Demonstrating the Value of the Library Collection

Tips for Academic, Corporate, and Government Librarians

Presented by ASME as a Service to Our Librarian Community

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Contents

Introduction

Academic, corporate, and government libraries: Driving discovery, accessibility, innovation, and collaboration.

The purpose of this document is to provide an overview of the components that contribute to the assessment of the value of the library collection across academic, corporate, and government libraries and tips for steps that can be taken to analyze, enhance, and communicate that value to administrators and other stakeholders. Many of the components that contribute to this assessment are valid across library types. What is important in an academic library can be equally important in a corporate or government library.

The value of library collections, and more broadly, the value of the library to its academic institution, corporate entity, or government department can be challenging to quantify, but the **potential benefit to librarians who are able to demonstrate this value can be significant. Ultimately, the definition of value must come from the community that uses the library's collection, not from the library itself.**

Professional library associations like the American Library Association (ALA), Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), and Special Libraries Association (SLA) are an excellent source of information, best practices, and resources for librarians who are tasked with enhancing and/or demonstrating the value of their libraries' collections.

In the area of academic librarianship, ACRL, a division of ALA, has been instrumental in providing professional guidance and tools to build the profession's capacity to document, demonstrate, and communicate library value in alignment with the mission and goals of their colleges and universities. ACRL has issued two landmark publications that provide a foundation for collection assessment programs.[1,2]

SLA supports its corporate library membership in many ways including insights into how to determine ROI of the library and its collection. Corporate libraries face unique challenges in managing company-generated information, some of which was generated decades ago, and safeguarding company confidentiality in a competitive environment.

Although less is written about the value of government library collections, ALA and SLA also provide useful resources for information professionals in this field.

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[1] Association of College and Research Libraries, 2010, *Value of Academic Libraries: A Comprehensive Research Review and Report*, Researched by Megan Oakleaf, Association of College and Research Libraries, Chicago, **http://www.ala.org/acrl/sites/ala.org.acrl/files/content/issues/value/val_report.pdf**

[2] Association of College and Research Libraries, 2017, *Academic Library Impact: Improving Practice and Essential Areas to Research*. Prepared by Lynn Silipigni Connaway, William Harvey, Vanessa Kitzie, and Stephanie Mikitish, Association of College and Research Libraries, Chicago, **http://www.ala.org/acrl/sites/ala.org.acrl/files/content/publications/whitepapers/academiclib.pdf**

Value of the Academic Library Collection

Academic librarians: Working at the intersection of technology and information in higher learning.

The "heart of the university," an academic library supports the research and teaching needs of its community. **Different members of the community may perceive the value of the library differently**. For example, an undergraduate **may find value in the library's physical structure**, a place to meet and interact with other students or study in a conducive environment. Faculty members and researchers, on the other hand, **may equate the library's value with the breadth and depth of its collection that provides "just in case" information.**

But the bottom line is that the fiscal situation in recent years has resulted in the need for the library to present detailed analyses and ROI of its collection in order to show the value that it brings to the university or college. The journal collection in particular, one of the core components of any academic library's holdings, is under intense scrutiny at most institutions.

The following questions can be asked in order to assess the value of the collection:

- Are the journals and books in the collection good value for money spent? Can an ROI be calculated?
- What is usage per journal or book?
- What is the cost per article or chapter download? Is it high or low?
- What percentage of journal articles are now published open access? How has this impacted subscription prices (or not)?
- How highly does the user community value the journals and books in the collection (survey them to find out)?
- Are there journals or books that are candidates for cancellation?
- Do I need to drop a title in order to add one?
- Instead of purchasing content, does it make financial sense to move to ILL, articles on demand, or single article purchase (journals and books)?

These questions can be difficult to address, and systematic, coherent, and connected evidence is required. Some issues are that journal use patterns vary from discipline to discipline, e.g., engineering versus health sciences, and there is more data available for scientific, technical, and medical (STM) content compared to social sciences, the arts, and humanities. Sometimes, even when value can be proven, libraries still have to cancel even in the best of fiscal times.

What can librarians do to demonstrate and increase the value of the collection and its contribution to its institution's overall mission? Here are some recommendations:

- » **Measure, measure, measure.** Develop, maintain, and adapt systems for collection assessment. Collect data on user behavior (while maintaining privacy). Results can provide essential information when calculating library ROI and for continuing improvements to library services and resources.
- » **Using the strength of the STM collection, become more actively engaged with faculty research productivity.** Can you contribute to research data management (RDM) and other elements of the research data lifecycle including assistance with writing grant proposals and preparing for publication?
- » **Assess how the collection contributes to faculty recruitment because of how well it supports faculty activities.** Library collections can bring prestige to their institutions. Although this is a "soft" factor that is difficult to quantify, university administrators are aware of the impact that a prestigious faculty and well-resourced library can have on securing institutional funding.
- » **Working hand-in-hand with faculty, help undergraduates and early career researchers increase their information literacy to take advantage of the full range of peer-reviewed and validated content available via the library in the place of easily accessible, unfiltered information from the web.** In addition, they need to learn how to locate, evaluate, and document information sources that go beyond journals and include books and codes and standards (increasingly in demand), trade publications, software manuals, and technical reports.
- » **Enhance the collection so it stays in sync with changing faculty, researcher, and student information resource preferences.** Consider adding good quality data repositories, videos, social media, and general news resources, which are growing in popularity and availability.
- » **Make sure the library's community knows what's available.** Publicize resources and library events. Reach out to publishers and other content producers to provide tools and resources so you can engage effectively with your community, particularly undergraduates and early career researchers. These are frequently offered at no charge.
- » **Work on professional development.** In order to successfully demonstrate the value of the collection and the library in general, librarians may need to acquire new skills, e.g., data management, data literacy, budgeting, and contract and other negotiation strategies and tactics, etc.

Value of the Corporate Library Collection

Corporate librarians: Managing a critical business asset.

Corporate libraries provide essential services that ensure that their researchers and other stakeholders **are informed "just in time" with the most relevant, up-to-date information to make decisions quickly and confidently**. As budgets are scrutinized for their business contribution, the need to demonstrate ROI is increasingly important.

Corporate library collections are closely aligned with a company's current R&D projects in specific fields of interest, while anticipating future developments. Although users in corporate settings may not visit physical libraries, particularly when multinational and/or multisite companies maintain a library at a single location, they routinely access resources and services online. **Rapid access to current, validated information is critical for this user community** so that it can continuously adapt to internal and external competitive changes, keep up with developments in their field, and drive innovation and profitability forward.

Journals are at the center of any corporate library's collection, but also important are trade literature, reference texts, codes and standards, full-text patent information, competitive information, technical reports, and news coverage. Equally important are internally generated information resources.

The following questions can be asked in order to assess the value of the collection:

- Is the library's collection aligned to support the company's overall mission and business objectives?
- Is the library's collection aligned to meet researchers' current and future needs?
- Are internally generated information resources well organized and easily accessible? Or are they fragmented and decentralized? Are there information silos?
- How much time is saved for employees thanks to library resources and expertise? Are there identifiable revenue increases and R&D expense decreases due to library-provided information? Are there productivity gains and cost savings?
- Is the library providing content to its users with sufficient speed and convenience?
- Is the library able to support proposals and business case preparation?
- Instead of purchasing content, does it make financial sense to move to ILL, articles on demand, or single article purchase (journals and books)?

What can librarians do to demonstrate and increase the value of the collection and contribute to overall business success? Here are some recommendations:

» **Measure, measure, measure.** Develop, maintain, and adapt systems for collection assessment. Collect data on user behavior (while maintaining privacy). Results can provide essential information when calculating library ROI and for continuing improvements to library services and resources.

» **Identify and prioritize user needs.** Evaluate subscription content annually with R&D managers, key active users, and other stakeholders. Does the collection, including internal and external resources, include what users need? What will users need in the near future? How necessary is it to search across all desired resources with one search interface? How important is full-text access? This will require some cost benefit analyses. Take a deep dive using surveys, focus groups, and other analytics tools to find out.

» **Protect corporate memory.** The library can play a key role by capturing and preserving historic methods and documents that are critical to current and future business. Work with longtime employees to capture, index, and store information related to past projects and processes, in digital format if possible.

» **Develop and manage the intellectual property portfolio.** Work closely with R&D, inventors, and the legal team to develop and manage content on patents, trademarks, and service marks. Monitor competitors' publications and news items and share relevant developments with R&D. Research existing patent coverage when the R&D team invents a new design. Pay attention to freedom of use and potential patentability.

» **Manage how content is shared across the company and externally while complying with company confidentiality and legal restrictions.** The library should work hard to make sure it and the company are compliant with copyright laws. Identify which digital reference items can be shared and how they might be used. Manage requests to share papers, standards, specifications, and other information with suppliers, internal and external customers, and external legal counsel.

» **Assist with new-hire orientation.** Introducing new staff to the library's resources and services, perhaps as part of the onboarding process, can help them locate, access, evaluate, apply, and document information and become more productive, more quickly.

» **Make sure the library's community knows what's available.** Publicize resources and library events and travel to other company locations, if feasible. Ask senior managers to join library staff meetings in order to publicize new and current products and services. Reach out to publishers and other content providers to take advantage of free resources for users.

Value of the Government Library Collection

Government librarians: Fulfilling the mandate of supporting efforts to advance scientific endeavor for the benefit of all people.

While government libraries provide many of the same resources and services and face many of the same challenges as their academic and corporate counterparts, funding is a major concern. Funding can be at risk, for example, due to political climate, leadership changes, or new legislation. **Consequently, because of this susceptibility, it is important for librarians in governmental settings to be responsive to change** and be able to efficiently demonstrate the value of their collections in order to justify annual budgets.

The following questions can be asked in order to assess the value of the collection:

- Generally, the user defines the value of the library collection. Is there a clear understanding of the users' definition/perception of this value?
- Does the library have procedures in place to accurately quantify the value of its collection for all user groups?
- Are there advantages gained from centralization of content that impacts costs and accessibility? Are there inefficiencies due to decentralization?
- How important is rapid access to pre-print articles rather than waiting for formal publication of those articles?
- Instead of purchasing content, does it make financial sense to move to ILL, articles on demand, or single article purchase (journals and books)?
- Is the library adhering to copyright regulations and funding mandates pertaining to open dissemination of information?
- Do users have immediate access from any location? Could a multi-hour wait in some cases be counterproductive?
- What information from the collection can be shared externally out of national interest?

What can librarians do to demonstrate and increase the value of the collection and contribute to the overall success of their institutions? Here are some recommendations:

- » **Measure, measure, measure.** Develop, maintain and adapt systems for collection assessment. Collect data on user behavior (while maintaining privacy). Results can provide essential information when calculating library ROI and for continuing improvements to library services and resources.
- » **Understand and quantify the value of the library's collection.** What is the user community's definition of "value?" Bibliometrics and user surveys are extremely useful tools to analyze the collection and determine how it is used. Even anecdotal evidence from users can be powerful.
- » **Build on best practices for handling and long-term preservation of government and non-government documents.** The value of the collection is enhanced by rapid access to historical information, including internal documents and codes and standards.
- » **Manage how content is shared across government institutions and externally while complying with legal requirements.** The library should work hard to make sure it is compliant with copyright laws and funder mandates. Identify which digital reference items can be shared and how they might be used. Manage requests to share papers, standards, specifications, and other information across all stakeholders.
- » **Assist with new-hire orientation.** Introducing new staff to the library's resources and services, perhaps as part of the onboarding process, can help them locate, access, evaluate, apply, and document information and become more productive, more quickly.
- » **Make sure the library's community knows what's available.** Publicize resources and library events and travel to other sites, if feasible. Reach out to publishers and other content providers to take advantage of free resources for users.

References
and Resources

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[1] Association of College and Research Libraries, 2010, *Value of Academic Libraries: A Comprehensive Research Review and Report*, Researched by Megan Oakleaf, Association of College and Research Libraries, Chicago, **http://www.ala.org/acrl/sites/ala.org.acrl/files/content/issues/value/val_report.pdf**

[2] Association of College and Research Libraries, 2017, *Academic Library Impact: Improving Practice and Essential Areas to Research*. Prepared by Lynn Silipigni Connaway, William Harvey, Vanessa Kitzie, and Stephanie Mikitish, Association of College and Research Libraries, Chicago, **http://www.ala.org/acrl/sites/ala.org.acrl/files/content/publications/whitepapers/academiclib.pdf**

Resources

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