SURVEYS
STATISTICS
NARRATIVE

Communicating Library Value to Administrators

▍INTRODUCTION

Following on from the Taylor and Francis 2016 paper, *Creative, Evolving, Relevant: Communicating the Library's Value*, which explored the innovative ways that libraries communicate their value to faculty and students, this paper looks at how libraries can best communicate value to their decision makers. Sharing perspectives from administrators, management, librarians and the alike, we will explore and compare a variety of ways communicating value is achieved and the positive impact it can have on the future of your library and institution.

To obtain the latest insight, Taylor and Francis surveyed over 250 librarians, the majority of whom came from the US. The 27 survey questions explored the differences in perception of what 'value' means to a librarian versus an administrator and uncovered the uses of data to communicate value in order to develop library services.

Following this survey, we conducted in-depth interviews which threw further light on the methods libraries use to showcase value within their institutions. These allowed Taylor and Francis to also expand on surrounding issues and collect examples of best practice.

The outcome reveals libraries not only at different stages when it comes to communicating their value but also different viewpoints. Some didn't do this at all, others relied solely on usage statistics, and several participants reported making presentations which had a tangible impact to their library — such as enabling them to successfully make the case to develop new spaces and projects.

As this paper guides you through the intriguing results of the survey and interviews, we hope that there are new ideas and approaches here for even the most communicative of librarians to make a strong case for the value of library services to institutional leaders.

PERCEPTIONS AND PRIORITIES

Viewpoints on value from librarians and administrators

Administrators and librarians have different day to day priorities, so the perception of the role of the library differed across the respondents. In some institutions, administrators are looked upon as revenue guardians while libraries are service providers who spend budget. More than one interview respondent identified the competent management of their allocated budget as a key value metric for their management. The perception of the library as a consumer of funds put pressure on librarians to justify their spend.

But for others, the key point of difference was that libraries are perceived to be driven by short term goals, such as enabling current students to access the information they need, while administrators were driven by longer term value and objectives, including the stewardship of their institution. Of course, whilst many librarians will plan for the long term future of their library, the need for librarians to demonstrate short term value for money may exacerbate this perception.

There was also a difference in focus between the individual library patron and the student body:
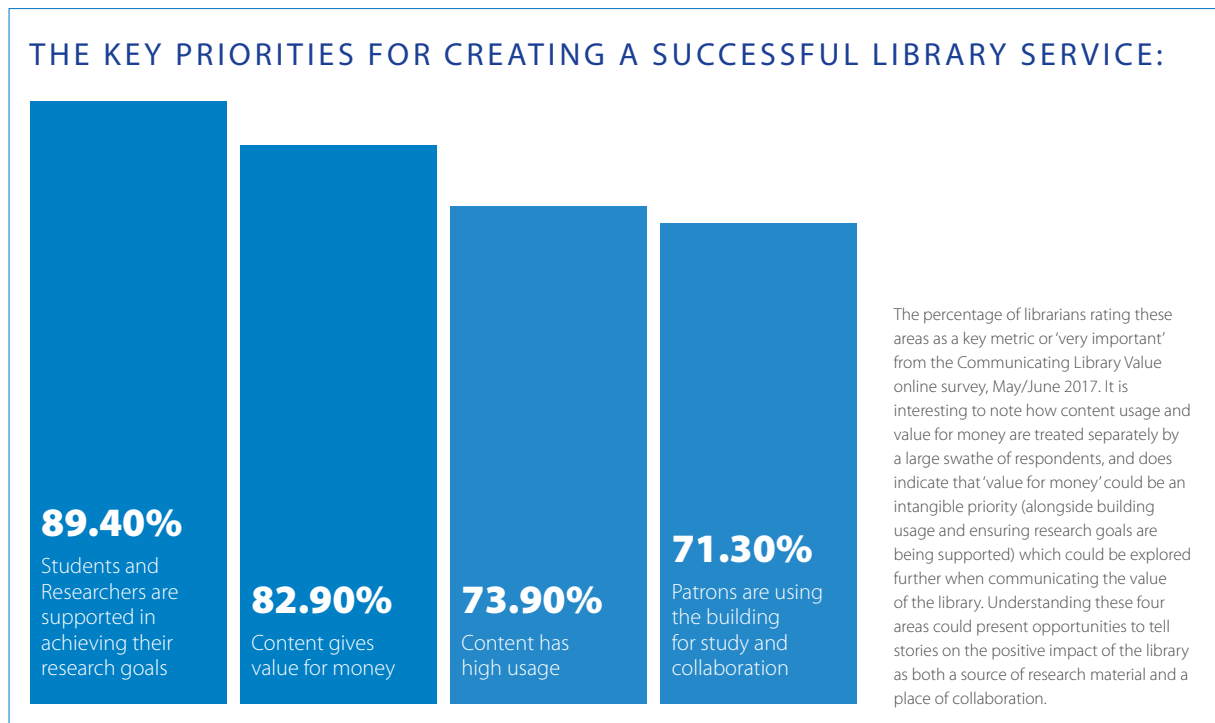
> *'I think that librarians also will tend to measure success on individual accomplishments, and administrators expect something that's going to impact the whole campus. So librarians tend to focus on the short term, while administrators have in mind the bigger picture.'*

Where librarians feel that administrators agree with them is on communicating the value of the entire educational experience to potential students and funders, and the library is a key part of that experience. However, some librarians felt there was a dichotomy between the library being seen as the 'beating heart' of the campus and its treatment on a day-to-day basis; with funders and potential students given tours of the library, even as library funding was being cut.

Some librarians articulated a frustration that the library is expected to 'run by itself' - with the implication that if a library needs outside resources in order to innovate and adapt, this was seen as a negative. However, if it came in on budget, this was seen as an opportunity to make cuts.

Though, not everyone was in a position of being asked to do more with less. For librarians with supportive management and administrators, demonstrating library value was about providing evidence that administrators could use to make the case for strengthening library services.

Usage and value for money

THE KEY PRIORITIES FOR CREATING A SUCCESSFUL LIBRARY SERVICE:

89.40%
Students and Researchers are supported in achieving their research goals

82.90%
Content gives value for money

73.90%
Content has high usage

71.30%
Patrons are using the building for study and collaboration

The percentage of librarians rating these areas as a key metric or 'very important' from the Communicating Library Value online survey, May/June 2017. It is interesting to note how content usage and value for money are treated separately by a large swathe of respondents, and does indicate that 'value for money' could be an intangible priority (alongside building usage and ensuring research goals are being supported) which could be explored further when communicating the value of the library. Understanding these four areas could present opportunities to tell stories on the positive impact of the library as both a source of research material and a place of collaboration.

The perception of the library as a department of the institution that consumed funds led institutions to seek an elusive and complex indicator of success: value for money. For many, this led to usage as the key metric to evaluate the library. But high usage of content doesn't always equate to value, as tacitly accepted by one librarian: *'Unfortunately we focus almost exclusively on usage.'*

The primary methods used to capture data in order to demonstrate the value of a library were **usage statistics, 98.50%, loans of physical books 76.00 % student satisfaction survey 65.40%**. The fact that loans of books are still so well used as a measure of value for money is a surprising one. However, usage comes in many forms. Evaluating value by measuring use of the library building and its different spaces was high on the list of priorities for many institutions:

> *'…the library is a vibrant space, and we're fairly innovative in the tools being offered in the space. I think our university administrators tend to pay attention to us in that regard. Whenever there is a campus tour or any kind of information for potential students, the first place that they always bring them to is the library, because we're a showcase for innovation and research.'*

FOR LIBRARIANS, THE TOP THREE METRICS USED TO MEASURE THE VALUE OF A LIBRARY WERE:

92.80% Usage

78.00% Feedback, faculty and/or students

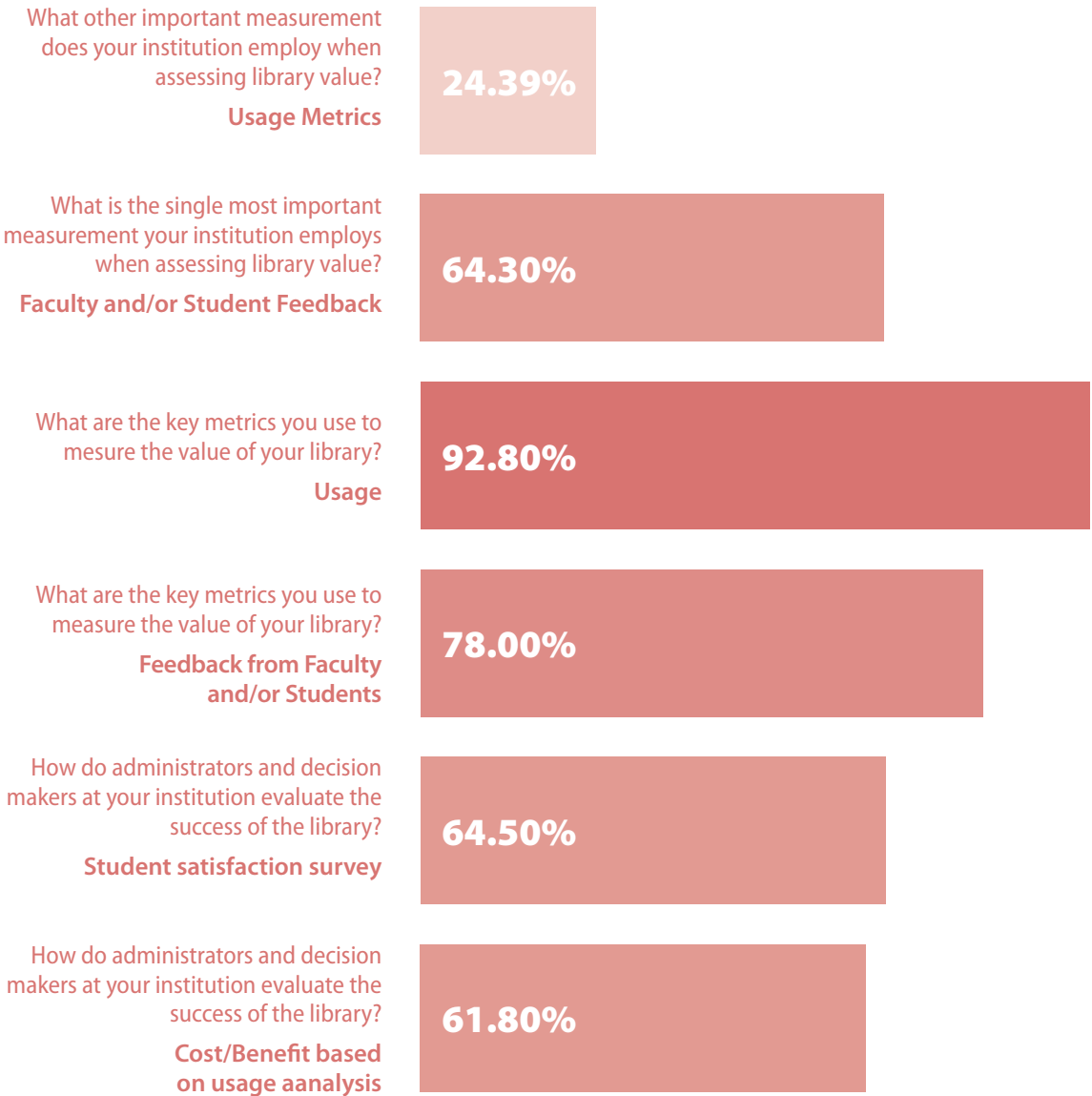**39.80%** Cost/benefit analysis

This places a responsibility on those measuring the library to understand the complexities of these three measures, since none are particularly simple. As we explore later in this paper, many libraries combined their usage figures and feedback to create a more sophisticated story about library value that contextualized the cost benefit analysis.

Other kinds of usage, such as student attendance at library events, use of library services, and the use of librarians to find information, were all seen as key indicators of value for money. Though with elegant simplicity, one librarian articulated the perception of success as a: *'low level of complaint that people can't get the journal subscriptions that they want, and we're not in the red.'*

> *'It all has to be done by inference,' one librarian explained. 'We ask ourselves, if the materials we're acquiring for the library are being used, we look at statistics for access to the content that we're providing. If usage is high, we use that as a credible proxy for saying that we supplied good content, taking the assumption that if it is being used it must be useful. The qualitative inference we make is that we are contributing to learning and research. But that's an inferential argument based on whether the initial numbers look good.'*

Value isn't just about quantitative measures but also subjective activities that are hard to measure. We asked several questions asking respondents to gauge how they, their institution, and their administrators measure library value. It is clear from the respondents that they placed significant emphasis on usage statistics - perhaps understandably. What is striking is the **clear gap between librarians identifying usage data as important (92%), and the perceived perception of administrators deeming this information to be important (62% and 24%)**. Librarians also deem Faculty and Student feedback to be a key metric for measuring value - in concordance with the perceived perception of administrators and institutions - but it is interesting that this latter metric looms larger in the eyes of administrators. Perhaps this can help librarians when communicating to administrators about the value the library provides - remembering not only to tell the data side of the story, but to gather and provide the positive human impact the library has as well.

THE DIVERGENCE BETWEEN LIBRARIANS AND ADMINISTRATORS ON MEASURING AND ASSESSING LIBRARY VALUE

What other important measurement does your institution employ when assessing library value?

Usage Metrics

24.39%

What is the single most important measurement your institution employs when assessing library value?

Faculty and/or Student Feedback

64.30%

What are the key metrics you use to mesure the value of your library?

Usage

92.80%

What are the key metrics you use to measure the value of your library?

Feedback from Faculty and/or Students

78.00%

How do administrators and decision makers at your institution evaluate the success of the library?

Student satisfaction survey

64.50%

How do administrators and decision makers at your institution evaluate the success of the library?

Cost/Benefit based on usage aanalysis

61.80%

The Common Good and the Cafeteria Model

For some librarians, there was a point of tension between the value provided for the individual student or researcher versus the student body as a whole. For these institutions, the library placed a priority on providing a broad coverage of subjects for the benefit of the whole institution, but this meant an individual researcher might not get access to the exact article they needed. And some researchers struggled to understand that they weren't able to access information in a 'pick-what-you-want' cafeteria style.

STORYTELLING

When libraries focused on the common good, there was a greater importance placed on framing stories to tell their communities where the value of library resources lay. This helped justify the purchasing of large databases that would offer something to everyone at the expense of individual articles. These stories were seen as just as important for fundraisers as they were for current students.

Where donors had a preference for high value gifts, such as a special book collection, it was important to explain the value that e-resources can provide. As they were perceived to be inexpensive and less prestigious, so there was a challenge in demonstrating their value, even though such resources are what students really need. Once again, this shows the dichotomy between demonstrating short term value for money and long term value of resources and services which meet wider institutional goals.

When telling the story of library value, some librarians found that programs that aren't necessarily related to the academic achievement – exam stress support, information literacy and employment-ready skills - all add value. This is partly because of the way they contribute to the conversations institutional fundraisers can have with potential parents and donors.

HOW TO CAPTURE VALUE

Usage statistics and student surveys

The Student Survey

Overall, usage statistics and student surveys were the two most common methods librarians used to gather evidence of the value of library resources and services. The information gathered from running surveys and examining usage statistics helped librarians to capture the utility provided by different resources and services, providing a context for how value can be communicated.

64.5% of respondents indicated that student satisfaction surveys were used by decision makers to evaluate the success of their libraries and 64.6% stated that 'faculty and/or student feedback' was the single most important measurement used by their institution. But not everyone felt that the annual survey delivered information that allowed them to develop the library service. For one librarian, the exercise was more about patrons feeling they had a say, rather than what they actually said:

> *'Our faculty members love to feel that they are heard. So asking them about what they want, what they need, or how they understand our services, can be valuable. We'll see it as a 'social management' piece, but we don't often get very valuable information out of it.'*

Some librarians went through the process of carrying out an annual survey but felt it didn't yield actionable information about improving the service:

> *'Generally, our surveys will predictably produce a low response rate and a number of complaints which can be frustrating. For example, we recently asked the question "Do the contents of our collection match your needs?" And when the response was 'No', no one had any suggestions as to why, what or how we could improve on this situation.'*

And some librarians felt they were passive bystanders in a wider evaluation of campus services:

> *'Central administration conducts an annual survey which goes out to faculty and students, but the questions tend to be generic e.g. "Are you getting the help you need?" The library consistently receives a 'Very Good' to 'Excellent' rating, so the survey can be viewed as something of a popularity contest! But the results are always predictable.'*

Surveys are a powerful communication and feedback tool. **For libraries that use them to evaluate value, there are two key questions: *'who is running the survey?'* and *'what do they want to find out?'***

As can be seen from the answers above, a general survey question might not provide any useful information. However, it may be the question rather than the concept that is flawed. Careful, intelligent survey design can gather feedback, which is more useful for developing the library service, and inform students along the way:

> *'We usually begin with a leading question to our surveys. So for example, we had a survey a couple of years ago when we asked the question "Were you aware that as an undergraduate student you can have 100 books checked out at a time?" This was an open-ended question and a lot of people filling out the survey said 'No, but I am now'. So they got the message instantly.'*

To get the best from survey data, librarians can think about the most important acquisitions and projects in a year and ask specific questions about these, since a general question won't provide useful results.

When it comes to continuing professional development for librarians, courses on how to run effective surveys and how to interpret data from usage statistics will enable them to effectively capture and communicate the value libraries provide to patrons.

HOW LIBRARIANS AND ADMINISTRATORS CAPTURE DATA AND EVALUATE LIBRARY VALUE

We asked several questions regarding what data librarians and their administrators gauge as the most important, and how that data is gathered. Perhaps surprisingly, the viewpoints converged significantly, with popular responses mirroring one another. Clearly, the method seen as most effective was the *Student Satisfaction Survey*, with feedback from this group (along with faculty) deemed the most significant metric. Of course, two questions could arise from this - the first being whether the act of collecting data through surveys influences the perception of feedback data as the most significant. The second question is, with these methods and metrics deemed effective and important, would the 37% of librarians NOT running surveys find a benefit to them if they did so?

Question	Yes	
Do you carry out user satisfaction surveys?	**63.00%**	
Dow do you capture data to demonstrate the value of your library? **Student satisfaction survey**	**65.40%**	
How do administrators and decision makers at your institution evaluate the success of the library? **Student satisfaction survey**	**64.50%**	
What is the single most important measurement your institution employs when assessing library value? **Faculty and/or Student Feedback**	**64.60%**	
What are the key metrics you use to measure the value of your library? **Feedback from Faculty and/or Students**	**78.00%**	

Yes ▮ No ▯

Usage Statistics

61.80% of librarians surveyed indicated that cost/benefit analyses based on usage statistics were used by administrators to assess value. Usage doesn't only mean usage of content. As with the design of surveys, librarians can collect data to measure the success of a variety of different projects and services.

> *'…we count the number of people who use our research services, the amount of data downloaded from curated articles, the number of times demo videos are viewed and the number of people who present at or attend events.'*

However, the use of statistics can create tension for librarians who have a more personal one-one relationship with patrons, even though over 60% of administrators are guided by what librarians tell them about success:

> *'Administration wants concrete [examples]. They don't want the anecdotal evidence, which I think is so important and personal, as a lot of what I do is one-on-one with the students. But they want averages, they want actual bar charts.'*

The importance of this measure means that librarians must have confidence in their usage stats and understand what they are looking at because part of the librarian's role is to interpret them for other people in the organization.

NOT EVERYONE MEASURES VALUE

Interestingly, some survey respondents reported that neither they nor their administrators measured the value of the library: *'We avoid metrics.'*

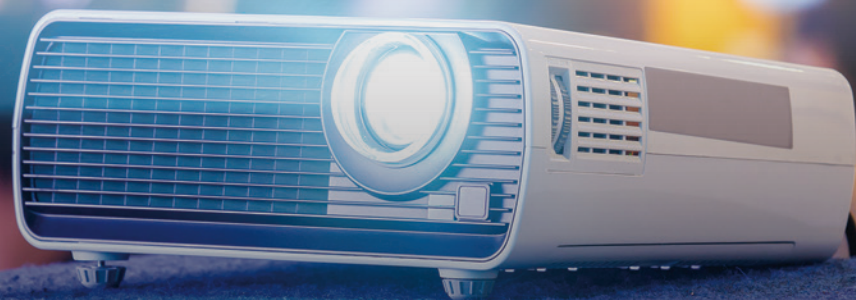But some were willing to accept this as a shortfall:

> *'I am ashamed to say I have no idea.'*

> *'I don't really think we do anything at the moment - we <u>should</u> use faculty and student feedback '*

These libraries may be missing an opportunity to develop their services.
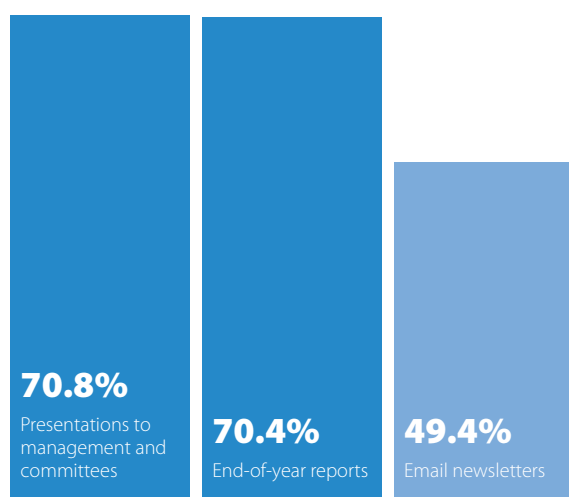

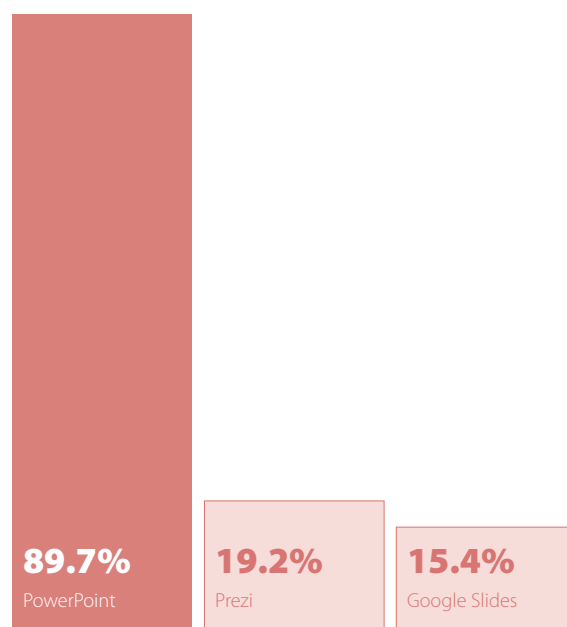# THE POWER OF PRESENTATION

How librarians record and share their data

Both student satisfaction and usage data can be used to drive innovation in libraries, and **39.6% of our survey respondents reported that they** *'analyze data, share results widely to evidence library value, and use data to develop our library'*. The favorite method for communicating survey results to administrators and management was via presentations, at 65%.

HOW DO LIBRARIANS COMMUNICATE THE VALUE OF THE LIBRARY WITHIN AN INSTITUTION?

Most popular methods:

Most popular presentation tools:

70.8%
Presentations to management and committees

70.4%
End-of-year reports

49.4%
Email newsletters

89.7%
PowerPoint

19.2%
Prezi

15.4%
Google Slides

Methods and tools for communicating value as identified by respondents from the Communicating Library Value online survey, May/June 2017. Interestingly, a large majority of respondents admitted to not regularly producing presentations, showing that the opportunity to communicate library value is perhaps only an annual occurrence. Among the respondents a variety of other channels were utilised to communicate about the library on a more regular basis, including social media activity, meetings with faculty and regular events. Could this be a more proactive approach to communicating about the value the library adds to an institution? They certainly provide an opportunity to gather feedback more openly and widely; which could in turn influence how the library tells its 'story' to administrators, identifies issues to be resolved, or even gathers support for future developments!

Half of respondents indicated that they had used data as an evidence base to win funds for a new project. In the case studies following, we'll look at some examples of how data is used to make the case for developing the library services in ways that are small but meaningful – and very large scale.

52.4% included usage data in their presentations, and just over a quarter augmented the headline figure with data that was more relevant to their presentation or activities, such as the number of information literacy sessions they had run. A further 10.68% of presentations included data about library buildings and 5.83% discussed costs. Database usage came in at the surprisingly low figure of 4.85%.

By far, the most common project where usage data was used to drive innovation was the development of the physical space of the library. One of the widely acknowledged ways libraries provide value is a space for creativity and community. For several libraries, a focus on space made the library more accessible and less daunting for students:

> *'We recorded student feedback about library space: positive, negatives, ideas, needs; these drove changes to the library space.'*

> *'We know for instance that noise is a problem for us and we used student provided data to argue for more enclosed study spaces. We have had service issues identified that have enabled us to correct those sorts of problems.'*

One librarian was concerned that the library was often seen as a partner, with the core role of supporting other departments rather than taking an innovative leading role. Through the interviews, we were able to collect examples of projects where libraries had taken the lead, positioning themselves as a place for innovation and research.

Success Stories: What communicating value could mean for your library

PROMOTING SUCCESS

As an institution, we rely heavily on private donors and legislative support, so the library needs to demonstrate its contribution to the overall academic quality of the university. We do this through demonstrating our impact on student retention and career success. Doctorates are now being added to our new, state-wide Repository Initiative (an initiative to make doctorates from graduate students available for research by patrons). As there is a dearth of nursing material, this initiative provides an opportunity to provide students with valuable research material, as well as a sense of pride for all those whose work is added. It also helps to raise the profile of the whole university. We are delighted with the Repository Initiative because of its broad impact on both the internal and external community. Particularly as the librarians are acknowledged as the gatekeepers of what goes in.

MAKING STATS INTO STORIES

We monitor usage metrics, which we combine with outcomes to create narratives, one example might be the result of student research usage. These are then communicated via campus media channels. These stories are also good for outside audiences, including donors and parents. The narratives are so much more engaging than a whole list of metrics or numbers and sometimes even receive external press coverage.

MAKER LAB

We've been trying to get outside of our traditional numbers such as circulation and the number of people in the building, so that we can gather data to tell our story better. We create benchmarks that go beyond our annual reports, so our stats now include:

- How many collaborative ventures we have with faculty

- How many publications have mentioned us

- How many groups use our databases

- How many people utilized a particular space or new service

 A few years ago we created the Learning Commons, an art studio and social space for students. We were able to build on that project and go to an external donor for funding for our Learning Studio which focused on creativity of video. Then we were able to go to internal administrators and use Learning Commons and Learning Studio as the basis for creating a Maker Lab. And we were successful in getting the extra funding that project needed.

MOVING OUT OF THE BASEMENT

We recently moved our statistics consultancy service from its basement location in to the library at a cost of over $100,000. We had to cover software and hardware updates, improved technical communications, create more space and ensure better protection including installing a fire prevention water sprinkler system. Before this project, I really had no idea of the cost of industrial elevators. In the end, the project resulted in an additional $10 million to upgrade the library and $5 million in supplemental funding for collections improvements or construction projects. We need strong narratives to demonstrate and communicate the excellence of the library service and explain the high value to the whole institution of such spends.

FREE PIZZA

We try and find different things to do because our events are library events, there's always a little bit of a learning element. It's not just an event that you could go to in the Student Union, get a ringside seat and hang out. So our events are all about the academic success of the students because that fits in to our main library goals.

Whenever we plan and event we ask ourselves:

- How do we mention library databases?

- How do we fit in our research services?

- How do we make students more aware of what the library has to offer?

And of course we also provide free food and fun activities. We introduced information learning stations for our two fall events; we make students learn about something in the library, then we ask them about it and then we give them the free food.

We now use events as a way of promoting services, for example, we may want to promote about our research consultation service that enables students to schedule a one-on-one appointment with a librarian. So we put on an event and we have 400 people who learn about that service before they get their free food.

We've seen each semester that whenever we push one aspect of our service at an event, the stats will go up, and more people are aware of it when they fill out surveys on campus.

We work really hard on outreach to let people know what we're up to, and luckily our Dean and our board members appreciate the work. They know that when we have to spend $500 for free pizza for students, that event will really get those students learning about the library, and will have an impact on the services they use.

THE POWER OF CREATING A STORY

CONCLUSION

Using the Taylor and Francis survey and follow up interviews, this paper has explored the types of data librarians collect to demonstrate library value. Overall, the picture is that both qualitative and quantitative data are important to librarians – with usage, surveys and cost benefit analyses integral pieces of demonstrating library value.

The examples and success stories we've explored illustrate that in using a collection of different data points, libraries can make the case for better engagement, collaboration, and the provision of new spaces which go beyond traditional resources.

Notably, by collecting a variety of data, one librarian was able to position the story of their library as a place rather than a function. This enabled them to develop a space where students and faculty, no matter their discipline, research-based or practical needs, could use the library. Such maker spaces have proven to generate interest within communities outside of campus.

> *Though each library and each institution is different, by exploring new projects that could potentially enhance the library service and using existing data to make a strong case for new investment, every library can win advocates among administrators and management.*

Without clear communication, tension may arise between those who prefer to look at statistics and those who regard anecdotal evidence as a more powerful message about library value. And the pressure on libraries to demonstrate value for money in the short term may lead to a negative perception that librarians are focused only on short-term goals rather than long-term objectives.

By effectively demonstrating value, libraries can create narratives that position themselves to run independent projects and develop the library service rather than becoming a passive partner. While the most successful libraries gather metrics, they also think carefully about how to present these as a relatable story. And when administrators and librarians work closely together to align their institutional goals, value over the long term can be achieved – from the provision of innovative learning spaces to student well-being and new ways to highlight research.

In conclusion, librarians who are not able turn their data into a story of value may be at a disadvantage. From the simplicity of offering free pizza and encouraging student engagement to multimillion-dollar building projects, illustrating value can be the first step in winning funds to develop impactful library services to the advantage of the entire institution. After all, when administration wishes to present the best of their institution, be it to prospective students or potential donors, a campus tour will often begin at the most vibrant center of learning and research they offer - the library.

CITATIONS & CONTRIBUTIONS

Throughout 2017, Taylor & Francis has been gathering and examining information on how librarians communicate the value of their library to administrators as an integral piece to the success of their institutions. In addition to focus groups, **over 250 anonymous librarians participated in our in-depth surveys to contribute their insight**, and we conducted interviews with multiple participants to dive deeper into the challenges and successes of communicating value.

INTERVIEWS

Jeffrey Matlak, *Collection Development & Electronic Resources Librarian, Western Illinois University*

Mark McCallon, *Associate Dean for Librarian Information Services, Abilene Christian University Library*

Luke Swindler, *Collections Management Officer (Davis Library), University of North Carolina Chapel Hill*

Alison Scott, *Associate University Librarian for Collections & Scholarly Communication, University of California, Riverside*

Maria Atilano, *Marketing and Student Outreach Librarian, University of North Florida*

Lisa Blackwell, *Director of Library Services, Chamberlain University*

ACRL CONFERENCE FOCUS GROUPS

Session 1 Focus Group

Zoe Unno, *Science and Engineering, University of Southern California*

Jessica Whitmore, *Archives Manager and Research Assistant, Mount St. Mary's University*

Charles Gallagher, *Special Collections Librarian, Mount St. Mary's University*

Julie Shenk, *Information Technology Librarian, Mount St. Mary's University*

Session 2 Focus Group

Emily Mross, *Business and Public Administration Liaison Librarian, Penn State University at Harrisburg*

Jennifer Dean, *Dean of University Libraries and Institutional Technology, University of Detroit Mercy*

Ryan Johnson, *Head of Collections, Research, and Instruction, Georgetown University*

Cynthia Thomes, *Reference and Instruction Librarian, University of Maryland University College*

Linda Kopecky, *Head of Research Services, University of Wisconsin Milwaukee*

Julia Gelfand, *Applied Sciences, Engineering & Public Health Librarian, University of California, Irvine*

Sherry Tinerella, *Public Services Librarian & Liaison for Education, Physical Science & Professional Studies, Arkansas Technical University*

Teresa Slobuski, *Academic Liaison Librarian, San Jose State University*

Christine Menard, *Head of Research Services, Williams College*

Belinda Ong, *Director of Reference and Information Services, The University of Alabama in Huntsville*

Rachel Cannady, *Research and Education Services Librarian, University of Texas at Antonio*

Rebecca Graff, *Humanities Research Librarian, Southern Methodist University*

Brittany Dudek, *Instructional Online Librarian, Colorado Community College*

WHITE PAPER SERIES: COMMUNICATING LIBRARY VALUE

This paper is a follow-up to the 2016 study on *Creative, Evolving, Relevant: Communicating the Library's Value*, which explored ways that libraries communicate their value to faculty and students.

A Taylor & Francis White Paper

Working in partnership to create an expanded perspective on our communities
– sharing trends and themes that broaden the discussion and inspire new ideas.

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