Jumpstarting your assessment: Using existing data to establish a foundation for pervasive assessment

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**ABSTRACT**

One of the many reasons why assessment is often overlooked in libraries is because it is perceived as a daunting task. Exploring viable strategies for purposefully establishing pervasive assessment is often hampered by the perception that every assessment effort should involve elaborate/ sophisticated methodologies and instruments in order to capture the data and information needed for decision-making. Furthermore, assessment is often perceived as something that only a few nerdy people do.

This presentation seeks to demystify assessment and highlight ways that everyone in an institution might contribute to assessment efforts. The presentation highlights modest methods that could be adopted to harness existing sources of data, and use information that is generated from day-to-day library activities to make informed decisions. The use of information is the driver of assessment efforts at Virginia Tech to demonstrate how libraries can tap data on an ongoing basis from a myriad of services, programs, and resources to generate useful information that augments information from larger, more standardized assessment efforts. Some of the specific topics covered using Virginia Tech experiences as a basis include: 1. Getting everybody involved, 2. Identifying and tapping your sources for data, and 3. Interpreting your data to generate decision-making information. Using your information going forward.

**GETTING EVERYBODY INVOLVED**

**SPACE SURVEYS**

The purpose of the study was to determine:
- If and how seating is used in the library
- The amount of group and individual work areas needed in the library
- Preferences for furniture types (individual carrels, tables and chairs, soft seating)
- If patrons use library and/or personal computers

**Methodology**

Each public floor of Newman Library was divided into zones by furniture type (carrel, table or lounge) or function (library computer or group study room). The building was canvassed 4 times weekdays and 4 times weekends to determine space use. The study was conducted over four weeks in spring and fall summer semesters 2007. All observations were non-intrusive. No students were interviewed during the data gathering process.

**MAKING SENSE OF & USING YOUR DATA SOURCES**

**YOUR DATA SOURCES**

**PURPOSES OF ASSESSMENT MAY BE:**
- Quality improvement
- Service improvement
- Decision making/strategic planning
- Determination of impact/outcomes
- Predicting
- Benchmarking
- Cost-Benefit Analysis/Return on investment
- Measure rate of productivity
- Measure size, rate of growth, scope of program, etc
- Anticipate change
- Make good decisions
- Demonstrate programming effectiveness
- Determine what to measure and what data to gather

**CHALLENGES**

- Deciding what to measure and what data to gather
- Deciding appropriate method for gathering data and developing appropriate instruments, etc
- Analyzing data/look for patterns with data analysis tools and systems
- Interpreting and using information

**NEW LEARNING COMMONS**

**SOFT SEATING**

The Library User Survey was sent out via email to all graduate students and 2000 undergraduates. The survey form was adapted, with permission, from the University of Washington survey form. The University of Washington had conducted surveys on library use and satisfaction and user needs since 1992. There were three questions pertaining to library use and satisfaction for the future, one of which was question 17. The responses are useful in library strategic planning.

Question 17. What should be the TOP priorities for VT Libraries for the next two years? You have 10 points total to vote on your top priorities. The total must add up to 10. Eleven possibilities were provided including a write-in option.

Analysis

The major improvement we could offer to undergraduate or graduate students is to provide access to more electronic journals (22%), increasing library hours (13%) or providing access to more electronic books (12%) were almost tied in the number of points garnered. Of these two, increasing our electronic book stock would appear to provide the most benefit. Increasing books once affects all users, increasing library hours is staff dependent and would have to apply to several sites since users noted the main library and branch libraries as their prime choice for visits.

**NEW LEARNING COMMONS**

**SOFT SEATING**

**IMPORANT** – Going beyond counting to interpretation and use:
- Creation of Group Study rooms (LibQual survey)
- Implementation of application software on public machines (User surveys, user comments/feedback)
- Redesign of the main library’s second floor (Space survey)
- Recategorisation of reference services (Departmental self-study)
- Hiring of four subject specialist librarians (Departmental self-study)
- Redesign of the Library website (Usability studies)
- Revision of library instruction classes (User surveys/clickers)
- Installation of additional power in the study tables (observation)