

Assessment: Key to Saving the Curriculum Library

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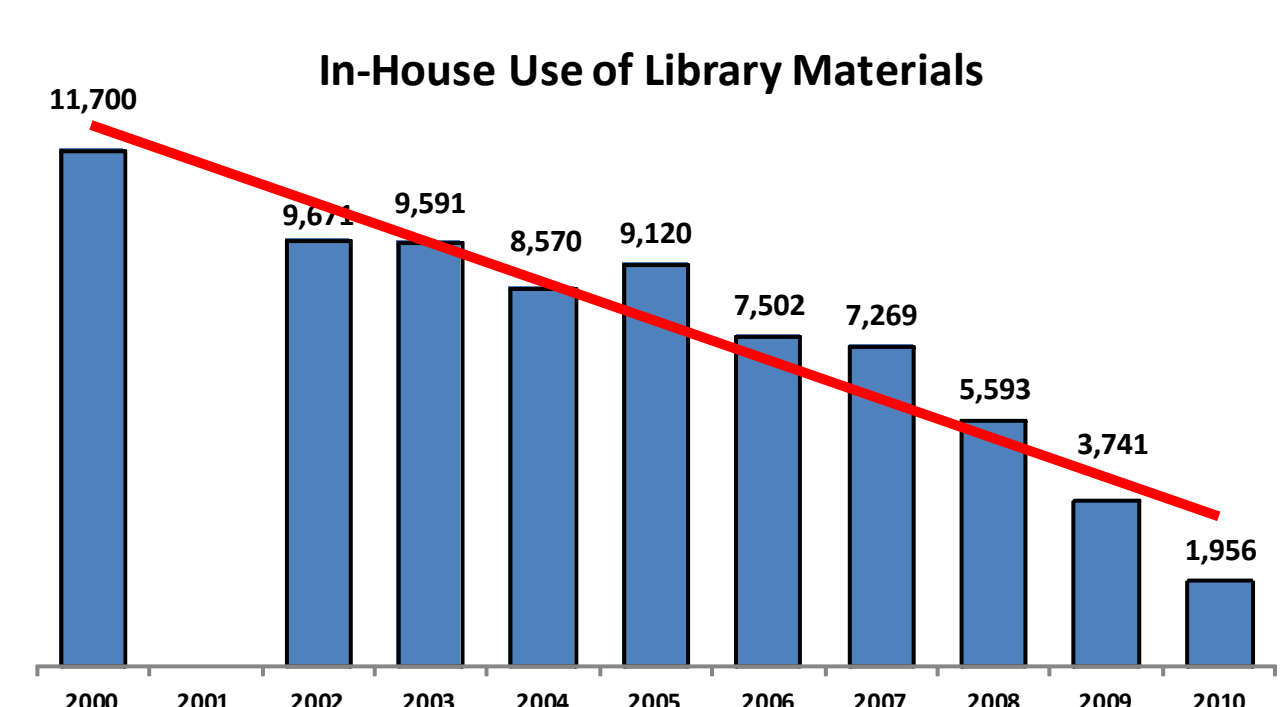
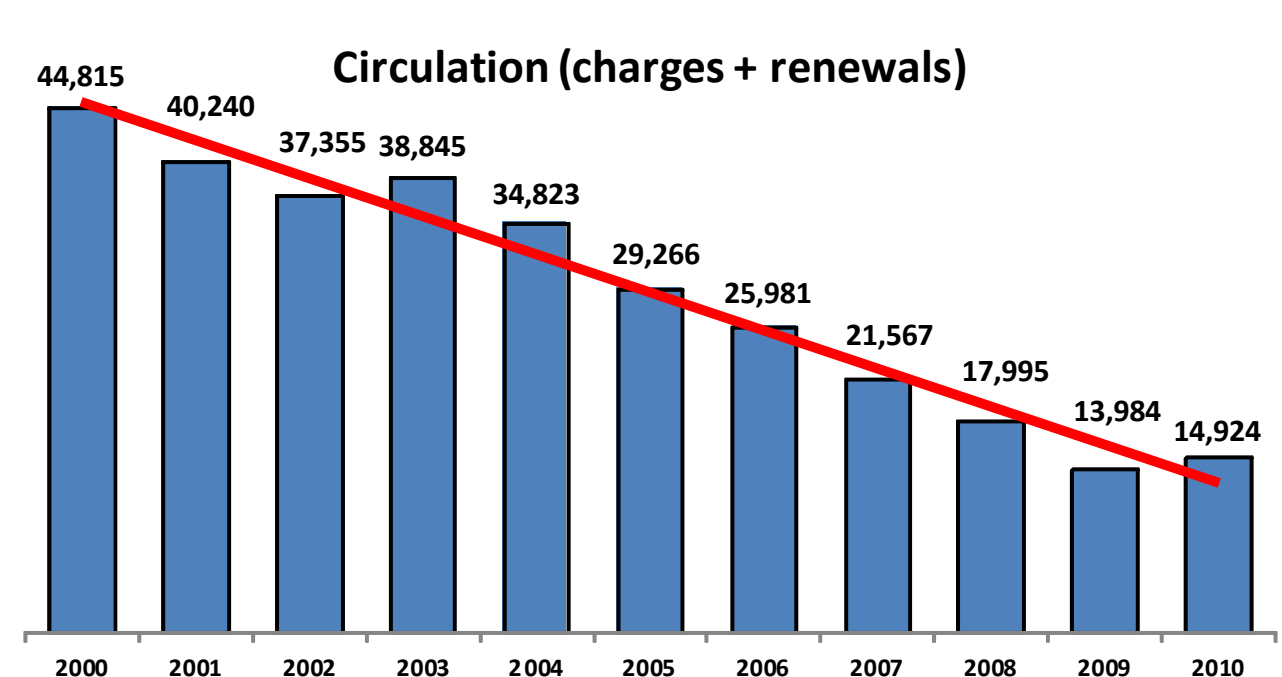
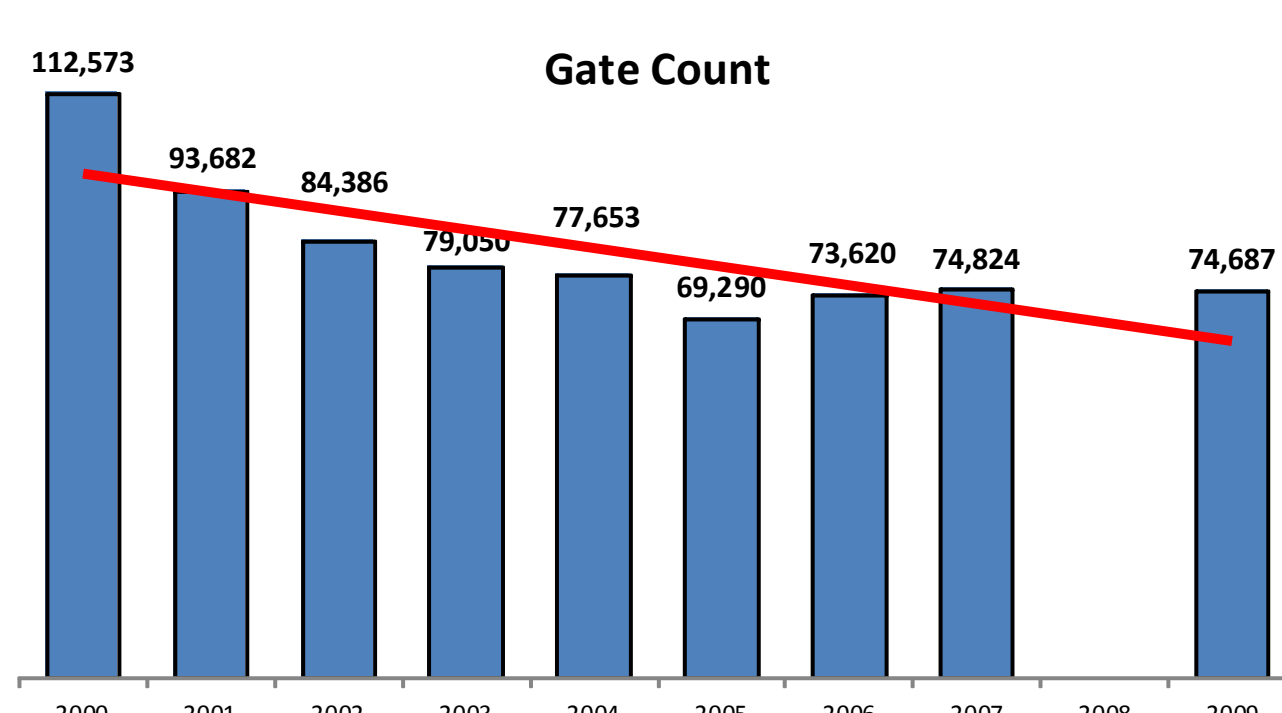
Background

In 2010 the University of Victoria Libraries faced unprecedented budget cuts. During such times of fiscal hardship and cuts, smaller more specialized libraries can be at higher risk of closure for a “quick and easy” way to save costs.

The Curriculum Library, a branch of the UVic Libraries embedded within the Faculty of Education, faced this fate. Reality did show a steady decline in use of the collection, services and the physical space of the library. In addition, the Curriculum Library was longer keeping pace with trends and changes in the K to 12 education system and thus no longer meeting the needs of its primary users, the teacher education program students.

A Statistical Snapshot of Decline

Fewer people visiting the Curriculum Library led to a decrease in gate stats, while circulation of physical materials and in-house use of materials dropped drastically as a result of less foot traffic and of materials not being updated to reflect changes in K-12 teacher education philosophies. These statistics clearly show a decline in the use of the Curriculum Library.



Methods

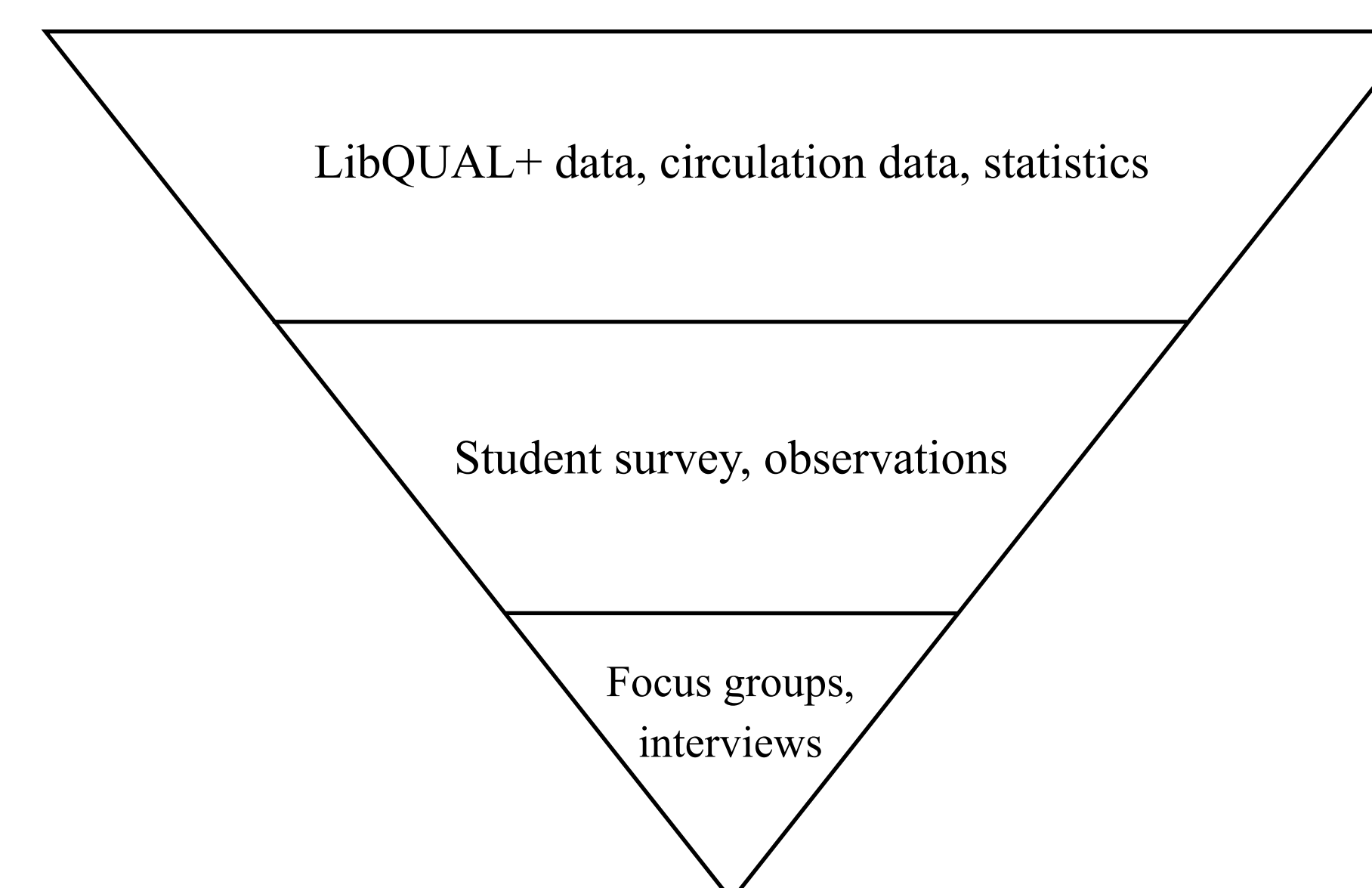
Given the gravity of the potential closure of a branch library, the UVic Libraries Assessment Resource Office was tasked with collecting in-depth and reliable data to help with final decision making. To facilitate the data collection, we developed a 3-tier assessment plan. This method allowed for the collection of multiple data sets which could be used to corroborate each level of investigation and findings.

Three Tiered Assessment Plan

Tier 1 involved the examination of all available statistical information. The statistics gave us basic information about the trends in the use of collection, resources and services. We then mined data from our LibQUAL+ results over a 9-year period, which also gave us a basic understanding of the perceptions and preferences of Curriculum Library users. This first tier of examination helped us formulate our survey questions and inspired us to conduct a robust series of field observations.

Tier 2 involved implementing a student survey to understand not only what the students *thought* of the Curriculum Library, but also to help us understand what they *needed* it to be. The field observations provided detailed data on the present use of space, resources and services, and corroborated the statistics on use of collections and the decline in gate counts. Informed by the data collected at Tier 1 and 2, we created student focus group questions and interview questions for faculty.

Tier 3 allowed us to dig even deeper into issues around the Curriculum Library and the specifics as to why it no longer met the needs of Education students and faculty. In this tier we found valuable data on what features were missing from the Curriculum Library which would make all the difference for Education students and faculty. This information corroborated and validated the data from the survey, observation and stats collection sub-projects. The narratives from the interviews and focus group created the foundation for a re-visioning for the Curriculum Library.



Results and Findings

- Historical statistics, LibQUAL+ results examined
 - Over 6 hours of field observations carried out
 - 72 students responded to survey
 - 29 students interviewed either singly or in a focus group, 4 responses via email
 - 5 faculty interviewed in focus group format, 3 responses via email
 - 10 library staff and 1 librarian interviewed
1. Support from a teacher librarian acutely needed for teacher education students.
 2. Learning Commons model most closely matched student and faculty space needs, and should be the model moving forward.
 3. Collection needed revitalisation and collection policy needed revising to reflect new support mandate for library (via teacher librarian). Weeding and movement of some parts of the collection would allow for more study space.
 4. Allowing food is important to encourage use of space and to enhance students' community and enjoyment of the space.
 5. More outlets to plug laptops into to increase students' productivity.
 6. Promote the library's collections to the community, including education alumni and local district educators, to foster engagement with the Curriculum Library.

Conclusion

From the assessment data gathered and analyzed via the 3-tier assessment plan, it was clear that the Curriculum Library needed to evolve to meet the unique needs of Education students and faculty. The ultimate request from students and faculty was to create a learning commons model at the Curriculum Library. As well, the data also showed that a priority for the transformation of the Curriculum Library was not simply the refreshment of the outdated space or collection but rather the clear need to create a new position; a teacher-librarian, or learning specialist, position. This position was the missing link in the existing complement of library resources. This position would develop programs and instruction to support pre-service teachers, develop information literacy and digital fluency workshops, and facilitate and support on-going faculty research and teachers' professional development.

As a result of the assessment project, we were not only able to advocate for the need to keeping the library but were able to do the unthinkable and even the unaskable during a time of budget cuts: advocate for hiring a learning specialist. Three years later the Curriculum Library has gone from being on the chopping block to being reinvigorated and thriving thanks to changes made based on evidence and assessment.



Key Learning

Check all assumptions! We assumed the outdated physical space was going to be the most significant factor in the decline in use of the Curriculum Library - we were wrong. The data showed us the main issue was not physical space, but rather the need for support from a teacher librarian.

Acknowledgements

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