Don't Get Married to the Results: Managing Library Change in the Age of Metrics

Charleston Conference 2015
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Program Overview

• Opening Thoughts on Assessment…
• …but…Some Problems with Numbers
• Library Change and YOU!
• About Kresge Library and Ross Construction
• Telling Your Story (Planning and Rebuilding)

Opening Thoughts on Assessment…

• I have an iconoclastic approach…
• …but with some clarifications:
  • Every function, service, product needs an assessment program.
  • Maybe formal or informal
  • Can be periodic or continual
  • Predetermined measures of success are insane
Design Thinking is key for continual improvement.

Excellent conference at GVSU focused on this for building and service design

Re-think it: Libraries for a New Age - http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/rethinkit/

Empathy of our users is critical.

Opening Thoughts on Assessment...

• Library challenge is that we have multiple stakeholders and they have different needs.
  - Faculty needs – scholarly journals, articles, books, datasets
  - Student needs – articles, company & industry information, market reports
  - Community – Mostly similar to student needs

Academic libraries are on-campus monopolies.

We are the primary information purchasers on campus.

Without competition - is there a real push for assessing and improving?
Some Problems with Numbers

- Political Season – Stupidity with Numbers
- Kohl’s Pricing
- Halloween – How much candy do you really need?

Some Problems with Numbers - Big Data

- Big Data appears to be the answer to all our problems.
- Just as mobile might or might have been the panacea that people have thought it might be – with library resources – the same might be true of Big Data.
- Data can answer some questions and we can use those numbers to indicate usage and direction – but at the end of the day – does it matter?
- Is the answer in having more stats?

Some Problems with Numbers – Retail Pricing

- One of the common dynamics of usage reports is the notion of retail costs vs. our costs (especially with business resources)
- No one at U of M (even Coach Harbaugh) can stretch around $5k to $3.7M… GO BLUE!

![Usage Summary Graph](image-url)
Some Problems with Numbers – Retail Pricing

• Cost per use is helpful information, but it does not really capture its value.
• Moves to connect usage with ‘value’ might be overly complicated and not tell your story any better.
• With the variety of data types (articles, data, books, videos, etc) we are not comparing apples to apples.

Some Problems with Numbers – Tiny Values

• Incremental changes are very small and might not provide a context for what is happening
• People do not see the change – they are likely to be less concerned (think climate change)
• Most library changes are under the “Just notable difference” threshold (Weber).
• The smaller changes – over years – can lead to bigger issues.

Some Problems with Numbers – Low ROI

• Economist Blog shared on Monday – Treating flyers is bad for airlines’ business
• Commercial success does not correlate to passenger satisfaction (IATA Report)
• How does that factor into a library?
Some Problems with Numbers

- Drowning by Numbers: The State of Baseball History (Pittsburgh History 76:2, Summer 1996)
- Available: https://journals.psu.edu/wph/article/view/4382
- “It would be gratifying to see the emphasis on the baseball contest replaced with baseball's context.”
- Are the answers only in the numbers?
- What other stories are there to tell?

Some Problems with Numbers

- When we think of Library statistics – we think of things we can count:
  - Items
  - Access
  - Usage
  - Head-count
- Many people want to see a greater emphasis on outcomes – not output.
- These library statistics help track what we are doing and what type of environment we have for our community.

Some Problems with Numbers – Change Happens

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Everyone LOVES dashboard indicators!
We live in a society where people are obsessed with dashboard indicators.
Give me a simplified version of what is going on in your library—like an executive summary.
And while your indicators might be fine—it might not reveal the threats that are all about you.

Some Problems with Numbers – Oversimplify

Some Problems with Numbers – Going Deep*
Dana Muir WSJ Piece (September 21, 2015) - 6 investing lessons learned from growing up on a farm:
  • The most important work isn’t the most glamorous.
  • Seeds, seeds, seeds.
  • It’s not all about yield.
  • Know when it is time to plow under the crops.
  • Growing season isn’t the only time to work.
  • Don’t fool yourself…a tornado will hit someday.

Library Change and You
Change is a very personal experience.
As we say in Michigan, your mileage may vary.
We see change from our point of view.
It may be dramatic or small, but still have an impact.
Certainly there has been huge change over the last 30 years.
However, I believe we are the tip of the iceberg for real systemic change.
We can see changes in the general reduction in departmental libraries (especially in medicine, sciences and business).

We can see this in the changing use of space on campus – and the continual need for more (by outside entities).

Don't Get Married to the Results

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Kresge Library Services

Steven Bell Library Journal Column

Focus is on catastrophic problems at the College Level (such as Sweet Briar College closing or LaSalle University dealing with dramatic decreases in tuition dollars).

These external factors will have a huge impact on the library.

Our Virtue is NOT our Salvation - me

Built in mid 1980s to serve the research and curricular needs of the Ross School of Business

We are open 108 hours during the Fall and Winter Terms.

Seating for nearly 700 students.

Very visible, located in the center of the Ross Complex (27K square feet).

We have a collection of over 140,000 volumes in Ann Arbor and Flint (where they are stored at the University of Michigan-Flint)

Constant state of "Library Erosion"
Kresge Business Administration Library

Ross Construction Project
- Summer 2013 – Scope of plans shared*
- September 2013 – Gift announced
- Early 2014 – Plans developed
- End of Winter Term – Started vacating the building
- June 2014 – Moved to MOtown
- July 2014 – Print moved out

Ross Construction Project
- Fall 2014 – Rebuilding Kresge Library Services
- Winter 2015 – Kresge Value Proposition Meetings Started
- Summer/Fall 2016 – Expected completion and move in to the new space
• We are moving from a full independent library to a service center.
• These are the designs for our new home.
• Original desire was to try to maximize public space – that was changed.
• Failure is an option – it allows us to be entrepreneurial and try things out.

Project moved very quickly
Discussion with the Leadership Team
Brought up the following issues:
• Academic Nature of the Collection (including the fact that estimated 90% did not have a digital counterpart)
• Some redundancy with main library – but some purchasing for market demand at Ross.
• Current Circulation of Ross Materials at Kresge Library (over 10K a year for a collection of 60-140K)
• Inability to collect additional print material (could no longer be format agnostic)

In the end – we still lost our space.
Shifting from library as place to library as service.
Many academic libraries are shifting librarian roles from being bibliographers to educators already.
Library Closed? Not really – We lost our lease.
Ross Construction Project

• What now?
  • Kresge had a tradition of being entrepreneurial and service oriented.
  • Entrepreneurial Thinking involves
    • New approach to a new (or old) problem
    • New market opportunity
    • Creative thinking
    • Empathetic focus (Design Thinking)
    • Willing to fail
    • One other big thing…an exit strategy

Telling Your Story

• How do we really assess our function at Kresge with the new confines?
  • No print volumes (save for 200 reference books)
  • No head count
  • We DO have reference numbers
  • ARL stats are pretty easy (win!)
  • Used our budget requests to reframe the library and how we will support the mission of the school.
  • Your story will be different.

Telling Your Story

• Change of library as a place to library as a service.
  • Gertude Stein quote describing Oakland of her youth — “there is no there there”
  • Dramatic change makes things unrecognizable.
  • This is true of our community and our staff.
  • Loss of an established identity.
  • Time to establish a new one.
Some of these aspects are influenced by my dad (New Jersey retailer).
One of the first discount retailers in New Jersey
Retail focus can help reframe your approach to this work and the task at hand.
Thinking both short-term and long-term (more on the former)

Balance of managing for the present and for the future.
Academic librarians collect not only for today — but for generations to come.
This might be too big a mix to handle for an electronic only library.
Can you build a perfect research collection in e-only? Probably not.

Libraries are hard-coded for thinking about the future of scholarship. This is a GOOD THING.
It is not something that we can easily do right now.
Ross School’s mission has four pillars (Action, Analytic, Boundryless & Positive)

Kresge – we do not have our own specific mission

We support the school’s vision: http://kresgeguides.bus.umich.edu/kresgelibraryservices/Ross

We still can control how we support the mission.

Telling Your Story

Connect with stakeholders (faculty, students, staff, community members, alumni).

Use this as a clean slate to figure out what is desired by THEM vs. what is desired by us.

Use that as the ‘North Star’

Ross Community Conversations

Amid changes – we were able to increase action-learning support at Ross.

Embedded Librarian program that fits the core mission of the school.

Expanded role with all incoming Sophomores (BA 200)

Reference Numbers are steady

Telling Your Story

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Always strive for the High Class Problem (vs. the Low Class Problem).

What does the school need vs. what is cool to have (we do not have a 3D Printer)

What we did was take on a service the school wanted. Immediate win for Kresge (we needed quicker wins)

We took over a service that faculty wanted.

From MBA Student Exit Survey…good:

Kresge librarians are amazing! One of the best things at Ross.

D was a great help for my projects!

Shout out to Sally, who was beyond phenomenal during our MAP project.

The ability to instant message Kresge staff is fantastic. The staff is very helpful.

The Kresge team might be one of the best at the school.

From MBA Student Exit Survey…bad:

Kresge being closed in 2nd year was a big loss.

Most of this has to do with not having an actual library and having no idea where to go to speak to a person. The ask the librarian feature is amazing but it only goes so far. Why not staff someone in a room that you can ask for help?

Kresge was closed this year, so I didn’t even really consider them a resource for this year.

It will get better with the new building?

Many students equated Kresge as a space, not a service.
Telling Your Story

• Time horizon of our work also changes. Even though there are perpetual use models for e-resources — we are looking more for what is needed today than down the road.
• This is what might be called the ‘short tail’

Telling Your Story

• Accomplishments must resonate with your stakeholders – not with the profession & not with tradition.
• From our budget request – we shared ways we managed in these spaces:
  • Kresge Print Collection Final Processing
  • Change to Kresge Library Services
  • Closing of catalog to a new service
  • Electronic course material (Study.net)
  • Exam & Assignment Service
  • Reference location & after-hours help
  • Embedded librarians supporting action-learning
  • Meeting with community members

Telling Your Story

• When going through dramatic library change – there is the tendency to wish to go back to the way things were.
• You need to shift your services & assessment tools to view the library as it is, not as what it was.
• Consider services your purchase to see if they are meeting your needs in the new world order.
• Give staff flexibility to choose their path forward – but they must move in that direction.
Don't Get Married to the Results!

• Something my father always said – he was a proponent of the importance of failure and risk-taking.
• Do not start with predetermined measures of success.
• Having the appearance of success does not mean you actually have it.
• Attaining metrics might come at the expense of other important elements.
• Do not let yourself be judged by what we did not accomplish – that is for the “customers”.

One Closing Thought

• Sometimes it does not matter what your dashboard shows….

Thank You

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