Reshaping Academic Library Outreach Efforts Using LibInsight

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Abstract: Some libraries are tracking metrics, such as instruction data and usage statistics, to illustrate the impact that their services are having on student retention and success. The data can be used as libraries advocate for adequate budgets, demonstrating the valued roles they play in the academic community. In addition to the traditional data collected, library outreach activities are used to demonstrate engagement with college communities and have a positive impact on student experience. The Berkeley College Library developed an outreach planning and assessment strategy using unified monthly initiatives across eight library locations, including an online campus, to measure Berkeley Library's impact across the entire college. This article explains how the Library's Outreach & Marketing Committee evaluated its methods for measuring library impact and how the Committee formulated a solution for effectively tracking outreach data to demonstrate the library's value.

Keywords: Library outreach, assessment data, LibInsight, library programming

Introduction

Academic libraries are increasingly expected to implement assessment strategies that demonstrate the library's value and relevance by measuring alignment with institutional missions and goals. According to the ACRL *Academic Library Impact* report, Megan Oakleaf states that there is both an increased need to demonstrate value as well as a "lack of consensus on how to measure library value for student learning and success" (Silipigni

Connaway et al., 2017). Without a standard measure of value, academic libraries are analyzing the methods through which they reach students and attempting a variety of assessment measurements based on their institutional needs.

Statistics gathered from instruction, reference, and access services can tell a story of how students directly use the library. Library outreach activities can show interaction within the library and the college community, potentially having a positive impact on student retention. In order to collect outreach data that "create[s] a narrative of value and relevance, libraries must think strategically about designing programs that speak both to the library's mission and that of the university as a whole" (Graves, LeMire, Mastel, & Farrell, 2018). Therefore, librarians must not only create and perform engaging outreach activities, but they must also ensure they are in alignment with specific goals and partnered with an assessment strategy.

At Berkeley College, campus librarians engage in a variety of outreach activities and the promotion of library services to increase the number and types of interactions with the library and contribute to student success. Efforts to increase student interaction with library services align with the library's goal to support student success. Through anecdotal positive experiences, librarians believed that these interactions were making an impact on students. However, the Library did not have a formalized method for measuring the impact of its outreach and marketing activities in order to demonstrate support of the department's goals and the College's strategic plan. Berkeley College Library used assessment data to show that the library aligned with institutional goals and formalized a strategy to share that impact to prove the library's value to the College. This article describes how the Library's Outreach & Marketing Committee (O&M Committee) successfully developed an assessment method using unified monthly initiatives across campus libraries and collected consistent, meaningful data using Springshare's *LibInsight* as a data collection tool.

Literature Review

College and university stakeholders focus on ensuring that students continue in their studies, achieve in their coursework, and ultimately, graduate. To visibly contribute to this shared goal of student success, academic libraries must have mechanisms for demonstrating their value to students, faculty, and stakeholders. While other organizations may be able to show value through increases in revenue, the library literature expresses that "understanding

student learning, faculty scholarly work, and institutional quality require a much more nuanced approach" (Oakleaf, 2010).

Being part of campus conversations about student outcomes ensures that libraries are seen as playing a valuable role in the student experience. To solidify their place at the table, libraries must quantify the impact they have on student outcomes and share that data with stakeholders. The University of Nebraska-Lincoln developed a two-year study that analyzed student GPAs in relation to circulation of material and access to library resources (Allison, 2015). While the study suggests that a correlation between library use and grade point averages exists, there is not necessarily a cause-and-effect relationship between these factors. However, the data does demonstrate that library use is linked to positive student outcomes by comparing student interaction with resources and space. This relationship shows the positive outcomes of measuring the library's link to educational results and the potential for additional research on why this connection exists.

A similar study by Murray, Ireland, and Hackathorn (2016) analyzed student library usage at a public university in an effort to evaluate the rate of retention in the following semester. The study found that "library use—of any kind—was predictive of freshman-to-sophomore and sophomore-to-junior retention, with freshman library users being nine times more likely to be retained than nonusers." The authors used data from a variety of sources including collection statistics, computer usage, and instruction attendance. These were aggregated into a centralized database for analysis against student progress. Each type of library interaction data is described in the study's methodology, illustrating the various ways librarians tracked student engagement and how each contributed to the final impact analysis.

The literature is replete with information on successful outreach efforts, but there is a lack of research on how outreach activities can be effectively assessed to demonstrate library value. This finding is echoed by Farrell and Mastel who "found many articles that explain 'how-to' do a specific type of outreach" but the articles "rarely discuss[ed] how to assess the outreach activities beyond head counts" (2016). Since then, more libraries began contributing their assessment projects to the literature, providing valuable examples of quantifying outreach. For example, at the University of Houston, the library joined an institutional campus engagement ROI team to determine strategies for contributing to student retention (Santiago, 2019). Through an analysis of data from the library's recent outreach activities, recommendations were made to leadership that were designed to improve library processes and make student engagement more effective. Their study shows

the value of using tools, such as Springshare's *LibInsight*, for collecting outreach data and how assessing outreach creates positive change.

Another recent outreach study completed at Texas A&M University focuses on the assessment of a large, annual library open house event. The authors stress the importance of "connecting assessment to outreach in an intentional and goal-oriented manner" and posit that this is not more prevalent in the library literature due to a lack of consensus on what the term "outreach" encompasses (German & Lemire, 2018). In order to select strategic, user-focused assessment methods, the concept of design thinking was incorporated into the planning process and each assessment metric was connected to an event goal. This event data was published in a final report that was shared with stakeholders to illustrate the library's specific impacts on new students and can also be used to plan future events more effectively.

As the study by German and LeMire illustrates, libraries must advocate by sharing the data they collected, achievements of the library, and impact stories within their institutions. In a white paper, the authors stress that marketing and outreach is "the backbone of an academic library's advocacy," and that, "compared to traditional services in the library, such as reference, collection development, and resource sharing, outreach is fairly new and is still being explored" (Dantus and Park, 2018). ACRL's A*cademic Library Impact* report notes*,* "a lack of consensus on how to measure library value for student learning and success," which includes using outreach data. As a result, libraries must develop their own methods (Silipigni Connaway et al., 2017).

This article explains how the Berkeley College Library evaluated their methods for measuring library impact and created an assessment workflow that included a Springshare *LibInsight* form, a data analysis spreadsheet, and post-promotion activities that allow for effective assessment of each monthly initiative.

Methodology

Berkeley College is a four-year degree college with seven campuses in New York and New Jersey. Berkeley grants associate, bachelor's and master's degrees, with a robust online program. Approximately 5,000 full-time students are enrolled in academic programs designed to prepare students for "life-long success in dynamic careers." The student population includes 59% who identify as being part of a minority group with many students across the population also reporting that they work while maintaining a full course load (Berkeley College, 2020). To support students with their coursework, each campus has its

own library space with at least one professional librarian overseeing library services, including information literacy instruction, research assistance, and outreach to their campus community.

In 2017, the Library's O&M Committee piloted unified programming for the Libraries. This involved each campus hosting the same themed events and promotions. The success of the pilot led the O&M Committee to design materials, engaging activities, and appropriate assessments for one initiative each month across all campus libraries, thereby maximizing opportunities for consistent campus outreach.

As the O&M Committee explored the idea of unified outreach, the Library was already collecting metrics to illustrate the impact of instructional sessions, reference transactions, and programming activities at each campus. The programming data was entered into a Programming & Events *LibInsight* Form (P&E Form) created by Amanda Piekart, the Director of Research and Instruction at Berkeley College. This form compiled data of individual events at specific campuses including quantitative information (attendee counts) and qualitative information, such as librarian observation of student reactions/engagement. While it provided statistics on some of the Library's outreach efforts, the O&M Committee recognized that the form could have been more effective had it tracked both individual campus programming efforts and monthly unified initiative data. By tracking all outreach efforts across campuses, the Library would obtain a more complete view of its impact.

To analyze the impact of outreach efforts, the O&M Committee downloaded all data from the P&E Form for the 2017-2018 year into an Excel document. The data in each field needed to meet at least one of three criteria in the review process. The first criterion was that it provided factual details about the outreach (i.e. program name, date or campus). The second criterion was that it provided information on the intended impact of the outreach (i.e. goal, collaboration with other departments). The last criterion was that it provided the actual measured impact of the outreach (i.e. assessment methods and outcomes). The data entered by librarians was scrutinized for accuracy. For example, the O&M Committee looked for consistency of data, such as whether institutional goals matched the purpose of the program or whether outcome goals matched with appropriate assessment measures.

After reviewing the data, the O&M Committee concluded that the fields were not all being used appropriately, certain fields were not necessary, and the addition of new fields could increase the effectiveness of the assessments. For example, the Committee determined that the "preparation time" field could be removed as it was not an effective measure of

outreach impact nor did it connect to Library goals or student outcomes. Also, the P&E Form was only tracking the single-day outreach activities of an individual campus. Adding detailed options by type of outreach effort would offer more opportunities for data collection, specifically for monthly unified initiatives. In addition, recorded outreach goals were not always measurable through the assessments selected nor were diverse assessment methods being used. The O&M Committee concluded that outcomes in these areas could be improved through a change in format to these fields, providing more detailed instructions, and using the pre-defined entry feature in *LibInsight*. Pre-defined entries allowed the O&M Committee to pre-populate specific fields (such as goals or suggested assessments) with precise data labels that were then used by librarians when they were ready to record their monthly initiative information.

After drawing these conclusions, the O&M Committee explored the option of using two forms: one form for monthly initiatives and the existing P&E Form for individual campus outreach. Ultimately, the Committee created an entirely new form using some fields from the old form as a basis to create a more seamless data entry process. As discussed in the next section, fields were created or strategically adjusted to improve the effectiveness of data collected. The new form was named the Outreach & Marketing Form (O&M Form) and is currently being used by Berkeley College librarians to track outreach efforts.

Outreach & Marketing Form

Each of the fields on the O&M Form serves a purpose in measuring the impact of library outreach on student success. The O&M Form begins by asking for descriptive information about the type of outreach performed. While the previous iteration only included checkboxes for events and external activities, options are now available for a range of outreach types from a single scheduled event to a multi-week promotion, such as for a scavenger hunt. Librarians are then asked to provide an event name, describe the support provided, and the event goals. These goals should be specific, measurable, and linked to assessments that are later tracked in the form. Using a pre-defined entry, the O&M Committee would populate examples to assist librarians in the creation of event goals that match the goals for the monthly initiative. Librarians must link each outreach activity to institutional goals as well as Library goals. This allows the Committee to run reports on which goals are being addressed in the unified outreach effort (Figure 1). Before starting the O&M Form for a monthly initiative, a librarian can also select the correct pre-defined entry from the top of the page and enter their campus-specific information (Figure 2).

Figure 1: O&M Form

Figure 2: O&M Form Pre-Defined Entry Option

To track the intended audience and collaborations, librarians report their target audiences, outreach organizers and supporters, class collaborations, and departmental collaborations. Librarians must report any professors they contacted (including those who did not ultimately attend), classes attending the event, and departments that provided support. These collaborations illustrate the value in cross-campus connections. By reporting target audiences, the O&M Committee can highlight the initiatives focused on faculty or

staff. Similarly, by tracking class support, the Library can show the added instructional value of outreach in addition to formal classroom sessions.

The O&M Form also tracks whether the outreach was part of a multi-campus event where all libraries consistently promoted the same theme, such as Banned Books Week, Information Literacy Month, or another monthly initiative. The O&M Committee also populates the multi-campus event field to ensure that the "O&M Initiative" drop-down is selected for reporting accuracy (Figure 3). *LibInsight* allows users to run date and location-based queries so the form requires librarians to enter the date (or starting date) of their outreach and their location. This offers the O&M Committee a method of reporting on monthly initiatives and campus directors with end-of-month report data (Figure 4).

Figure 3: Multi-Campus Event Dropdown Field with O&M Initiative Option

Figure 4: LibInsight Option to Run Reports Using Date- and Location-Based Queries

Assessment measures and the corresponding results are important pieces of information collected through the form. Librarians must select at least one assessment measure and then report the related data in the box underneath. Two additional assessment dropdowns and larger text boxes were added to the new form to allow more data to be collected. The assessment measures are both quantitative and qualitative and include attendance count, circulation count, *LibGuides* statistics, handout counts, survey data, compiled social media, and attendee comments (Figure 5). After reviewing the P&E form data, the Committee recommended that librarians more consistently use the form as part of the outreach planning process to ensure that intended goals are matched with appropriate assessment methods and measures. For example, librarians who report a goal of "increasing student confidence using a new search tool" must plan an assessment that captures that confidence and not just use an attendance count as the measurement.

Figure 5: O&M Form Qualitative and Quantitative Assessment Measures

Lastly, librarians are encouraged to make conclusions about the outreach: Were the goals met and assessed effectively? Does the program/activity still hold value? What would they do differently next time? If qualitative data, multimedia, or images are available, librarians should specify where those files are located for review purposes (Figure 6). By reflecting on outreach efforts and providing qualitative data, the O&M Committee can consider these conclusions towards the overall success of a monthly initiative. These reflections can also be used when planning the same or similar events in the future.

Figure 6: O&M Form Options for Indicating Location(s) of Multimedia & Qualitative Data, as well as Options for Adding Comments

As the O&M Committee was designing the new form, they determined that a method for consistently compiling and analyzing this data should be recorded for all campus-wide outreach efforts. A variety of options were explored; in the end, an Excel spreadsheet was selected as the most effective because of its flexibility and usability. During the planning process for each initiative, the O&M Committee set objectives and assessment measures for each suggested activity. These are recorded in a Data Assessment & Analysis Spreadsheet (Figure 7). At the end of each month, an O&M Committee member combines the quantitative data and any linked qualitative data from the *LibInsight* form to create a set of statistics about each initiative (e.g., "99 students across 7 campuses attended events"), writing a short statement that determines whether the Committee goals were met for the monthly initiative and what could be improved in the future. These insights are recorded in an Excel planning document for O&M Committee review and for reference as future initiatives are planned (Figure 7).

O & M Initiative	Institutional Goal Alignment	Library Operational Goal	CLO Supported	O & M Objective Supported	Learning Objective	Assessment Strategy(s)	Outcome/Measurement	Qualitative Data Y/N
Celebrate Berkeley College Libraries Month - January 2018	Retention & Graduation	Integrated Services	Information Literacy	4. Library personnel convey a consistent message about the library and engage in their role as ambassadors in order to expand user awareness of resources, services, and expertise.	A superhero theme will provide a consistent message for the community to recognize that librarians have specific information specialties and expertise.	Programs followed a consistent theme and unified program/marketing materials with learning objectives that promoted IL skills.	15 programs were held that reached over 450 students	Yes, pictures on the S drive
	Innovation and Competitiveness	Educational Impact	Knowledge and Skills for Living in a Diverse Society			Printed materials engaged the community with the library through stickers and an informational infographics to support theme.	100 stickers distributed across 7 physical campuses	Pictures on the S Drive
		User Experience	Integration of Learning	1. Libraries engage the campus and broader community through multiple strategies in order to advocate, educate, and promote their value.	To raise awareness of the services, resources and expertise the library offers.	Weekly questions at reference desks and the Online Student LibGuide engaged the community by testing their knowledge about the Library	1452 students answered questions	

Figure 7: Excel Planning Document, with Outreach & Marketing Efforts, for Review and Future Reference

Sharing Outreach Assessment Results

By sharing outreach assessment results in a variety of ways, the O&M Committee found that libraries can expand the reach of their message and highlight their impact through the college community. Pictures taken at outreach events are shared on social media with fun caption recaps for post-promotion. Pictures paired with quantitative event data and shared with the media/press departments immediately following an event raise student awareness and interest in library outreach efforts. For example, the O&M Committee designed an initiative for Hispanic Heritage Month that included materials for a Wikipedia Edit-a-Thon. Information on the multiple Edit-a-Thon events were sent to the college media department, which led to a local radio interview for one of the participating professors and an article on the college's website.

Including images and data analysis in library or campus stakeholder reports demonstrates library outreach impact on student retention and engagement. Data shared can include the number of students or classes reached, positive comments, and post-event survey data that may indicate an increase in student engagement with the library or with information literacy concepts. Librarians can also include data from outreach events in their annual reviews to highlight accomplishments and contributions to the success of the library's operational goals. These reports can also be shared in a visually appealing infographic created using a web-based tool such as Canva. Infographics or visual reports are also effective for sharing in faculty, student, or department newsletters because they can tell the story of an event or month-long promotion (Figure 8).

Finally, running periodic reports in *LibInsight* allows the librarians to look for changes in outreach patterns. These analyses can be especially impactful because they can show positive changes in metrics such as student attendance at events, more engaging comments about the library or improved confidence using library resources. Collecting data is valuable, but it must be evaluated and shared to tell a story of outreach success.
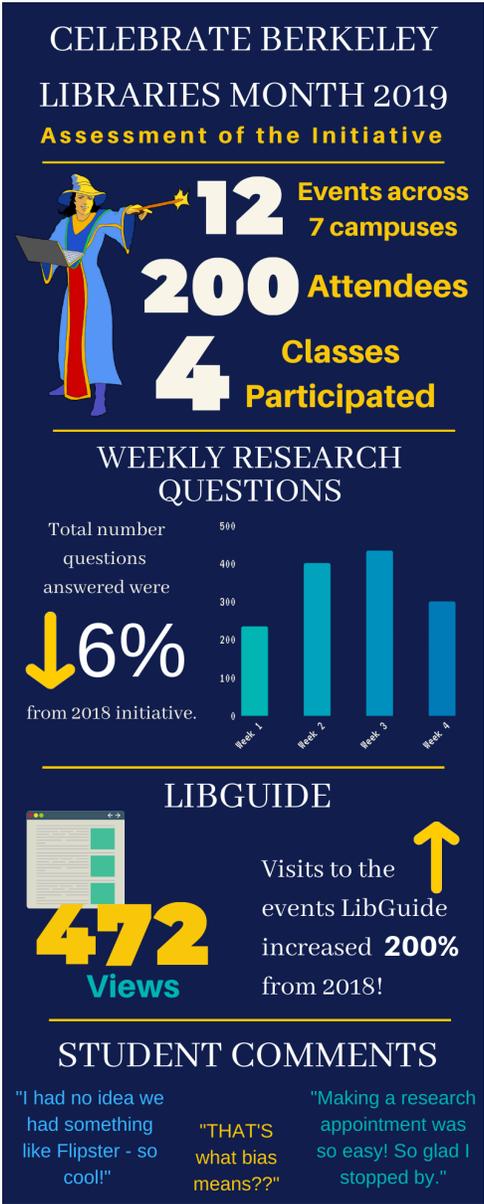

Figure 8: Infographic as Visual Report of O&M Initiative Efforts

Conclusion

As academic libraries are being asked to prove their contribution to student retention and success, the Berkeley College Library recognized the value of measuring library outreach impact. While the Library's O&M Committee had been tracking selected outreach activities, the effort was not formalized, consistent, or effective in proving the value of the library or individual campuses. Throughout the process of evaluating existing forms and data collection processes, the O&M Committee concluded that designing a single Springshare *LibInsight* form would enable the Library to gather both quantitative and qualitative data to tell its outreach stories.

The O&M Committee recommend several best practices for creating an effective assessment strategy to demonstrate the value of library outreach. First, centralizing data collection of all outreach information into a single form, even for multiple campuses, avoids confusion and failure to collect accurate data. Next, librarians should consider the importance and application of every data point being collected, selecting the most appropriate fields to illustrate the outreach activity and library event's impact on the college community. Data collected that highlights the contributions of outreach to achieving library and institutional goals should be promoted to stakeholders. It is also an important practice to continuously analyze collected data for its accuracy and insights. The insights from this analysis provide librarians with opportunities to connect library interactions with student success so that libraries remain a valued part of the campus community.

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