

Spring 2011

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### Repository Citation

Brown, J. M. (2011). Demonstrating library value: Examples and applications for arts libraries. *Art Documentation*, 30(1), 48-53.

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# Demonstrating Library Value: Examples and Applications for Arts Libraries

Jeanne M. Brown

Demonstrating library value is of critical importance to all libraries, both to protect services and to serve patrons effectively. This paper presents suggestions for art and architecture libraries as they engage in determining what patrons value and documenting that value for library and campus administrators. Methods for calculating worth and for presenting a case are provided, as are ways of using strategic thinking and the assessment process to ensure the continuance of valuable services should budget reductions be unavoidable.

[The following article is based on a paper presented at the "Confronting the Future: Articulating Purpose, Documenting Value" session at the ARLIS/NA Annual Conference held in Boston in April 2010.]

## Introduction

Assessment has been of growing interest to libraries during the last decade as they seek to respond to demands for accountability and, more recently, to address the stresses generated by the economic climate. One aspect of assessment is demonstrating value. How well librarians are able to demonstrate value has implications both for libraries and for those they serve.

The widespread focus on demonstrating library value comes from groups interested in topics as varied as advocacy, assessment, and standards. The American Library Association (ALA), the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) division of ALA, the Library Leadership and Management (LLAMA) division of ALA through its Measurement Assessment and Evaluation Section (MAES), the University Libraries Section (ULS) of ALA, and the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) have all provided programs to assist libraries in demonstrating value. Examples of recent programs and initiatives include:

- 2009 annual ALA LLAMA MAES Discussion Group: "Advocating in Tough Economic Times: The Story, the Data, or Both?"<sup>1</sup>
- "Advocating in a Tough Economy Toolkit" by the ALA ULS Campus Administration & Leadership Discussion Group<sup>2</sup>
- ACRL Value Project<sup>3</sup>
- ACRL compilation of presentations from 2000-2009 related to the value of academic libraries<sup>4</sup>
- ACRL's toolkit "The Power of Personal Persuasion: Advancing the Academic Library Agenda from the Front Lines"<sup>5</sup>
- Neal Kaske's presentation at the 2008 Library Assessment Conference: "Turning Data into Information: Details Behind Telling the Library Valuation Story"<sup>6</sup>

- 2010 ALA Library Snapshot Day to visually document value<sup>7</sup>
- ARL "Value and Impact Workshop," June 28, 2010<sup>8</sup>

Although each of these is aimed at the broad library community, the lessons and methods they present can be invaluable for any library, including arts libraries and branch libraries that are components of larger organizations.

## Documenting Value

There are many ways of determining what patrons want, like, and value, including surveys, focus groups, and informal methods which can be activated relatively quickly.<sup>9</sup> One method of collecting data is LibQual+®, a survey on library quality offered by the Association of Research Libraries that has been administered by hundreds of libraries both nationally and internationally. LibQual+® asks patrons to indicate their minimum expectations, desired levels of service, and perceptions of performance on a scale of one to nine. The "minimum expectation" and "desired" ratings of items can provide value indicators, as can the comments.

Table 1 shows an example from the 2009 LibQual+® survey conducted at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV). The survey was administered campus-wide; however, responses can be extracted for specific disciplines and individual branches. These responses come from UNLV architecture faculty and students, rating their minimum expectations and desired levels on items in the *Information Control* category. It is particularly noteworthy that the data shows that printed library materials have the highest minimum expectation rating; however, electronic resources have higher desired ratings. Architecture as a discipline is heavily dependent on print, yet the convenience of online access is obviously valued as well. With this data, an argument could be made for increasing electronic journals, for increasing (or at least maintaining) the print budget—or both. Items with high minimum expectations as well as items showing high desire for the service can both be seen as expressions of what patrons value.



**Table 1: Information Control Items Relating to UNLV Architecture Studies Library Collections**

[Information Control is one of three categories of items in LibQual+®; numbers indicate minimum and desired ratings on a scale of 1-9]		
Item	Minimum	Desired
Making electronic resources accessible from my home or office.	6.60	8.16
The printed library materials I need for my work.	6.82	7.81
The electronic information resources I need.	6.68	8.06
Print and/or electronic journal collections I require for my work.	6.60	7.86

Unique circumstances can also elicit expressions of the library's contributions and value, as illustrated by the threatened closure of the art library at the University of California Los Angeles in 2009. The argument made by library patrons and others against closure, as reported in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*,<sup>10</sup> cited the "unique display and accessibility features required for art books." Faculty descriptions of the library and its collections included the following:

- "We're using these books as a visual archive."
- "Many art books are unique, rare, and vulnerable to theft and abuse. So-called artists' books are made to be works of art in their own right. Exhibition catalogs tend to be printed in limited runs and cannot be easily replaced."
- "The Arts Library is 'the center of our community,' a place for students and faculty members and artists to gather and share ideas."
- "Many scholars and practitioners of the visual arts believe general-research libraries do not serve them well."

Just as general research libraries may not serve art and architecture disciplines well, non-specialist librarians often lack the expertise and sensitivity to the unique information needs of faculty and students in those disciplines. The subject knowledge of art and architecture librarians certainly adds value.<sup>11</sup> Their awareness of the unique information behaviors of art and architecture students and faculty and the elements of those disciplines that can be fostered in library space also adds value. "Library as place" is another important aspect that should be documented, especially given the perception that branches are not cost efficient and therefore targets for reduction or elimination. Surveys in the UNLV Architecture Studies Library show that students value space for sharing, discussion, and connection. LibQual+® results nationwide show that students—especially undergraduates—value physical space.<sup>12</sup>

Lastly, documenting the impact of the library on the academic success of the students or on their personal feeling of well-being is a powerful expression of value, and one that is especially persuasive in an academic environment. Impact on academic performance is difficult to document as there are so many variables affecting such performance. Joe Matthews, in his book *Library Assessment in Higher Education*,<sup>13</sup> cites many studies which fail to show library impact. Nonetheless, it is imperative

that libraries begin to make the connections between library use and the effect on patrons. The set of tools which accompanies the book *Evaluating the Impact of Your Library*<sup>14</sup> by Sharon Markless and David Streatfield is useful, as is the article "Impact Measures for Libraries and Information Services" by Roswitha Poll and Philip Payne.<sup>15</sup>

## Ways of Projecting or Determining Monetary Worth

In tough economic times, drawing attention to the concrete worth of resources and services provided by the library can be effective in raising patron appreciation of the library's value. Concrete values could be derived by asking such questions as:

- How much is it worth?
- What are you saving by using the library and its services?
- How much are you willing to pay?

### Using a Calculator

One way to portray worth is through a library calculator, which focuses on concrete monetary value. The example provided in Table 2 is a modification of the calculator used by the University of Hawaii.<sup>16</sup> The patron inputs the number of times he/she borrows a book, for example, and the value is automatically calculated based on the library's determination of the cost to provide.

**Table 2: Sample of Library Calculator from University of Hawaii**

Value of Library Services		
Input Your Use	Library Services	Value of Services
	Books borrowed	\$ 0.00
	Journals used in library	\$ 0.00
	Reference questions asked	\$ 0.00
	Use of research consultation/ assistance	\$0.00
	Database searches conducted	\$0.00
	Electronic journal articles downloaded	\$0.00
	Hours of computer use	\$0.00

This demonstration of worth to the patron can raise appreciation for what the library provides. The method obviously works best with those that use the library. It is possible that students who do not use the library at all might conclude that their tuition should be used in other ways. On the other hand, for a branch library with high use this would be a minor concern. Even students who do not use the library can see its usefulness for their fellow students.

### Highlighting Time and Cost Savings

One could calculate how much time is saved for the patron by a service such as online journals. This approach works better for faculty, whose time is more easily valued in dollar terms, than for students. This is an example of the Return on Investment (ROI) method, with the library's investment in electronic journals



weighed against the return of faculty time saved. Neal Kaske, in his 2008 presentation at the ARL Assessment Conference in Seattle,<sup>17</sup> provided the following formula for calculating return on investment for faculty time:

$$U \times T \times S = V$$
  
(Recorded Use)  $\times$  (Time Saved)  $\times$  (Salary) = Value of the time saved in dollars

One could also calculate how much is saved in resource costs. Sarah E. Aerni, in a brief presentation at the 2006 ARL Library Assessment Conference,<sup>18</sup> reported that after obtaining self-reports of the number of articles used for research and the value of those articles, she asked faculty to provide information on where they would get those articles if not in the library and how much they would cost. Calculating how much they would be willing to pay to obtain articles from alternate sources puts the value of those resources in a concrete context.

The American Library Association has compiled a bibliography of articles and studies related to return on investment.<sup>19</sup> Although many of the studies involve public libraries that are pioneering this technique, academic libraries are starting to employ ROI methods as well.<sup>20</sup>

**Presenting the Case for Library Value**

Charismatic advocates, support groups, convincing statistics, and persuasive stories are all components in effectively presenting the case for the library’s value. Compelling advocacy conveys a clear vision of the library and its value, selecting the best approach and the most relevant data for the audience being addressed. Political and budgetary audiences will be more likely to respond to statistics, whereas user populations and donors will be more likely to respond to stories and testimonials. The categories are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, some powerful stories can be told using statistics.

It is critical that one projects the value of the library to a variety of stakeholders. Deans, faculty, and donors are all potential stakeholders. Library patrons are an obvious audience and a potentially effective advocacy group. The impact of patron advocacy was seen at UCLA, where the library administration backed off—at least temporarily—from closing the Arts Library thanks to the feedback from the library’s patrons. Seventy faculty members signed the letter to the director of the library protesting the closing. Two art faculty members and an undergraduate student circulated a petition that was signed by more than 3,900 people. They also set up a Facebook group that gathered more than 3,800 members.<sup>21</sup>

**Deciding What to Count**

Selecting the category or categories of statistics to highlight can be based on several criteria. One could use data that tells the most compelling story or be based on what the campus considers important. For example, some institutions and accrediting agencies are persuaded by peer comparisons. Sources for art and architecture library peer data are not easy to locate, however, since they form a subset of overall library data. Efforts by the Art Libraries Society of North America and the Association of Architecture School Librarians to collect this data in the past have not been sustainable. Even selecting which institutions to use for peer comparison is a challenge; the peers for the art or

architecture library are not necessarily the peers for the university library.

Often it is the library administrators who determine the categories of statistics to report and analyze. Steve Hiller’s article “Measure by Measure: Assessing the Viability of the Physical Library”<sup>22</sup> presents the criteria and statistics areas the University of Washington used in considering cuts in service. For their branch library analysis, administrators looked at distance from the central library, size of the primary user population, hours of access, facility visit counts, circulation, and space use. In particular they looked at use of materials and services in the physical library.

**Sharing Use Data**

Sharing assessment data with library patrons can reflect the impact of the library; it can also *have* an impact. The UNLV dean of libraries is employing collection use statistics to make the argument to fellow deans that if they consider a journal critical to the discipline, they need to make sure the faculty incorporate it into their assignments. The message was shared by the deans with their faculty members, leading to one architecture class making heavy use of architecture journals in their assignments, which in turn created a dramatic upturn in internal use. This statistic in turn can be effective in demonstrating library value.

Although library administrators determine which base statistics to collect and report, the branch manager can deliberately identify and share numbers which best reflect value. For example, Tables 3 and 4 below report two sets of usage statistics: fiscal year and six-month comparisons. Both sets of numbers accurately reflect use for a certain period; however the six-month numbers show a dramatic increase which, if sustained, demonstrates a change in use patterns. An effective manager and advocate finds and shares numbers which tell a story, in this case a story of both the impact of one class on library use, and the value of the library.

*Table 3: Comparison of FY 2007/08 Use Statistics with FY 2008/09: UNLV Architecture Studies Library (ASL)*

	Total 2008-09	Total 2007-08	Percentage change
ASL materials checkout	15,183	14,878	+2%
ASL materials internal use	12,879	12,709	+1%
ASL total materials use	28,062	27,587	+2%

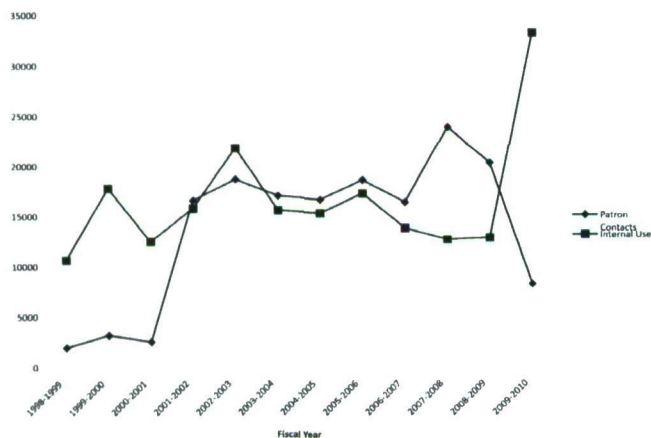
*Table 4: Comparison of July-December 2008 Use Statistics with July-December 2009: UNLV Architecture Studies Library (ASL)*

	Total July- December 2009	Total July- December 2008	Percentage change
ASL materials checkout	8,424	7,495	+12%
ASL materials internal use	17,455	6,533	+167%
ASL total materials use	25,879	14,028	+85%



The format, as well as content, can contribute to portraying how the library is used and what value it serves. Tables such as those above might best serve to highlight a change in one particular area, while a line chart such as the one shown in Table 5 can be very effective in visually comparing two types of library use. The content presented in this chart would certainly raise questions concerning the decline in patron contacts, especially given the increase in internal use. The fact that it can be explained by a change in the way patron contacts were counted should be included with the chart lest an inaccurate conclusion be made.

**Table 5: Comparison of Patron Contacts and Internal Use, 1999-2010: UNLV Architecture Studies Library**



### Telling the Story

The following example, like the one given above, shows the use of statistics to tell a story. In this case the point speaks to student use of physical space for both social and academic value.

At the end of each tour given to the students in the "Introduction to Architecture" course, library staff members ask students to complete a feedback sheet. The last question is "Of the many things we have shown you in the Architecture Studies Library, what two do you like best?" Table 6 shows the top listed features, and the number of students (among the ninety-four participating in the tour during one semester) who listed them.

**Table 6: Student Responses to Favorite Features of the UNLV Architecture Studies Library**

Features List	Number of Responses
Whiteboard	49
Building Blocks	40
Gallery	19
Plasma Screen	14
Moveable Furniture	14
New Books Section	7

At first glance, it might be somewhat disturbing that so few rated the new books section in their top features. However there is a good story here. Although some might view the whiteboard and building blocks as peripheral to the library's mission, for freshmen they serve important functions. Staff members have observed these items encouraging interaction among students

in the library space, thus contributing to the social aspect of the library. These features contribute to the value of physical space in the students' academic life as well, offering a visual mode to share ideas (in the case of the whiteboards) and providing a mechanism to enhance learning for kinesthetic learners (in the case of the blocks).<sup>23</sup> Whether the story stresses the role of these two items in the students' social interactions or their use in supporting learning styles that in turn affect academic performance depends on the audience for the story.

Examples have thus far illustrated stories derived from numbers and their interpretation. Following are stories of a different nature. In an informal survey, students were asked what word, from a list of approximately twenty words, best described the library. The word selected most frequently was "learning." This is a story that a dean who is committed to the library's role in education can use when representing the library to the campus. Just as important, it is a story to share with the students, through blogs or other means, to reinforce the library as a learning place. Hearing what fellow students have said can trigger or reinforce the perception that the library is about learning, which is valuable groundwork in developing an informed student group.

In another example, Architecture Studies Library staff members used a flip chart positioned prominently in the library to engage students. One of the questions posed on the flip chart was "what is your favorite place in the library?" The student feedback resulted in some immediate insights for services (e.g., restrooms received more attention than anticipated, encouraging use of the restroom for marketing). The technique also allowed students to share their perceptions and stories with each other, building a consensus of library value with each expression.

Using the words of the patron is an effective way to demonstrate and present the library's value. One source of patron expression is survey comments. Positive comments, such as this one from an architecture faculty member, carry weight—sometimes due to content, sometimes due to the status of the person making the comment. The usefulness of this comment in presenting the library's case to both library and campus administrators is obvious:

This is the best library facility and staff team I have ever worked with at any university. Their responsiveness to my requests is fantastic. The library is the strongest element on UNLV's campus in my opinion—it is our greatest strength.

### Planning for Budget Reduction

Providing excellent advocacy and presenting the library's value to multiple audiences is not always enough. If one must cut services, it is best to plan ahead. Past affluence has allowed libraries to simply add services without making hard choices. Given the economic climate, this is no longer possible. Information collected with the initial intent of demonstrating value can be applied to a different goal: protecting vital services and possibly streamlining operations. The key is to think strategically. Suggested approaches include:

- Supporting major library and institution goals
- Supporting strengths
- Being deliberate versus ad hoc
- Avoiding the "across the board" method



Many universities discuss “strategic” cuts—or at least they claim they are approaching cuts strategically. However, an August 2009 study of thirty-five Georgia higher education institutions “found little evidence that institutions ... were cutting their budgets in strategic ways that reflected a willingness to ‘re-examine their aspirations or strategic plans’ ... or through strategic ‘right-sizing’ based on which programs are more or less effective.”<sup>24</sup>

Libraries will have to take care that if they are charged with making cuts, those cuts are *strategic* ones. The ACRL 2009 *Strategic Thinking Guide for Academic Librarians in the New Economy*<sup>25</sup> asks the following question: “How can libraries creatively redesign functions and services to realize cost savings and support student success and faculty productivity?”

The following are examples of responses to that question generated from the specific set of circumstances at the UNLV Architecture Studies Library:

- *Collections*: Streamline the approval plan so only the “cream” comes to the library.
- *Collections*: If the institution cuts a program emphasis, cut purchases that support that emphasis.
- *Services*: Right-size by eliminating services not being used, such as late night hours.
- *Services*: Combine functions (example: circulation and reference).
- *Communication*: Cut back on staff time spent in conveying the same information in multiple formats, after determining which of the several modes have the most impact.
- *Instruction*: Train the trainers (example: train disciplinary faculty to do information literacy instruction, or set up a peer instruction system).
- *Staff*: Review staff duties to determine the extent to which they support “student success” and “faculty productivity,” with the goal of eliminating some duties and possibly adding others more targeted to providing value.

Despite best efforts to be strategic and to streamline services, and despite strong indicators of value from populations served, the severity of required budget reductions may lead to substantial cuts. The process of assessment and determining what patrons value can, nonetheless, result in retaining elements critical to the library’s clientele. At the August 2009 IFLA Pre-Conference sessions, Susan Searing presented a case study on the closure of the Library and Information Sciences Library at the University of Illinois.<sup>26</sup> She described the circumstances that led to the closing of the library school branch library, including declining use of the physical library and demonstrated interdisciplinarity of information needs. Of particular interest is how she mined the comments about the value of the physical library in order to formulate alternate services—including an enhanced virtual library and a physical presence in the library school—to address identified values. Note that visibility and a strong reaction against closing the branch did not keep the branch from closing. The primacy of the local situation, both fiscal and political, is key.

## Conclusion

Determining what patrons value is an ongoing enterprise that can and should be integrated into routine operations.

Demonstrating value is a multi-faceted and continuous process which is documented formally in annual reports, in accreditation reports, and by numerous other methods. Under current economic conditions, library staff members must be ready to demonstrate value at any moment, possibly in response to the latest urgent budget-cutting request. By anticipating the need to demonstrate value, and by engaging in determining and demonstrating value as an ongoing action incorporated into the work flow, the results will not just be readiness for disaster, but continuous improvement that can be strategically focused to increase benefits in relation to costs and to improve value.

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**Author:** Brown, Jeanne M.

**Title:** Demonstrating Library Value: Examples and Applications for Arts Libraries

**Source:** Art Doc 30 no1 Spr 2011 p. 48-53

**ISSN:** 0730-7187

**Publisher:** Art Libraries Society of North America/Headquarters

7044 South 13th Street, Oak Creek, WI 53154

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