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Hidden Treasure: Connecting Your Value with the Needs of the Institution

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CONTEXT

While traditionally libraries are very good at counting (books, patrons, reference questions, etc.), the question of value can no longer be answered by quantifying things and activities. In fact, it is challenging to try to assess and assign value to the services and resources provided by libraries. Increasingly libraries are asked to communicate their value to their stakeholders more effectively by providing **evidence of outcomes related to user experience and institutional mission and goals.** Several library associations have recently published reports delineating the value of libraries to the constituents.[1, 2, 3]

Traditionally, technical services has been a hidden part of libraries. It is physically hidden in back rooms or basements. Often, the products we create (data, licences, records, etc.) are not seen or, if they are seen, are not directly or immediately connected to the person who created them. While some of the products created by technical services may directly connect to user experience, the connection to outcomes is difficult to assess. We are great at measuring quantities of activities, but what story do those numbers tell about the value of librarians to the mission of the institution?

"[The] discussions on value build on two underlying principles: one, that there is a pressing need to advocate more effectively for the ongoing relevance of libraries to their institutions and beyond; and two, in order to accomplish this, libraries must re-evaluate traditional measures of value that are not sophisticated enough to capture the impact of library services."[4] (Emphasis mine.)

It is difficult to define "value" in relationship to "impact" within the library context, let alone the context of technical services. Value, i.e. financial and impact value, are the main categories that stakeholders are interested in. Some ways of measuring value are return on investment (ROI), frequency of use, commodity production, comparing competing alternatives, and stories of user experience that illustrate impact. However, determining impact based on these types of measurements can be challenging for technical services activities. Measures of impact fall into

two categories: direct (quantifiable) such as cost, access fulfillment, and graduation/employment rates and indirect (qualitative) such as prestige, user satisfaction, and use of data by new technologies in new ways.

Conversation starter: What types of assessment measures does your department have in place to determine the impact of technical services "products" on users?

- Most libraries collect usage statistics on the materials, mainly electronic, as a way of showing the value and return on investment of the collection.
- Connecting the use of library services with student retention.

MISSION

Everything that the technical services department in a library does should support the mission of the institution it serves. In order to do that, we need to know what the mission of our institution is. It is sometimes expressed as a vision statement. Below are a few representational phrases from mission statements of ATLA institutions to which activities and services of the library correlate :
- "...equipping Christian leaders to think theologically, engage globally and live biblically." 5
- "...equip these men and women for effective missional leadership in all its forms and to provide strong academic foundations for theological inquiry." 6
- "...to educate men and women for worldwide leadership and service by integrating academic excellence and Christian commitment within a caring community." 7
- a center for scholarly research, informed and creative teaching, and service to the community and society at large. ... uphold the highest standards and be a leader in the quest for new knowledge through scholarship, dissemination of knowledge through teaching and outreach, creative experimentation of ideas and concepts. ...values most highly intellectual freedom that supports open inquiry, equality, compassion, and excellence in all endeavors. 8

Assessment measures should be designed to demonstrate the impact of the technical services department. That impact should then be connected to the mission of the institution which will clearly attest to the value of the technical services department to faculty, administration, boards, and any other stakeholders.

Conversation starter: How do you articulate the connection between the library and the teaching mission or spiritual mission of the institution? Does it reflect the value to the institution of what you do?

- Many in the group reflected on the value of consistent cataloging to make the collections understandable and discoverable and to facilitate data management.
- Subject headings and classification are especially useful for connecting users to the resources they need.
- For electronic resources and digital collections, maintaining good metadata and technical connections is what keeps those materials discoverable.

TRANSFERABLE SKILLS

Explaining what we do in a way that others will understand and relate
One way to think about explaining technical service activities to people not in technical services or not in libraries is to move away from library jargon and highlight the skills we use that will be transferable to jobs outside of libraries. These are also the skills you will still be using five years from now when the tasks you perform have completely changed.

Acquisitions -- or "finding the best price and the best access to content needed by patrons"
- Negotiation skills
- Data analysis
- Assessment abilities
- Technological skills
- Mathematical abilities
- Familiarity with publishing industry

Cataloging -- or "facilitating access to intellectual content"
- Attention to detail
- Data analysis
- Pattern seeking: user, publisher, provider
- Technological skills
- Project management
- Familiarity with ontologies and taxonomies

Electronic Resource Management -- or "maintaining discovery and linking technologies for maximum access"
- Data analysis
- User need assessment
- Technological skills
- Troubleshooting
- Pattern seeking

Conversation starter:
What is your 30-second elevator speech to explain the value of your job in five years to library outsiders?

Continuing the conversation, plus resources for making connections between job duties, skills, and value to the institution. Please see this libguide: http://libguides.murraystate.edu/Treasures.

<div align="center">End Notes</div>

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