Communicating Your Value--Development of an Open-Access Survey to Assess Library Effectiveness

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Assessment and communicating value to stakeholders is important for all libraries including small academic libraries, but we often lack dedicated personnel, tools, and expertise to address this need. The Private Academic Library Network of Indiana (PALNI), a consortium of 24 libraries, created the Return On Investment (ROI) committee to address this need for assessment and demonstrating our Value to our member institutions. Committee members were charged to identify opportunities, design tools, promote activities, and foster a culture of quality and evidence-based practice within the organization aligned with PALNI goals and strategic initiatives.

After much deliberation, the ROI committee determined that the best source to clarify our direction was the *ACRL Standards for Libraries in Higher Education.* PALNI sponsored the ACRL RoadShow traveling workshop, "Standards for Libraries in Higher Education," for the entire PALNI Board. There we were introduced to the nine Principle Standards and their related Performance Indicators. Following the workshop, board members (library directors and deans) were surveyed and it was determined that the two most impactful Principles to address with this proposed survey were "Educational Role" of the library in the University and "Institutional Effectiveness" of the library. Subsequently, the committee surveyed the identified stakeholders, faculty and administrators, and found that their priorities for their campus' library were "Educational Role," "Discovery," and "Collections." We found the discrepancy interesting and took the opportunity to highlight the library's value in "Institutional Effectiveness," as comments indicated that stakeholders were unaware that the library could also contribute to the institution's effectiveness. We agreed that the assessment of the "Discovery" and "Collections" principles could be better addressed through other initiatives.

Our next steps were to identify goals for this assessment. They were:
1. Data that provides evidence that the library is important for institutional effectiveness and critical to the educational process on our campuses.
2. Data that indicates where improvements need to be made in these two Principles.
3. Information to take to our administrative stakeholders to assist them in decision-making, especially in the areas of library staffing and funding.

Design:

The ROI committee consulted with Dr. Sharon Calhoun, an Indiana University survey design expert, before PALNI entered into a contract with the higher education research organization IDEA Education (now Anthology). IDEA staff directed us through the process of creating valid questions and piloting the multi-user survey. PALNI also contracted with them to analyze the

results. The collaboration resulted in a tool to assess the library's impact and value to each institution. The survey, *Assessing the Educational Role and Effectiveness of the Library at Your Institution* is available as an open-source survey that can be administered independently by individual libraries, consortia, or other library groups. Data can also be used for benchmarking. While the survey was created by and for small libraries we believe that academic libraries of all sizes could benefit from the use of the survey on their campuses.

Findings:

The survey was distributed to administrators, faculty, and staff at 15 of the PALNI supported institutions during spring and fall semesters 2019. 690 respondents consisted of 357 faculty (52%) and 80 (12%) administrators. The rest of the respondents were staff (324 - 34%)) and "others" (19 - 3%) which included "student services" employees and a few trustees. Highlights of the survey results confirm that:

- Partnerships between the library and other campus academic units enhance student learning.
- Consortial relationships are beneficial to our institutions.
- The library is essential to the institutions' accreditation.
- The library has a positive impact on student academic success.

Areas for improvement include identifying effective communication conduits for reporting the library's contributions to campus and determining ways to demonstrate the library's impact on student success, recruitment, and retention. Differences in how administrators, staff, and faculty view the library's contributions to their departments' outcomes have been noted. These differences may indicate opportunities for greater development and communication.

Practical Implications/Value:

This manageable survey offers all libraries a single multiple-stakeholder tool that provides a snapshot of how the library's educational role and contributions to the institution's effectiveness are viewed by its administration, faculty, and staff. This survey has a special appeal to smaller libraries who are staff-strapped with limited budgets yet still desire, and may have a greater need, to demonstrate the value of the library.

Survey results give libraries the opportunity to focus on the library's areas of greatest need and celebrate their institutional impact. The results may also reveal our stakeholders' preferred communication styles for keeping apprised of the library's services and resources as questions about communication preferences were also included.

An unexpected value of the survey is in educating our stakeholders of the myriad ways the library contributes to the institution. Moving beyond the library's impact on student learning and support of faculty instruction, this survey also helps demonstrate to stakeholders how libraries add value to mission-critical goals such as recruitment and retention.

The survey, the creation process, a bibliography as well as other resources for the VALUE survey are available on the PALNI's libguide https://libguides.palni.edu/libraryvalue/

Feel free to contact either Anita or Tonya about the process or results of the survey.