Sandra Blackaby

Increasing recognition of the value of libraries and librarians

Outcomes and assessment build support

It would be surprising if most readers of this journal would not agree that the value of an academic library is critical to the success of students pursuing degrees in four-year colleges and universities, as well as two-year community colleges. At the community college in southeastern Washington state where I am vice president of instruction, the library also plays an important role for students who are completing course work for program certi cates in speci c career areas. When we have surveyed students on their satisfaction with their library experiences, they have responded quite positively. Despite all these encouraging indicators of library effectiveness, academic librarians often express the desire to increase the value that college and university administrators place on libraries in their institutions.

As a former community college library director for more than 20 years before becoming a vice president of instruction, I must admit to being slightly biased in my opinion on the value of academic libraries. My experience in Washington and Oregon libraries has made me very aware of the positive impact a strong library can make on the success of students and faculty. Taking a look at how people use academic libraries helps illustrate the value of academic libraries on campuses.

Professors and instructors typically depend on academic libraries to support and enhance their teaching when preparing for their classes. Most instructors refer students to library resources to deepen their understanding of the content base and key concepts introduced in the classroom. Fur-

thermore, students can meet the critical need of becoming lifelong learners by developing library skills that will allow them to explore ideas and gather information well after completing their formal college education. Employees of a college or university may also use their institution s library resources for job-related needs or personal interests. Finally, many academic libraries are open to community users who are not students or employees of the host college or university, but they still provide local citizens a scholarly center for searching out needed information or pursuing recreational interests.

The value of libraries expanded exponentially once they made the leap beyond the traditional function of providing print and nonprint materials in the physical facility called a library to become centers of information, where patrons can access myriad electronic databases and online resources. No longer do users need to limit searches for books, periodicals, and nonprint resources to their local library s collection or hope for a timely turnaround of an interlibrary loan request. Now libraries offer users a whole world of information that unfolds at a terminal where a skilled user can search for materials and request interlibrary loans themselves, often resulting in articles being e-mailed to them. Now that type of service increases a library s value in any user s eyes!

Sandra Blackaby is vice president of instruction at Walla Walla Community College, e-mail: sandra.blackaby@wwcc.edu

Academic libraries' contributions to student and faculty success

The academic library and librarians contribute to student and faculty success by being well educated, helpful, and service-oriented. At our college the librarians are known throughout the campus for going out of their way to find materials students and faculty need. They contribute to student and faculty success by keeping current with technology and promoting the availability of all types of in-house and electronic services. As the use of technology for libraries has expanded, the librarians search for ways to make it more user-friendly and available to students and college personnel, whether they are in the library, on campus, in offices, or at home.

For example, our college library Web site offers users access to resources from a remote desktop. Providing databases of online periodicals and e-books enables students and faculty to access them locally or at a distance. The Web site also provides directions for using other library resources, doing research in the library, citing sources, and evaluating Web sites. Faculty experts are featured on the Web site with their reviews of videos and other resources so that their expertise is publicized. Since about 25 percent of our students are Latino, the library is developing a growing collection of Spanish-language books, videos, and children's books. Most library signs are in English and Spanish. Like many other academic libraries, our college library also belongs to a local consortium, where materials from all the cooperating libraries are available to individuals holding a consortium library card. All of these services contribute to the success of students and faculty and make the library an essential element in the educational process at the college.

Gaining support of administrators for improved resources

Every college and university in the country these days is focused on outcomes. Gone are the days when higher education institutions assessed the value and importance of their library just by the number of books, periodicals, and other resources in its collection. Now one of the most critical measures of the library's worth is how those resources are being used by library patrons to meet their needs.

Librarians who want to gain the support of administrators need to speak the language of outcomes. This means that information from the users' point of view is an important consideration when asking for improved resources. Administrators want to know whether library materials supplied to faculty and students are useful and how the library staff know that they meet patrons' needs. When librarians request a budget increase, administrators will probably ask how the new space, library materials, staff, or other resources will make a difference in student success. Many administrators also want to know if faculty and students have been involved in any of the planning for improved resources. Librarians who supply the research and assessment that was done to justify the request will score points for their thoroughness with administrators who get deluged with requests each year.

Since all of the accrediting organizations focus on outcomes and assessment, library staff could gain support of their administrators by reviewing their regional accreditation standards for libraries and base their requests on areas where their operations do not quite measure up to the accreditation requirements. This would demonstrate that librarians understand the requirements and are trying to improve their libraries according to established standards.

Libraries' contributions to the institution's mission and answering the question, "Where's the value?"

First of all, the academic library should have a mission statement that complements the mission of the college or university. If there is a strong interrelationship between the library mission and the institution's mission, the library's success in meeting its goals will lead quite naturally to demonstrating its contribution to the college's success.

Furthermore, when librarians establish intended outcomes and assess the degree of

success in meeting the outcomes, they will generate evidence that answers the question Where s the value? As librarians become practiced in outcomes assessment and use results they obtain to improve services, facilities, and staff, they will not have to convince their colleagues of the library s value.

In conclusion, librarians are most effective in working with the administration when they are forward thinking and anticipate trends that point to the future needs of students, faculty, and other patrons who use the library. I have always found it refreshing to work with librarians and their staffs who are not afraid of change and are willing to reach out to patrons and encourage their use of the library. By actively participating in their professional organizations and cooperating with other libraries to share resources, librarians demonstrate their leadership abilities and effectiveness to their own institutions.

When all of these elements come together, the library s success will speak for itself and loudly!

Call for applications—Consultants for subject specific information literacy standards

ACRL and the Institute for Information Literacy Executive Committee are seeking ACRL member volunteers with a strong foundation in information literacy concepts and standards to serve as information literacy consultants to ACRL units that are developing subject-specific information literacy standards

Responsibilities

The information literacy consultant will work closely with the ACRL unit in the creation of a subject-speci c information literacy standards document that meets core criteria and has sound content related to information literacy and educational outcomes. The consultant will act as a resource person in assisting the unit during the process of developing the standards in accordance with the Tip Sheet for Developing Subject-Speci c Information Literacy Standards.

The information literacy consultant is not responsible for the nal review of the standards documents and recommendation to the ACRL Board; these tasks are the responsibility of the ACRL Information Literacy Advisory Committee and Standards and Accreditation Committee. The information literacy consultant should expect to be involved with the project for one to two years.

Training will be provided for information literacy consultants to provide additional information about their role, responsibilities, relationship to ACRL, and guidelines for subject-specific information literacy standards.

Qualifications

Information literacy consultants should have:
- strong understanding of and experience using the Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education,
- expertise in teaching and learning issues,
- uency with the language of student learning outcomes and assessment,
- experience working with information literacy principles in the context of speci c disciplines, and
- experience working in collaborative environments.

Applications

Applicants interested in serving as an information literacy consultant should complete the Information Literacy Consultants Application Form. Applications will be accepted on an ongoing basis for the development of a pool of potential consultants. Complete details and application materials are online at www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlissues /acrlinfolit/professactivity/subjectspeci c. htm.

Questions? Contact aloomis@library. wisc.edu.