

When we put together the special issue for April, I was excited to see so many articles that focused on strategic management of libraries. Many of the articles in *College & Research Libraries* are focused on library operations, data-driven projects, or information literacy. We only periodically receive submissions on library management and leadership topics dealing with strategy, values, ethics, organizational impact, etc.

My interest in this topic is drawn from my perception that academic libraries are still experiencing a crisis of leadership. I realize that this particular contention has been present in the scholarly and professional dialogue for a number of years now, so what I am saying is nothing new. However, the fact is that we in the profession have been aware of the situation and have had so little impact on it, save for some institutions who have demonstrated successes and innovations locally.

When I look to our professional organizations for leadership and vision, I am struck by how they, too, are struggling . . . struggling to figure out how to position themselves, how to engage in higher education in a way that is meaningful, how to support the membership into the future as the environment changes so quickly.

Looking at local levels, leadership and vision as articulated in position descriptions, with a few exceptions, seem to hold fast to traditional library values and priorities. I see a tension between how libraries focus their efforts and what universities set as priorities. Many external factors are at work on institutions of higher education, with funding and accountability being the most visible. Some academic libraries are engaging with their universities to address these concerns and find a way forward, while others are focused on their core functions. I think that it is a

mistake for academic libraries to cling to way they have always done things and to point to the provision of books or database access and the establishment of study spaces as being the primary indicators of our contribution to the institutional mission. While seats occupied and lattes sold are an observable and popular way to measure a library's success, they hardly contribute meaningfully to the education and research mission of our universities and colleges.

I do not mean to say that this is all academic librarians do. That is, patently, not the case. But when it comes to demonstrating how our expertise, innovation and collaboration contributes to the mission of the university, I think that this is an area where we struggle to show how what we do is important.

I will admit that I am struggling with this issue myself. As a liaison librarian and coordinator of a very small branch library, I have had to cope with administrators calling it a "boutique library" and asserting that we can sustain that level of service. As if collaborating with faculty on high-impact practices—such as capstones and innovative teaching, empowering students to be able to find, evaluate, and use information successfully, or customizing access to course readings that saves students thousands of dollars a year—is on par with a spa vacation or a mint on your pillow at an exclusive hotel. The irony of this is that I actually coauthored a paper a few years ago about the practices at this library as a way of demonstrating what successful embeddedness and effective collaboration can look like: it was entitled "Managing a boutique library: Taking liaison to the next level." It is clear, to me, that my vision and my efforts to effectively engage with faculty and students to further the mission of the university is not aligned with that of the administrative vision.

With enrollments increasing almost everywhere, the cost of tuition going up, and the corollary intense scrutiny from

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governance boards and legislators, there is a lot of pressure to focus on return on investment. This mindset puts the emphasis on quantitative evidence as opposed to a qualitative focus. Unfortunately, numeric data, such as gate counts, reference questions or instruction sessions given, are more quickly absorbed than a narrative about student learning and information fluency. It is not surprising that, in an environment where scalability is a concern, the focus is on numbers rather than education.

However, when I consider these submissions in this issue, I am heartened by the engagement that I see on strategic issues in academic libraries and on the thought and intention with which the authors have approached these topics. While each paper addresses a singularly different topic, they are all aspects of organizational behavior and how an academic library is framed to achieve its mission and the goals of its institution. Each author has effectively mapped profession values and practice with forces affecting higher education today.

“Learning Analytics and the Academic Library: Professional Ethics Commitments at a Crossroad” by Kyle Matthew, Lauer Jones, and Dorothea Salo addresses the ways in which libraries are engaging in institutional learning analytics efforts. There is the recognition that the values that have long been upheld in the library profession may need to be reconciled with computer-mediated services and systems, institutional policy, and user expectations. After framing the environment and the tension between competing priorities and expectations, the authors offer some recommendations:

- “Librarians should develop library-specific information policies as well as participating in building institution-wide information policy to govern the ethical use of LA technology.”
- “Adding librarians to data governance teams provides another opportunity for library professionals to challenge ethically suspect data flows and analytics, while

shaping governance practices to protect intellectual freedom and privacy.”

- “Librarians need to advocate for the profession’s values with institutional policymakers when they design internal policy documents, memoranda of understandings with partner institutions, and legally-binding contracts with third-party service providers.”

The authors offer a way for libraries to be strategic and integrate professional library values with institutional priorities. They also make a case for how the expertise of librarians can lead to more tempered and constructive results.

“Salary Negotiation Patterns between Women and Men in Academic Libraries” by Elise Silva and Quinn Galbraith tackles a longstanding issue in the profession—the perceived discrepancy in salaries based on gender. Given that it has been predominantly female for decades, our profession is a noteworthy counterpoint to the rhetoric and dialogue that is in mainstream media. The authors’ survey of professionals at ARL libraries contributes constructive data and some compelling findings to the discussion:

- “Female librarians negotiate less often than male librarians do.”
- “Female librarians are less successful in their negotiations for higher pay than male librarians.”
- “Female library heads, deans, and directors negotiate more than female librarians do.”
- “The longer one works in an academic library the more likely that individual is to negotiate for a higher salary.”

After I read this submission, I also had occasion to talk with a student graduating this semester who is applying to MLS programs. She, because this was a young woman, was asking me about the profession, how to get a position, and about internships. She asked me about negotiating the salary/stipend for internships and if that was permitted. Thinking on this article, we talked about what seems to be the norm, how organizations react when someone does negotiate, and

what the implications are for future earning when one “settles” for less. It took this issue, and this study, from being concern in the profession to how organizational questions of equity and procedural justice have a profound effect on individuals.

“Provosts’ Perceptions of Academic Library Value and Preferences for Communication: A National Study” by Adam Murray and Ashley Ireland. As alluded to earlier in this Spotlight, an individual or a library can do great work, but if it is not communicated and made known to decision makers, there can be very real consequences in terms of funding and support. Murray and Ireland explore this topic with a survey of university provosts and chief academic officers, addressing both perceptions of the “value” of libraries and preferences for how this information is communicated. The results and subsequent discussion are “troubling,” as the authors put it:

- “These findings, overall, demonstrate the need for continued effort to link library services and resources to initiatives of institutional priority.”
- “Provosts tended to rate the academic library as being ‘somewhat involved’ with institutional initiatives such as retention, student academic success, faculty productivity, and less involved with enrollment.”
- “It should come as no surprise that provosts at all types of institutions perceive use data and user satisfaction data to have only moderate impact on a funding decision.”
- The authors also noted some differing trends or priorities based on type of institution, size, and other variables, such as affiliation.

Murray and Ireland’s study serves, to my mind, as the canary in the coal mine. If academic libraries do not attend to the priorities and goals of their parent institutions, they are not only missing opportunities to increase their impact to contribute directly to the success of their universities, but they run the risk of not having the support, po-

litical and financial, that they have always relied on.

“Still a Deadly Disease? Performance Appraisal Systems in Academic Libraries in the United States” by Glenn Ellen Starr Stilling, Allison S. Byrd, Emily Rose Mazza, and Shawn M. Bergman. The title of this article is quite fitting. It seems that the mention of performance appraisals (PA) or evaluations inspire a deep sigh and some anxiety across all organizations. This study reports the results of a survey of U.S. library directors concerning the performance appraisal system in use, who is in a position to give feedback on performance, and the perception of the effectiveness of the system in use. The takeaways reported are:

- “Libraries continue to use several standard components of performance appraisals that are recommended in the job feedback literature.”
- “Library directors are lukewarm about the effectiveness of their PA system.”
- “Library directors at libraries with performance appraisals in addition to the annual evaluation rate their overall PA system as more effective.”
- “Libraries are missing out on opportunities to collect and share feedback that are widely used outside of academia and might improve their PA system.”

The authors are thoughtful and practical in their approach and recommendations, which also attend to best practice in HR at large, not just focusing on the profession—with which I am in enthusiastic agreement.

“What Do Data Librarians Think of the MLIS? Professionals’ Perceptions of Knowledge Transfer, Trends and Challenges” by Camille V. L. Thomas and Richard J. Urban. Data is the buzzword in higher education—data-driven, big data, data literacy, data management, metadata, and so on. With the attention and growing activity, it is essential that academic libraries engage—and they have done so, based on the number of institutions with data librarians. Thomas and

Urban investigate this phenomenon with a survey of both practicing professionals about their preparation for data positions and their supervisors about their performance and how an MLS education contributed. The results:

- “Professionals regard a matriculated MLIS program that includes field experience as the best way to give professionals a sense of qualification for employment in data curation, especially if they do not have other education in a data-driven discipline.”

- “Several professionals who had negative sentiments about their education or current institutional support were optimistic about future developments. They did not seem to expect direct skills from their education.”

- “Data professionals often suggested MLIS programs require all students, whether specializing in data curation or not, to conduct research that included handling and analyzing data.”

While the responses from the study and much of the discussion of results seemed to focus on data curation or management as opposed to data literacy, the authors also asserted that developing skills in research methods and statistical analysis would be valuable across the board.

“A Multi-Level Approach for Library Value Assessment” by David Schweider and Lisa Janicke Hinchliffe. The value of academic libraries becomes a more prominent topic in practice and scholarship, indicated by its distinction as an initiative from ACRL over the past few years. Schweider and Hinchliffe approach the research and literature on this topic from structured schema, examining levels of analysis and identifying best practice for library assessment. Their assertion is that studies at all three levels examines—small group, single institution, multi-institution—are complementary and, when taken together, “can be productively combined into a single assessment program.”

“Given its ability to establish library value at three distinct but interrelated levels, this approach comprises more than the sum of its parts. It draws validity from its close mapping to the structure and organization of existing academic library value scholarship, and it increases the scholarly rigor of the field through its reliance on the fundamental, widely recognized concept of levels of analysis. Ultimately, we believe that practical assessment programs will be the most important beneficiary.” ❧

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