

Jumpstarting your assessment: Using existing data to establish a foundation for pervasive assessment

ABSTRACT

One of the many reasons why assessment is often overlooked in libraries is because it is perceived as a daunting task. Exploring viable strategies for purposefully establishing pervasive assessment is often hampered by the perception that every assessment effort should involve elaborate/ sophisticated methodologies and instruments in order to capture the data and information needed for decision-making. Furthermore, assessment is often perceived as something that only a few nerdy people do.

This presentation seeks to demystify assessment and highlight ways that everyone in an institution might contribute to assessment efforts. The presentation highlights modest methods that could be adopted to harness existing sources of data, and use information that is generated from day-to-day library activities to make informed decisions. The presentation uses experiences of assessment efforts at Virginia Tech to demonstrate how libraries can tap data on an ongoing basis from a myriad of services, programs, and resources to generate useful information that augments information from larger, more standardized assessment efforts. Some of the specific topics covered using Virginia Tech experiences as a basis include: 1. Getting everybody involved, 2. Identifying and tapping your sources for data, 3. Interpreting your data to generate decision-making information, 4. Using your information going forward.

INTRODUCTION

Assessment may focus on determining:

- User Needs (space, programs, services, etc)
- Rate of usage (number of transactions, gate counts, collections use, web logs etc)
- Use patterns
- Usability of programs/products/services
- Level of user satisfaction
- User perceptions
- User preferences
- Services/programs impact or outcomes
- Cost of providing services/programs/products
- Level of output

Purposes of assessment may be:

- Quality improvement
- Service/program/product development
- Decision making/ strategic planning
- Determination of impact/outcomes
- Profiling
- Benchmarking
- Cost-Benefit Analysis>Returns on investment
- Measure rate of productivity
- Measure size, rate of growth, scope of program, etc
- Anticipate change

Methods of gathering data

- Qualitative and quantitative
- Web logs/ web analytics
- Usability studies
- Transaction stats/Output stats
- Surveys
- Data mining
- Observation
- Interviews/focus groups
- Comment/suggestion box
- Anecdotes

Challenges

- Deciding what to measure and what data to gather
- Deciding appropriate method for gathering data and developing appropriate instruments, etc
- Analyzing data/ lack of familiarity with data analysis tools and systems
- Interpreting and using information

GETTING EVERYBODY INVOLVED

Teams

Eight teams were created for a departmental self-study. The Statistics/Data Team charge was to review the various statistics and data currently maintained on Virginia Tech Libraries and propose how various statistics/data would be used for service/program improvement. Recommendations included what should be measured, how and for what purpose, how best to package various statistics/data to enhance usability and how to integrate findings in services/programs

Collaboration opportunities

Collaboration was necessary among statistics/data team and the other seven teams. After the self-study was completed four Coordinator positions were developed to continue the work. Close collaboration between Coordinators has helped continue the momentum.

Coordinator roles

Four Coordinator positions were established within the Research & Instruction Department in 2007. The role of the Assessment Coordinator is to work with others to develop a plan for assessing user needs and satisfaction, reference and instruction quantity, quality and outcomes, and the web presence.

Making data public

Data is made available on a monthly basis on the library intranet. Anyone in the library is free to view and use the data as needed. Data can be crunched and re-crunched in different ways as needed. Various reports can be generated

Pervasive assessment

Through the Assessment Coordinator position avenues for assessment are being discussed for service/program areas Libraries-wide

Institutional buy-in

Assessment in the University Libraries works in close cooperation with the Virginia Tech Office of Academic Assessment (www.oaa.vt.edu). Their mission is to facilitate and promote a climate that supports continuous improvement of student learning across the university.

Leadership and management support

The University Libraries has been supportive in funding the Assessment Coordinator position, LibQual participation and a subscription to an online survey company.

IDENTIFYING AND TAPPING YOUR DATA SOURCES

Data/Sources	Data Use
Service Transactions	
Reference	Desk staffing, expertise, hours
Circulation	Collection development decisions
ILL	Collection development decisions
Instruction statistics	facility needs, program growth
Collections use/ Collection management	Collection development, storage/weeding decisions (collection management), accreditation, space planning
Web Analysis	Use of web resources (i.e. Web logs, transactions, and other statistics) Effectiveness of library web site, Web usability (navigation, organization, etc)
Database use statistics	Collection development, cost effectiveness of resources
Gate Counts	Library hours, staffing
Service Transactions	Services planning
ARL Statistics/data	Benchmarking with other libraries, institutional peers.
Outreach statistics	Scope of influence
Program Assessments	
Outcomes Assessment (instruction)	Program effectiveness: Income/outcome assessments, effectiveness of instruction, programming needs
User surveys (LibQual, Library Use Survey, Survey at end of chat session, etc)	Satisfaction with library facilities and services, resource allocations, enhancements to collections, services, and facilities
Space surveys	Building use, furniture needs, group study/quiet study needs

SPACE SURVEYS

The purpose of the study was to determine:

- if and how seating is used in the library
- The amount of group and individual work areas needed in the library
- preferences for furniture types (individual carrels, tables and chairs, soft seating)
- if patrons use library and/or personal computers

Methodology

Each public floor of Newman Library was divided into zones by furniture type (carrel, table or lounge) or function (library computer or group study room). The building was canvassed 6 times weekdays and 4 times weekends to determine space use. The study was conducted over four weeks in spring and first summer semesters 2007. All observations were non-intrusive. No students were interviewed during the data gathering process.



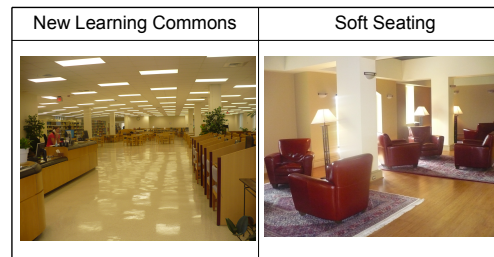
Analysis

Group Study in the library

The 8 group study rooms in Newman Library see a consistent high level of activity. Usage rates by day range from 62% to 88%. Hourly use peaked in the evenings at 95% at 9:00 pm. Any hour of the day you will find groups, defined as two or more people collaborating, outside the group study rooms. 17% of patrons were in groups outside of group study rooms with the average group size from 2-3. The larger groups appeared in the late afternoons and evenings. 79% of groups outside group study rooms were on the second or fourth floors, designated as non-quiet floors.

Computer use.

Computers are pervasive in academic communities today. Patrons come to the library to use a computer, either a library computer or their personal computer. 42% of patrons observed in the library were using personal computers. 69% of laptops were using library power sources. The 61 public computers were also in demand. One constant is use of the workstations near the entrance. At least one of the four machines in the lobby was occupied 81% of the time. Workstations near the entrance to the building and sources of external power were high priorities for patrons.



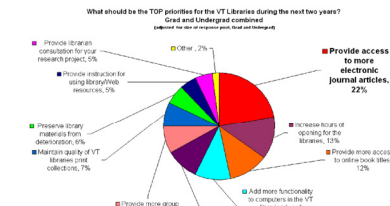
USER SURVEYS

The Library User Survey was sent out via email to all graduate students and 2000 undergraduates. The survey form was adapted, with permission, from the University of Washington survey form. The University of Washington had conducted surveys on library use and satisfaction and user needs since 1992. There were three questions pertaining to library plans for the future, one of which was question 17. The responses are useful in library strategic planning.

Question 17. What should be the TOP priorities for VT Libraries during the next two years? You have 10 points total to vote your top priorities. The total must add up to 10. Eleven possibilities were provided including a write in category.

Analysis

The major improvement we could offer to undergraduate or graduate students is to provide access to more electronic journal articles (22%). Increasing library hours (13%) or providing access to more electronic books (12%) were almost tied in the number of points garnered. Of these two, increasing our electronic book stock would appear to provide the most benefit. Increasing books once affects all users, increasing library hours is staff dependent and would have to apply to several sites since users noted the main library and branch libraries as their prime choice for visits.



MAKING SENSE OF & USING YOUR ASSESSMENT DATA: VIRGINIA TECH EXAMPLES

Important – Going beyond counting to interpretation and use:

- Creation of Group Study rooms (LibQual survey)
- Implementation of application software on public machines (User surveys, user comments/feedback)
- Redesign of the main library's second floor (Space survey)
- Reconfiguration of reference services (Departmental self-study)
- Hiring of four subject specialist librarians (Departmental self-study)
- Redesign of the Library website (User surveys)
- Revision of library instruction classes (library studies/clickers)
- Installation of additional power in the study tables (observation)