely meet. That’s the lowest common result. In fact, if you go to a meeting and meet no one new, don’t speak, and don’t improve an idea or clarify a goal, then seriously ask why you are there. Rank, status, title, and politics are not great reasons; indeed, you may create the opposite impression that you intended. Thoughtful meeting attendees do the following:

- Engage in good “followership” and ask clarifying questions;
- Volunteer for special projects that arise;
- Agree to take minutes (that’s a power role);
INFO TECH

Contribute during the meeting—for example, by offering to conduct research that assists with decisions or strategies for the group; and

Market themselves as a great resource and information professional (personal positioning arises from good meeting behaviors).

Build relationships by building trust. In meetings, you often meet new players and new team members who are on their orientation tour. Don’t waste the opportunity to increase your presence, network and likability.

Never, ever be negative. Know the difference between constructive criticism (and the critical thinking that underlies it) and plain criticism.

Don’t arrive late and leave early. Relationships are strengthened in those moments before and after meetings, when grapevine insights are shared and social relationships that transcend the organization chart are built.

Finally, use meeting time wisely to network, market and position yourself. You can even gain higher quality project and questions with a long-term meeting strategy. Follow up by sharing useful information after the meeting.

So there you have it—seven tips, simply stated! Of course, it’s not simple at all to implement them, but with a little effort up front, you’ll find that you’re more productive, better aligned with your organization, and getting better work assignments over time. You’ll grow as a leader and, with a little effort and new habits, make a bigger difference. SLA

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service experience, and compiling the data over time, is a practical and useful way to conduct research on perceived user value. One way you can implement this is by creating brief pre-service and post-service questionnaires to determine the perceived value of the service. By administering these types of pre- and post-service surveys regularly over a period of time, you can gather useful information that can inform service development and help support any discussions about the value of the information services at an organization.

Libraries and their associations have long tried to quantify their value to public and academic environments, often by focusing on their return on investment. The qualitative and longitudinal studies that are also in use probably provide a more realistic look at the impact of the work that we do. Helping users see and recognize the value of the services that we provide is fundamental, regardless of any other means of measuring value that we undertake.

For additional insights into using learning outcomes to measure value, see these resources:

- LibValue: Comprehensive Approaches to Defining Library Value
- ACRL Value of Academic Libraries
- Stephen’s Lighthouse (Stephen Abram) Value of Libraries Megapost
- Examples of Learning Outcomes, University of Toronto
- OCLC Research Publications SLA
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