

Library Value May Be Proven, If Not Self-Evident

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We hold these truths to be self-evident: libraries are valuable to humankind; libraries preserve knowledge; libraries enable access to information; libraries serve the information needs of their users. To the believer the truth is evident. But libraries are not natural phenomena like the sun rising and setting every day. Libraries are institutions created and supported by those individuals who hold that these statements are true even if not self-evident to everyone.

The caretakers of libraries have gathered data on library performance for decades and have used this information to understand how to improve services and programs they provide to their users. The ability to measure the quality of library services is extremely important as libraries are faced with the need to make informed decisions about the best way to meet the needs of the users of those services. This ability has become even more important as libraries make transformative changes during times of fiscal constraint and increased competition.

ARL has built a program of assessment over the past 20 years and continuously looks for ways to strengthen this capacity for member libraries. This issue of *RLI* highlights ways in which assessment tools have helped libraries improve their services and programs. These improvements are the result of library leadership and their staff using data to make decisions that would have the most impact. This issue also captures some of the newer initiatives focused on demonstrating the value of library services.

LibQUAL+® has now been used for a decade by upwards of 1,200 libraries around the world in 20 language versions. The results have helped libraries understand users' perceptions of library service quality. Colleen Cook and Michael Maciel provide a brief historical look at the evolution of LibQUAL+® and highlight how the administration of this tool enabled the Texas A&M University Libraries to make significant service improvements based on sound data. The

University of Glasgow Library used the results from their LibQUAL+® surveys to build a strong case for enhancing the physical spaces in the library. Jacqui Dowd's article brings attention to how user perceptions of the library's environment can build support for increased funding. The introduction of LibQUAL+® Lite with fewer questions improves survey response rates and provides solid results. Both the University of Glasgow and Cranfield University in the United Kingdom implemented LibQUAL+® Lite. Selena Killick captures the experience at Cranfield, where they were particularly concerned with the impact of the recent economic downturn on library services and the possible consequential impact on their LibQUAL+® scores.

When ARL directors began to discuss what the research library of the 21st century would look like, it became clear that the traditional ARL statistics, and even many of the new measures tools, were not enough to draw the full picture. ARL initiated a process to address this shortcoming, calling on each ARL library to develop a narrative profile that describes their organization. Bill Potter, Colleen Cook, and Martha Kyrrilidou provide an overview of this project and discuss how the profiles are being mined to describe the key elements of the 21st-century research library in addition to providing insights into possible new measures.

The "new measures" movement has definitely helped many libraries enhance and strengthen their assessment capacity, but the need to link assessment effectively with organizational priorities remains a challenge. The Balanced Scorecard has been used in the commercial and non-profit sectors for nearly two decades as a strategic management tool. ARL's new initiative to build a collaborative model for implementing a scorecard in research libraries is also highlighted in this issue. Johns Hopkins, McMaster, University of Virginia, and the University of Washington are among the key players in this pilot effort. In attempting to link strategy and metrics, we have realized that our library assessment toolkit can use a more convincing and richer arsenal in describing value delivered to library users. Lib-Value is an effort funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services that supports collaborative work among the University of Tennessee, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and ARL exploring how we can capture the value of library collections and services in the research, teaching, and learning process. Regina Mays, Carol Tenopir, and Paula Kaufman provide an overview of this three-year project.

Last, Catherine Davidson and Martha Kyrillidou discuss the use of MINES for Libraries® by the Ontario Council of University Libraries, a 21-member library consortium. The consortium is using this brief point-of-use survey protocol to collect data on the value and impact of the rich electronic resources provided to students and faculty. Deeper understanding of user behavior in the virtual environment is a key element in articulating the value of networked electronic services and MINES for Libraries® is a proven useful method. Furthermore, the influence and importance of this protocol in future years is likely to increase.

This *RLI* issue on assessing library performance is timely for readers who will be participating in two upcoming events: the ARL-CNI Forum on Achieving Strategic Change in Research Libraries (October 14–15, Washington DC) and the Library Assessment Conference (October 25–27, Baltimore MD). Proceedings from both conferences will be made available on the ARL website after the events, enriching our understanding of these issues in multiple new ways. We invite the community to actively engage in the debate about the strategic aspects of library value and capturing the evidence, because few truths are self-evident.

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<http://www.arl.org/resources/pubs/rli/archive/rli271.shtml>.