Description

A Changing Mission

Research libraries have long considered their primary user base to be the students and faculty of the institution that funds their existence. Over time, technology has enabled greater collaboration that goes beyond interlibrary loans into shared access to journal collections and databases. There is also a broader commitment to a “collective openness” where information is accessible to all scholars, irrespective of their geographical location.

The increased ability to digitize content and share it across the globe through an open access framework, while at the same time overseeing the fair use and protection of copyrighted material, places research libraries and academic librarians right at the center of the research process.

The Bottom Line

While commitments to “collective openness” and open access are truly honorable in intent, the fiscal reality is that research libraries must compete for institutional resources alongside equally deserving stakeholders. For these stakeholders continue to seek additional personnel, and more often than not, increasingly expensive lab equipment.

Librarians must now justify the budgets they currently have in the face of requests to “do more with less” more often than requesting additional funding. By definition, justification requires data to support your position, and as the role of research libraries continues to evolve, the nature and availability of that data is also changing.

A General Lack of Enthusiasm

In a 2012 study conducted by the *Library Journal*, 55 percent of the 2,516 students surveyed, confirmed that they were able to find what they were looking for on their last visit to the library or library portal at their two- and four-year colleges. On the face of it, that could be seen as a successful performance rating that falls short of a stellar rating. However, when we examine other questions in the survey, the general perception seems to lean more towards blasé than raging enthusiasm. Only 25% “strongly” agreed that the library met their expectations and only 20% agreed with the statement that the library “provides support that I can’t get anywhere else on campus.”

The Google Curse

The *Association of Research Libraries* (ARL) has compiled an impressive suite of tools to provide data on utilization and performance measurement for their member libraries:

- *LibValue* — “a set of methods and tools that measure value and return on investment of library services”

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- *LibQUAL+*® — “a suite of services that libraries use to solicit, track, understand, and act upon users’ opinions of service quality”
- *MINES for Libraries*® — “an online, transaction-based survey that collects data on the purpose and use of electronic resources”
- *StatsQUAL*® — “a gateway to library assessment tools that describe the role, character, and impact of physical and digital libraries”

The battle being fought with all of this data, however, is the extent to which Google’s search engine and Google Scholar have embedded themselves in the daily lives of students and faculty.

The habitual convenience of turning to Google first is proving to be a tough barrier to overcome. The search results may not be the best available in an academic sense, but for a stressed student facing an impending assignment deadline, those results may be good enough, especially if that student has been lax in his or her development of research skills in the numerous academic databases that research libraries make available and fight to fund every year.

If *Boolean Operators* sounds more like a fringe band than a means of refining an academic search, those academic librarians clearly have some work ahead of them.

Category

1. Industry News
2. Publishing News

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