

[Home](#) | [About](#) | [Authors guidelines](#) | [Call for papers](#) | [Indexed in](#) | [Archives](#)

Search (<http://temaria.net/simple.php?origen=1575-5886&idioma=en>)

Why Libraries? A Call for Use-Centered Assessment

[[Versió catalana](#) | [Versión castellana](#)]

 LYNN SILIPIGNI CONNAWAY, Ph.D.
Senior Research Scientist
OCLC Research
Chair of Excellence, 2014
Departamento de Biblioteconomía y Documentación
Universidad Carlos III de Madrid
connawal@oclc.org

Opcions

 [Imprimir](#) [<meta />](#)
[Metadades](#)

It is often difficult for library and information professionals to accept "that the majority of the population does not use libraries to get information" (Connaway, 2013, p. 83). Regardless of whether the library and information science (LIS) profession accepts this, it is something that must be discussed and addressed. LIS professionals need to know what types of information services, systems, and sources people access and use. They need to be prepared to learn how, where, and why people get their information. Knowing the answers to these questions will provide LIS professionals with the knowledge, skills and confidence to develop user-centered library services and systems.

With the widespread availability of social networks, such as social question and answer sites and openly available full-text resources on the web, it can be challenging for LIS professionals to provide library resources and spaces (both physical and virtual) that will attract users. Libraries used to be unique because they provided services, such as reference, and access to resources that were not available elsewhere. However, libraries no longer have this edge as resources have become readily available in other places (Dempsey, 2008). To complicate the matter, the current economic situation has forced governments, private industry, and public institutions to decrease costs by reducing funds. Libraries are not immune to these pressures. Many LIS professionals have been asked by their parent organizations to manage services at the same or higher level despite hiring freezes, budget cuts, consolidations, and freezes (Drake, 2010; Guarria; Zhonghong, 2011).

However, times of economic hardship can provide opportunity for libraries. Specifically, it can be an opportunity to assess current library services and systems and to develop new ones that better meet the needs of users and prospective users. It also can provide the opportunity to consider new narrative-based marketing strategies to make prospective users aware of the library's services and systems (Germano, 2010). To reinforce consistent value propositions that may be unclear or unknown to the target population to make them aware of and, ultimately, to use the services, systems, and resources offered by the library (Germano, 2010). In order to accomplish this, LIS professionals must know how to assess the value and use of these services and systems.

In the current global economic environment assessment and evaluation are becoming more important in the context of higher education. Assessment and evaluation also are critical for libraries since there is a need to prove both their indirect and direct value. "Librarians are increasingly called upon to document and articulate the value of academic and research libraries and their contribution to institutional mission and goals" (ACRL Value of Academic Libraries, 2010, p. 6); therefore, the emphasis has shifted from input and output assessment to quality assessment (Pung et al, 2004; Hufford, 2013)¹. Input measures evaluate the library's raw materials (budget, space, collection, equipment, and staff) against standards, but are insufficient for overall assessment. Output measures quantify the work done, such as the number of items circulated, the number of reference questions answered, or the number of individuals who attended library instruction sessions, but do not relate these factors to the overall effectiveness of the library (Connaway; Radford, 2013).

Output measures suggest demand, performance efficiency, and customer satisfaction, but do not describe performance or identify the *outcomes* or *benefits* resulting from the use of library services and systems (Pung et al, 2004). In order to demonstrate institutional value, librarians must "define outcomes of institutional relevance and then measure the degree to which they attain them" (Kaufman; Watstein, 2008, p. 227). They need to utilize the data that is generated by library systems and services, such as analytics

as well as feedback from both those who use the library and those who do not. The analysis and reporting of these data can identify how and why services are used or not used and how people define satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the services and systems.

Satisfaction is an outcome, as is dissatisfaction. However, satisfaction and dissatisfaction can be difficult to measure; therefore specific service goals, related to outcomes and benefits, should be set and measured (Connaway; Radford, 2013). The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) of the American Library Association (ALA) defines outcomes as, "The ways in which library users are changed as a result of their contact with the library's resources and programs" (ACRL, 1998).

Assessment takes time and effort to plan and a formal evaluation requires a financial investment from the organization. Formal assessment is data-driven and evidence-based and utilizes accepted research methods and data collection techniques. It is recognized as a rigorous, ongoing process (Connaway; Radford, 2013). Assessment is a user-centered research activity to understand and improve service and systems.

Education and training in assessment have not kept pace with the need (Connaway; Radford, 2013). Without the knowledge and skills to conduct formal assessment, LIS professionals will not be able to lead the effort. The premise for the development and assessment of library services and systems must be user-centered. Although this principle dates back to 1931 with Ranganathan's five laws of library science,² LIS professionals can become distracted by day-to-day responsibilities and forget the real reason for the library's existence—to meet the expectations and information needs of users and prospective users; therefore, the foundation of LIS education and continuing education must be user-centered. All courses offered in the LIS curriculum should be based on identifying and meeting users' and prospective users' expectations and needs. No service, system, or collection should be offered, developed, or made accessible without consideration of the intended users. The curriculum also should include courses on the assessment of these services. Several studies list one of the major barriers to research and scholarship, as articulated by librarians and library administrators, is the lack of skills to conduct research and inadequate education in research methods (Powell et al, 2002; Berg et al, 2013). Offering and requiring research methods courses in LIS programs provides the theoretical foundation and confidence for practicing librarians to actively assess and evaluate the library's services.

Research methods courses can provide the forum for a comprehensive introduction to quantitative and qualitative research methods and design. Instructors need to stress the importance of matching the research questions to the appropriate research methods and data collection techniques as well as identifying their advantages and limitations. The lectures can highlight the power of triangulation and mixed methods for comparing results, developing and informing other methods, recasting questions or results, and extending the breadth and range of enquiry (Connaway; Radford, 2013). LIS graduates should not only be able to critically read and evaluate research, but also to design studies, conduct the research, collect and analyze the data, and report research results, which can be part of the curriculum objective for critical thinking and analysis.

"Access to information is ubiquitous and information permeates all aspects of our lives" (Moran; Marchionini, 2012, p. 97). According to some of the contributors to the publication *Information Professionals 2050* (2012), profound changes in the information world call for profound changes in the education of those that will enter this new world. Redesigning education for LIS professionals will require effort on the part of the students and faculty and changes to the curriculum and its delivery (Moran; Marchionini, 2012). Core values for today's information schools include: "organization of information; universal access; collaboration; intellectual freedom; self-directed learning and stewardship" (Moran; Marchionini, 2012, p. 98).

Integrating a user-centered focus into these core values will prepare LIS professionals to play a major role in the development and assessment of library services and systems. With basic research knowledge and a user-centered theoretical foundation, LIS professionals will be able to articulate the value of libraries. They will have the knowledge, skills, and confidence to create an awareness of the existence of library services and systems and to articulate their benefits to users and prospective users. Librarians also will be prepared to fulfill Ranganathan's fifth law of library science—a library is a growing organism (Ranganathan, 1931)—by adapting and changing library services and systems to meet the ever-changing needs and expectations of users and prospective users.

Bibliography

Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) (1998). *Task force on academic library outcomes assessment report*. <<http://www.ala.org/acrl/publications/whitepapers/taskforceacademic> (<http://www.ala.org/acrl/publications/whitepapers/taskforceacademic>) >.

Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) (2010). *Value of Academic Libraries: a Comprehensive Research Review and Report*. Researched by Megan Oakleaf. Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries.

Berg, Selinda Adelle; Jacobs, Heidi; Cornwall, Dayna (2013). "Academic librarians and research: a study of Canadian Library administrator perspectives". *College & Research Libraries*, vol. 74, n.º 6, p. 560–572.

Connaway, Lynn Silipigni (2013). Meeting the expectations of the community: the engagement-centered library. En J. Janes (ed.), *Library 2020: Today's leading visionaries describe tomorrow's library*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, p. 83–88.

Connaway, Lynn Silipigni; Radford, Marie (2013). *Academic library assessment: beyond the basics*. [Powerpoint presentation], Raynor Memorial Libraries, Marquette University, [18 July 2013].

Dempsey, Lorcan (2008). "Reconfiguring the library systems environment". *Libraries and the Academy*, vol. 8, n.º 2. <<http://www.oclc.org/content/dam/research/publications/library/2008/dempsey-portal.pdf?urlm=162916> (<http://www.oclc.org/content/dam/research/publications/library/2008/dempsey-portal.pdf?urlm=162916>) >.

Drake, Miriam (2010). "Academic Library Challenges". *Searcher*, vol. 18, n.º 9, p. 16–53.

Germano, Michael (2010). "Narrative-based library marketing: selling your library's value during tough economic times". *Bottom Line: Managing Library Finances*, vol. 23, n.º 1, p. 5–17.

Guarria, Charles; Zhonghong, Wang (2011). "The economic crisis and its effect on libraries". *New Library World*, vol. 112, n.º 5/6, p. 199–214.

Hufford, Jon (2013). "A review of the literature on assessment in academic and research libraries, 2005 to August 2011". *Libraries & the Academy*, n.º 1, p. 5–35.

Kaufman, Paula; Watstein, Sarah Barbara (2008). "Library value (return on investment, ROI) and the challenge of placing a value on public services". *Reference Services Review*, vol. 36, n.º 3, p. 226–231.

Moran, Barbara; Marchionini, Gary (2012). "Information professionals 2050: educating the next generation of information professionals". *Information Services & Use*, vol. 32, n.º 3/4, p. 95–100.

Powell, Ronald; Baker, Lynda; Mika, Joseph (2002). "Library and Information Science Practitioners and Research". *Library and Information Science Research*, vol. 21, n.º 1, p. 49–72.

Pung, Carolina; Clarke Ann; Patten, Laurie (2004). "Measuring the economic impact of the British Library". *New Review of Academic Librarianship*, vol. 10, n.º 1, p. 79–102.

Ranganathan, S. (1931). *The five laws of library science*. London: Edward Goldston, Ltd.

Notes

¹ "LIBQUAL+TM survey measures library users' perceptions of service quality and identifies gaps between minimum, desired, and perceived expectation of service" (Hufford, 2013).

² The five laws of Ranganathan are: 1) *Books are for use*; 2) *Every person his or her book*; 3) *Every book its reader*; 4) *Save the time of the reader*; 5) *A library is a growing organism* (Ranganathan, 1931).

Acknowledgement

The author would like to thank Carrie Vass, OCLC Research Assistant, for her help in preparing this tribute.

Versió En PDF

Recommended citation

Connaway, Lynn Silpigni (2014). «Why Libraries? A Call for Use-Centered Assessment». *BiD: textos universitaris de biblioteconomia i documentació*, juny, núm. 32. <<http://bid.ub.edu/en/32/connaway3.htm>> [Consulta: 21-06-2014].

  <p style="text-align: right;">Login</p>	<p>Facultat de Biblioteconomia i Documentació (UB) (http://www.ub.edu/biblio) Carrer Melcior de Palau 140, 08014-Barcelona</p> <p>Undergraduate studies (http://www.ub.edu/biblio/futurs/en/) Master's degrees (http://www.ub.edu/biblio/masters/masters.html) Doctoral program (http://www.ub.edu/biblio/doctorat-dinformacio-i-documentacio-/introduction.html) Other courses (http://www.ub.edu/biblio/cursos-de-formacio-continuada/altra-oferta-formativa.html) Research (http://www.ub.edu/biblio/reerca/7.html)</p>	<p>Information and Communication Sciences Department of the UOC (http://www.uoc.edu/portal/en/estudis_arees/ciencias_informacio_comunicacio/index.html) Rambla del Poble Nou, 156, 08018-Barcelona (publicacions@uoc.edu)</p> <p>Educational offer (http://www.uoc.edu/portal/en/estudis_arees/ciencias_informacio_comunicacio/docencia/oficials/index.html) Get to know the UOC (http://www.uoc.edu/portal/en/universitat/index.html) Research and innovation (http://www.uoc.edu/portal/en/reerca-innovacio/index.html) Live the UOC (http://www.uoc.edu/portal/en/viu-la-uoc/index.html) Study at the UOC (http://studies.uoc.edu/)</p>
---	---	--