We don’t have an agenda… but we need one!
Launching an Assessment Agenda for Improving the User Experience

ABSTRACT

BACKGROUND

The Northwestern University Library’s Public Services Division engaged a process of self-reorganization in the Spring of 2011, a high priority was placed upon meeting changing user needs and ensuring the continuing relevance and dynamism of the division through ongoing assessment.

OBJECTIVE

Ongoing and practical assessment was particularly marked for immediate action. An assessment librarian was appointed ahead of the curve of the reorganization, which quickly brought a central tension into clear focus. How does one create an assessment agenda where none existed before? What questions are even asked, and what could be the most-practical and sustainable goal?

METHODS:

The first prong of would maximize on-site expertise, with utilization of the librarians, library staff and student employees for generation of content using a variety of methods. The second prong was an examination of the user, via traffic patterns, usage of informational service points, and interactions with resources.

BACKGROUND

The new four-department organization of the Public Services Division.

METHODS

LISTENING TOUR

Explain New Position to Staff; Brand Position as reliable source for assistance
Build Trust Across Division
Gather Information to Drive Next Steps
Create Assessment plans based on divisionally-agreed upon priorities, and that address the collection of data through a variety of context-appropriate methods.

FOCUSING THE GATHERED PRIORITIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Listening Tour</th>
<th>Post-Forum</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Number of Staff</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area of Assessment</td>
<td>22 (25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library Instruction</td>
<td>6 (7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Space Use</td>
<td>22 (26%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Collections</td>
<td>7 (8%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Topic Orientation</td>
<td>17 (20%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>User/Staff Data on User Services, Spaces</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research Consultation Survey beta-testing</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Consultation Survey:</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discovery</td>
<td>12</td>
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A need to refine the Data: Creating a Division-wide Forum

Problem: too much data pointing to too many directions

• The priorities gathered from the Listening Tour were rather diverse
• The greatest interest lay in specific structural support issues of staff

Forum would have specific goals to engage staff, share information
Establish context of mission, challenges in Academic Libraries
Have staff work together to create reasoning for assessment
Discussion must work towards gathering focused priorities

Success!

• Focus shifted in discussion to users, discovery
• Feedback created in-session and post-sessions by survey
• What else did it do?

• Clarified the role of the Assessment Librarian
• Let staff talk to each other and come to a consensus on priorities
• Created early categories for establishing baselines and design future data collection instruments.

DATA PROJECT RESULTS

Create a Comparison Group for an unusual Academic Library
Identifying a group of academic libraries with the following characteristics:

• Private School
• 50-50 split in Undergrad/Graduate Student enrollment
• Large Faculty body
• Consortial ties
• Identifiable measured services in NCES or ARL statistics

NU Library (blue) vs. Peer Group means (red), 2002-2010

REFERENCE DESK SERVICES

USER OUTREACH AND SURVEYS & QUESTIONNAIRES

Min-Surveys & Reference Room Post-It notes
Research Consultation Survey
Mystery Shopper:
• Traffic review
• Cross-Departmental comparison by desk, day, and hour

USING THE RIGHT TOOLS TO ADDRESS THE RIGHT ISSUES

The Assessment Plan is constructed to gather data in a mixed methods model, and yet also tackles specific priorities raised by staff in the Listening Tour. This plan can serve as a feasible model for future assessment plans in this area as well as other areas or departments of the library.

• Desktracker Review: Staff data on Services, Spaces
• Mini-Surveys & Reference Room Post-it notes: User Discovery Data
• Student Employee Focus Groups: User data
• Student Employee Focus Groups: Staff data
• Mystery Shopper: User data on Services, Spaces
• Research Consultation Survey: User Discovery data on instruction

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