Libraries & Student Success

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Good morning! Thanks for that introduction. I’m really happy to be here.
I have questions to start with.
1. Who here feels like what you do in your library contributes **directly** to students succeeding in college?
2. Who feels like what you do contributes **indirectly** to students succeeding in college?
3. Anybody here doing work that **hinders** student success? ;-)

This is a topic that I think all libraries and librarians have a stake in. Even if you don’t see students on a daily basis, the work we do to provide services, space, and resources are vital to student success. You may have a natural interest and instinct towards it, or your provost or dean may *tell* you that your library has an interest in it, but either way we need students who attend our institutions to do well in their classes and graduate. It’s central to the mission of any university or college and thus part of the job of everyone who works at that university or college.
When I talk about student success, I’m talking at a basic level about helping students graduate from our institutions in a timely manner. A 6-year graduation rate is how that is usually measured. In my career so far I have worked at two public, state schools that accept over 85% of the students who apply. (UW 95% acceptance, 54% graduation; UNLV 88% acceptance, 42% graduation) This issue of retention and graduation (and other higher ed issues) have gotten a lot of attention from the White House lately. Have you seen the College ScoreCard? Graduation rates, costs, and employment are the major things measured for that scorecard.

Nationally, about 59% of students who start a bachelor’s degree finish it in 6 years. Princeton – anybody here from Princeton? – and schools like it are really breaking the curve for the rest of us. You don’t have a retention/graduation problem, right? But we do all have a role to play in student engagement and creating an environment where students can be most successful.

In my experience, universities have several incentives to help students succeed: there’s money, of course. We need happy alumni, we need happy legislators, we need to look good in college rankings and we can’t do that without a decent 6-year graduation rate. But there’s also a social and moral imperative: we are not doing right by our students if we don’t help them to earn the degrees that they came for. I hear some faculty and staff say, “We need to raise admissions standards and bring in more qualified students. Then they’ll graduate.” Sure they will. But the students we have are our students. And

59% graduation rate

[Image of the United States with a text overlay: 59% graduation rate]
we have to meet them where they are.

Success is not just about graduation, it’s also about student learning, and whether we’re helping students develop the skills they need to succeed as lifelong learners in careers and as citizens. Professionally, I come to librarianship by way of teaching college writing, and I saw myself as a teacher before I saw myself as a librarian. For that reason, my research and work have been directed towards libraries’ educational initiatives and their impact. I found in my work at University of Wyoming that there was a real interest in the profession in seeing what impact library interactions had on students’ success, and I did a study there that correlated student enrollment in an upper-division class that included library research with a higher GPA at graduation. We were all excited about that, because it suggested, “Yay! Library instruction can make a difference to student grades!” But I’m not a fan of assessment just to demonstrate impact, I also want to learn about what works and doesn’t work in order to prioritize our programs. Part of my argument today is that we need to measure our impact on student success in order to prioritize our efforts and put our time and resources into activities and programs that make a difference to student success.
Since I’m telling you where I’m coming from on this topic, I’ll also mention that I am currently the vice-chair of the ACRL Value of Academic Libraries committee, which is focused on leveraging research that articulates and promotes the value of academic and research libraries, increasing the production of that type of research, and (more broadly) increasing the visibility of libraries in national conversations and activities focused on the value of higher education. The Value initiative inspired that University of Wyoming study, has shaped my work, and will inform this talk, as I’ll be referring to several studies and publications that are all about demonstrating libraries’ impact on student success. If you are working on that type of research, please let me know. I’d love to hear more and feature your work on the Value of Academic Libraries blog.

Anyway, by the end of my talk, I hope you’ll all believe (if you don’t already) that librarians are in the business of student success. And you’ll have some ideas of how we can do a better job in that business. So let’s talk about how . . .
So what actually makes a difference in student success?
My framing questions for my talk today are:
What makes students stay in college and finish a degree? What prevents them from finishing?
What can librarians and faculty do to increase students' chances of succeeding at learning and at earning a degree?

There are piles of research on retention, engagement, and high impact practices in higher education. The major work I’ll be citing comes from George Kuh and also from Vincent Tinto.
I’m going to talk about high impact practices identified by researcher George Kuh and adopted by the AAC&U, and give some examples of how libraries can support those high impact practices.

I’m also going to talk about student engagement, as measured by tools like the National Survey of Student Engagement or NSSE, and how libraries can contribute to a sense of belonging and engagement for students.

I’ll address some best practices for course design and assignment design, and how librarians can have an impact there.

And then I’ll talk about the data, and what we know about library programs that make an impact on student grades and retention, specifically.
I’m highlighting five of ten high impact practices identified through years of research by George Kuh. These are practices that have been widely tested and shown to be beneficial for students from many different backgrounds.

First-year seminars & experiences

The best FYS/FYE classes emphasize critical inquiry, writing, information literacy, collaboration, and developing intellectual and practical competencies. They are ideally small and taught by devoted faculty or staff. I’m sure you’re familiar with courses like these. Exploring majors class at UNLV, Honors Symposium at UW.

How can libraries contribute to these courses and help students succeed? *Library example:* Claremont College

*article:* [http://crl.acrl.org/content/early/2014/07/22/crl14-621.full.pdf+html](http://crl.acrl.org/content/early/2014/07/22/crl14-621.full.pdf+html)

At Claremont College, librarians analyzed the impact of differing levels of librarian engagement in first-year seminars and found that as librarians were more engaged with syllabus and assignment design, there was an increasingly positive impact on student performance.
Writing-intensive courses
This is writing across the curriculum, not just in first-year composition. Encourages writing and revising, for different audiences and different disciplines. Includes final-year projects.
In 2011, University of Chicago Press published *Academically Adrift* by Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa. Did you all hear about it? Their conclusions were summarized everywhere. I saw them on Gawker, Slate, and all over the web. Basically, they found that college students were making tiny gains in academic skills (as measured by the CLA Collegiate Learning Assessment) after their first two years in college. The performance tasks measured by the CLA involve critical thinking, complex reasoning, and writing. These are skills that are best developed in writing intensive courses that require at least 20 pages of writing per semester and 40 pages of reading per week. *Academically Adrift* cites NSSE, revealing that 51% of college seniors have not written a paper of that length.


*Library example:* What can libraries and librarians do to support writing-intensive courses? Many library instruction programs are already involved with first-year composition programs, and that’s a good start. But a vertical pathway for students to practice writing and research at all levels in their college career is really important. At UNLV, we had librarians involved in general education reform and they were successful in getting writing and research outcomes to be embedded in every level.
Collaborative assignments & projects
Two goals here: learning to work with and solve problems with others AND improving understanding by listening to and learning from others. Study groups, team-based assignments, cooperative projects and research. **Library example:** Stone, Graham, and Bryony Ramsden. 2013. “Library Impact Data Project: Looking for the Link between Library Usage and Student Attainment.” *College & Research Libraries* 74 (6): 546. Actually shows that using space -- doesn’t lead to better outcomes. But library space can facilitate collaborative work, which does improve outcomes. If we are intentional about designing space that meets student needs, based on curriculum and assignments, we will be doing better by our students.
Undergraduate research
Not just in STEM! Involve students with actually contested questions, empirical observation, technology, and the excitement of solving important problems and answering relevant questions. A focus on undergraduate research acknowledges the importance of experiential learning, and it might include internships, study abroad programs, student teaching, summer fellow programs, summer research programs. You may think of things like student teaching or internships to be purely practical, but they should be informed by research and reflection so as to model best practices and help students prepare for careers and lifelong learning.

Library example: Undergraduate research awards from libraries. Lots of libraries doing this! We can build in support for students and for mentors – workshops, incentives, etc.

University Libraries Lance and Elena Calvert Undergraduate Research Awards. https://www.library.unlv.edu/award
Capstone courses & projects
Culminating experiences that require students to create a project that integrates and applies what they’ve learned in their years at college: research paper, performance, portfolio, exhibit.

Library example: How College Graduates Solve Information Problems Once They Join the Workplace. Project Information Literacy Research Report: The Passage Studies. http://projectinfolit.org/images/pdfs/pil_fall2012_workplacestudy_fullreport_revised.pdf. Project information literacy studied how college graduates solve information problems once they join the workplace, and found that while recent college graduates were quick to find answers online, they were not prepared to dig deep and do comprehensive research on a topic. If we can make capstone courses and projects relevant to students’ post-college life, we’re in good shape.

It also requires support. At CSUMB (California State Monterey Bay), there is a required senior capstone in which students complete master’s degree-level work, according to faculty. The whole process is scaffolded through students’ time at the university: freshmen learn about the capstone project in their first-year seminar. There’s a required junior seminar, where librarians work with students to help them develop their research questions, and students do a “capstone light” type assignment. Then the capstone itself is divided into two semesters of work: one semester for brainstorming with peers and faculty to flesh out the topic and approach and the second semester for completing the project. Writing tutors and librarians are available to help. (Kuh 110).
What do you do at your library to support any of these types of activities? – 3 minutes to share with the person next to you
Student engagement and a sense of belonging

NSSE: National Survey of Student Engagement asks students about time spent working with other students on projects, writing papers or reports, examining the strengths or weaknesses of one's own views on a topic, participating in co-curricular activities. These are all activities that strengthen a student’s engagement with college and then helps to create a sense of belonging. The library can have a hand in this with outreach and co-curricular planning and support, and again – thoughtful space planning.
Course & assignment design
I’m hearing about more and more librarians doing this on a programmatic basis, and not just on a one-shot basis where they might have a great relationship with a professor or a department.

Transparency:

Flexible formats
Build skills in a logical sequence
Explicate assignments' purpose and task in advance
Criteria for success provided to students in advance
Self, peer, and group evaluations
Huddersfield
statistically significant correlation across a number of universities between library activity data and student attainment.” E-resources usage, library borrowing statistics, and library gate entries were measured against final degree award for 33,074 undergraduate students across eight U.K. universities. The research successfully demonstrated a statistically significant relationship between library resource use and level of degree result.

Minnesota
Analysis of the data suggests first-time, first-year undergraduate students who use the library have a higher GPA for their first semester and higher retention from fall to spring than non-library users.

Wyoming
Statistically significant correlation between upper-level library instruction and higher GPA at graduation.

GWLA
20 institutions in the west. Tracking library instruction methods and level of engagement in first-year courses. Correlating with student retention and grades.
Conclusion
What we do for students: providing them with space, resources, and support to develop research skills and lifelong learning skills does make a difference. It prepares them for college success and for whatever they plan to do after college. We can always do better! Let’s stretch ourselves to measure our impact, prioritize our efforts, and rely on established best practices in higher education to help our students succeed. Thank you! Questions?
References


College Scorecard: http://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/education/higher-education/college-score-card

Graduation Rates: http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts


UNLV University Libraries Lance and Elena Calvert Undergraduate Research Awards.
https://www.library.unlv.edu/award

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