Tracking for Outreach: Using Data for Cross-Unit Purposes

Heidi Gauder and Hector Escobar
University of Dayton, USA

This session will discuss how librarians at the University of Dayton have been able to utilize data from reference transactions and programming events in order to improve and deliver library services. Although the data originated from the reference department and programming events, analyses indicated opportunities across the library, particularly for the instruction department and the library liaison program. The data is currently used for library improvement, but it could have potential in exploring the library's role in student success and retention.

Since creating a learning commons a couple of years ago, the University of Dayton's Roesch Library reference department has been coordinating data gathering methods with the writing center. With both units using standard check-in procedures at a shared desk and hosting in-depth consultations in a shared space, it also made sense to share technologies. Since spring 2015, we have logged students for research consultations with the TutorTrac software that is commonly used by writing centers, tutoring and other academic support units. We are not only able to count the number of consultations, but we are also able to record cross-referrals with the writing center, calculate average consultation session lengths, and more.

During the time that we began to collect reference transaction data, another campus unit was developing co-curricular learning opportunities that also offered great data and outreach potential. Residence life staff began offering co-curricular learning opportunities with specific learning goals in mind: authorship, interculturalism, and community living. By participating in these activities, students not only engaged in learning outside the classroom, but they also secured points that increased their standing in the housing lottery, a desirable outcome. The co-curricular learning program is called AVIATE and the events are identified as PATH-eligible (Points Accumulated Toward Housing). Other campus units can participate as long as they are able to articulate how their sponsored events meet the learning goals.

The data is only as useful as the culture in which it is collected, and there are several aspects about the University of Dayton that play into the data collection and library decisions. As a private Catholic university, academics at University of Dayton include a College of Arts and Sciences, plus professional schools for engineering, business, and education and health sciences. There are approximately 8,200 undergraduate students, of which 78% are white, non-Hispanic, and another 12% are international; the remaining population includes Hispanic, African-American, two or more races, and other. The campus is highly residential, with most students living on or near campus. In fact, 90% of the undergraduate population lives in campus housing, as these structures, particularly the ones in the surrounding neighborhoods, are seen as advantageous.

These campus conditions affect the library and its service focus several ways. With a primarily residential campus, most of the library interactions with undergraduates are face to face. The library's marketing committee has developed consistent and ongoing messages about the library as a welcoming gathering place for both individual and group work, and at the same time, efforts have been made to improve the quality of service interactions. Given the predominantly white undergraduate student population, the University of Dayton places high value on diversity, which the library actively supports via its mission statement, a library diversity committee, and campus-wide programming. And finally, the library's curriculum support, specifically the instruction and reference components, is intended for all course levels. The instruction program does do some intentional work throughout the curriculum, with an online tutorial in a required first-year communications course, an online tutorial and face-to-face instruction session, both mandatory, in second-year writing courses, and additional instruction sessions in various upper-level and graduate courses.

The decision to utilize software to record research transactions came about in part because of the campus culture on data collection. Within the library,

there is emphasis on data-based decision making, whether it is analyzing reference department activity to determine service desk staffing needs or programming and outreach decisions. Across campus, many academic support units are already using TutorTrac; the library and writing center are two of the 15 seats currently in use. And finally, students are used to swiping, whether to pay for meals, buy books, or access the gym. The University of Dayton is an urban campus, so residence halls and buildings likewise require swipe access in the evening.

The research consultation data, which currently comprises three semesters, contains information relating to meeting date, department and course number, and instructor. For the fall 2015 and spring 2016 semesters, we found that the largest distribution of students seeking research help were for courses in English, history, teacher education, communication, and mechanical engineering. Altogether, we recorded research consultations for 269 different courses or course sections. By comparing the files with the data we have for instruction, we can ascertain whether research consultations occurred after an instruction session or, more tellingly, where the absence of any instruction sent the student for research help. During the fall 2015 and spring 2016 semesters, we taught 211 course-related instruction sessions. When we compared the instruction data against the research consultation data, we found 60 instances where the course or section had an instruction session and at least one student from that same course or section sought research help. In contrast, there were students from 209 courses who sought research help but did not come in for an instruction session. The instruction team can not only ascertain what research help is needed for a particular class, especially if multiple students are seeking help, but can also use that data as a basis for outreach.

This information will not only help us document our reference transactions more effectively, but it also helps document the growth and utility of the learning commons itself. We are moving from anecdotal evidence that students in particular courses were coming in for research support to documenting exactly which courses students, on their own accord, were seeking help with research support. And, because both the writing center and the reference department each have a seat license in TutorTrac, we are able to document when students use both services or are referred from one unit to

the other. In the fall 2015 and spring 2016 semesters, we recorded 152 students who sought both writing and research help, which we see as a growing sign of collaboration between the library and the writing center, as well as growing student understanding that the learning commons can serve as a one-stop center for research paper support. Given that the learning commons opened in August 2014, we were particularly anxious in making sure that our students understood what services were offered and how they could get help, as the writing and research consultation space is an open area that reverts back to student use after the consultation hours are done for the day.

The data will also provide help with our library liaison program, which is moving away from a collections-based model to one where librarians are expected to at least know, if not perform, multiple liaison responsibilities with assigned departments. This data, then, can help liaisons, some of whom do not provide reference services, with a sense of research needs in their constituents. In addition to basic information, this data could also help liaisons gain even more insight about particular collection development needs. For liaisons who do have reference responsibilities, this kind of data provides a more concrete work measure of the extensive research and reference work that is often done on behalf of our users. Within the reference department, we are able to use this information to evaluate our reference staffing models as we look to determine the best way to help students while balancing librarian workloads.

The data collected up to now has been strictly for programmatic improvement as we look to identify opportunities for library services and collaborations. As such, we have only looked at our interactions at the course and departmental level. As the library considers its role in student success and retention, the library would likely need to analyze the results at a more granular level. However, further conversation is needed with our Office of Institutional Research and Reporting before we use the data for such purposes.

In addition to the reference transaction data, the library has also been able to collect data on its programming efforts and look at that data to improve and extend services. As previously noted, this data is gathered from events that students attend in order to secure points for the campus housing lottery. In

the 2015–16 academic year, the library sponsored 14 PATH-eligible events: nine film screenings, two panel discussions, and one each of a book talk, presentation, and teach-in. Student participation is recorded with OrgSync, a campus engagement software product. Data from the library-sponsored events that first year indicated large participation numbers in September and October, as well as March, right before the housing lottery. Excited by this type of student engagement outside the classroom, staff across the library have scheduled 17 PATH-eligible events for the fall 2016 semester. The September and October 2016 events saw over 200 attendees, of which just over half (51%) were upper-division students, another 27% were second-year students, and 22% were first-year students.

The PATH-eligible events offer even more opportunities and consideration in the future. Within the library, the instruction team is taking another look at instruction workshops that focus on lifelong learning, rather than being tied to a particular course. The instruction team sees opportunities to collaborate with external units, like the campus credit union for a workshop on financial literacy, career services for company research workshops, and the writing center for sessions on brainstorming and topic development. The breakdown by student standing could help us target specific opportunities to particular student groups or class year.

As these co-curricular learning activities grow, however, there will be an increased need for internal coordination, as the library resources—namely, space and personnel—remain static. Dates and times for programming are also limited, as the co-curricular programming is usually scheduled at times designed to be optimal with student life, which is after most classes are done for the day. Within the library, different groups sponsor the co-curricular learning opportunities; for example, the library diversity committee hosts a monthly film series, the marketing and outreach committee sponsors a Hispanic heritage month film series, and another reference librarian organizes an undergraduate book club. Because no single library group or unit manages the PATH-eligible events, library stakeholders will need to work together to avoid conflicts and scheduling issues.

Although not without controversy, using standardized swipe data helps create a uniform set of data files that can be analyzed by the units housed in the information commons. By using data collected from one service point to help analyze the work of a related library service—while recognizing relevant campus circumstances and values—we will be able to determine relevant campus constituents for a targeted, proactive outreach plan.

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