SEMLOL
Annual Spring Meeting Minutes
"Taking Measurement: How to Assess Your Library's Services"
May 13, 2011
Davenport University

Introduction:

Laura Mancini, the SEMLOL Chair, welcomed the SEMLOL members to the Annual Spring Meeting. She called the Business Meeting to order at 1:03pm.

Business Meeting:

Laura presented the membership application of South University to the SEMLOL members. She introduced the South University librarian who was present at the meeting and the librarian gave a brief introduction to her institution. Laura noted that the SEMLOL board was recommending that South University be approved for SEMLOL membership. She then called for a motion to approve the membership application of South University. Diane Manko-Cliff motioned to approve the membership application. Mike Barnes seconded. The motion was approved unanimously.

Laura then presented the new slate of board members. She called for a motion to approved the new board. Julia Eisenstein motioned to approve the new board. Mike Barnes seconded. The motion was approved unanimously.

The business meeting adjourned at 1:14pm and Laura introduced the first speaker, Monique Andrews.

Spring Program Presentations:

Monique Andrews, Wayne State University, "Reference Assessment: Using Data, Feedback and Values."

Monique Andrews presented on how to assess reference services. She started by first asking the questions "What is the goal of reference? Why do we do reference?" She noted that the main goal of reference is to help people access the information they need. She then asked "What does reference look like?" By this, she meant, how are we measuring reference encounters? She noted that to most librarians it looks like the reference tally sheet, but that there is so much more going on in the reference event that should be measured.

Andrews noted the following about reference:

- Reference is about making the connection between the student and the resources.
- Reference is also about making the connection between the student and the librarian.
- Reference is about communication.

- Reference work helps the librarian maintain communication and problem-solving skills.
- Reference is a proving ground for library managers.

She then went on to list some reference assessment tools, including the following:

- LibStats – a free product. Questions that were asked at the reference encounter can be typed in, as well as the resource used. The product will provide qualitative data on the question.
- Reference Analytics (SpringShare) – This product is similar to LibStats but is not free. Instead, it is a paid service.
- READ Scale (Reference Effort Assessment Data Scale) - Another free product. This product helps to quantify questions into categories (for example, easy, hard, extremely difficult, etc.)

So how do you determine if your reference was effective? The following questions should be asked to see how effective the reference service was:

1. Did the patron use the information?
2. Was the patron satisfied?
3. Were you satisfied?
4. Did the patron learn anything?
5. Are there any answers to these questions?

Andrews noted that assessment of reference tends to be based upon if the librarian was satisfied with the reference encounter or not. There usually is no opportunity to follow-up with the patron to see if they actually used the information and if they were satisfied with the reference assistance. Sometimes a patron will return and tell the librarian if they used the information or not and if they were satisfied with the help they received. But this information is rarely documented.

So assessment and decision-making tend to be based on:

1. Tallies which are used as data.
2. Comments which are used as feedback.
3. Librarians, who provide value to data for decision-making.

Andrews then went on to describe some of the reference projects in which she had been involved. One such project was the Roving Reference Pilot Project. The goal of this project was to gather observational data. Librarians walked around the Library with an Ipad. They approached the students, rather than the other way around. Assessment was built into the project. The roving librarian would complete an online survey after completing one of their roving journeys. The rovers would also report on what they saw in the Library (i.e. how students were utilizing the Library). This was one way to gather feedback on reference.

Andrews noted that another change in the Library was the switch from one virtual reference product to a new one. Docutek was dropped and the Library went to a system called LibAnswers. The change was from one system that was easier for the library staff touse to another system that was easier for the patrons to use. LibAnswers allows you to set up a list of FAQs that provide pre-answers to the most frequently asked questions. The system will also tell you if a question really is frequently asked. It will track the questions not asked (questions typed by a patron but not submitted). This can give you a look at what your patrons might be needing.

Andrews remarked that off-desk reference transactions need to be tracked as well. She will be taking a closer look at this kind of data at her own institution in the future. She commented that librarians need to keep track of email reference that is sent directly to them and reference appointments made with students. She noted that the Library is providing intellectual output for the university and there is a need to record that in data.

Loyd Mbabu, Senior Associate Librarian, Graduate Library, The University of Michigan, "Assessment of Library Instruction."

Loyd Mbabu presented on how to assess library instruction. He noted that the library instruction must also be aligned with the curriculum. To assess effectiveness of instruction, it must support the goals of the curriculum and thereby provide outcomes that can be measured. Mbabu noted that if library instruction is ad hoc and disengaged, it is difficult to demonstrate its relevance to teaching and learning. This is why it is necessary to integrate library instruction into the curriculum, making it more relevant.

The goals of assessment measures include:

- What students are actually being taught.
- That what is taught parallels the curriculum.
- Student learning – assessing if all partakers were included and does it improve teaching and learning?

The scope of assessment at any institution is at several levels:

1. Institutional Level
    a. Accreditation guidelines
    b. General education guidelines
2. Program Level
    a. Required courses
    b. Core courses
3. Discipline Level
    a. Important resources
    b. Necessary seeking and processing skills

Mbabu noted that librarians can get involved at the institutional level by particating in the revision of general education guidelines. Librarians can become members of curriculum committees and provide input on changes in the curriculum. Most frequently, librarians are at the discipline level, where only stand-alone library sessions are taught upon request. Mbabu noted that it is important to get administrative support to integrate information literacy into the curriculum. This, in turn, will make assessing library instruction much easier, as it will be a required part of the curriculum.

Mbabu then noted some examples of where libraries had attempted to measure information competencies or integrate information literacy into the curriculum. These included California State University where information competencies were measured in the freshman orientation transition and in general education courses. Another institution was San Jose State University, where library instruction was integrated into a required freshman English course. The goals of this program were to teach the students to use the Library effectively, to recognize and accurately employ bibliographic elements and to successfully perform basic literature searches.

Finally, Mbabu provided some tips on how to get started, including:

- Decide your goals – This depends on administrative support, how many librarians are involved, student body size, etc.
- Take inventory of what's already happening at your institution.
- Fill in gaps or strategize once you have a tentative plan.

Mbabu distributed two handouts, one that provided an overview on information literacy components and how to select appropriate assessment measures and a second that provided examples of evidence of student learning.

There was a break for refreshments after Mbabu's presentation.

Alice Crosetto, Associate Professor of Library Administration, Coordinator, Collection Development and Acquisitions Librarian, University of Toledo, "Collection Assessment."

Alice Crosetto presented on how to assess the library collection. She noted that collection assessment is usually done when changes are being made in the Library (i.e. a change in space, in library service methods, etc.). It is not usually an ongoing process, although some automatic weeding may take place.

She highlighted the following factors to consider ("The Thinking Part"): 1.) Time, 2.) Space, 3.) Library type, 4.) Collection type, 5.) Format, 6.) Patron base, 7.) Staff to be involved, 8.) Offsite storage, 9.) Discards management, 10.) Collection development policy, 11.) Mission statement and 12.) Public relations.

Crosetto then discussed setting up guidelines ("The Determining Part"): 1.) Usage statistics, 2.) Currency of content, 3.) Physical condition, 4.) Electronic version, 5.) Check benchmarks or resources and 6.) Faculty review.

Crosetto noted the following collection development resources:

- Resources for College Libraries
- CREW: A Weeding Manual (Public library resources – there is a free .PDF version online.
- K-12 resources

Crosetto then discussed how you do the actual work ("The Doing Part"):

1. Who?
    a. Get help from other staff
2. Access lists from the integrated library system (ILS)
3. Do actual hands-on assessment

Crosetto noted that it is important to assess the strengths and the weaknesses of the collection while doing the hands-on work.

Joshua Neds-Fox, Web Librarian, Wayne State University, "Assessing Library Websites: How to Know What You've Got and How to Make it Better."

Joshua Neds-Fox presented on how to assess library websites. He asked the question of library users, "What do they want anyway?" He remarked that library users expect to access library information anytime and anywhere. He also noted that users expect the information to be relevant to their tasks.

Neds-Fox then went on to iterate some alarming statistics, noting that libraries are competing with other Internet sources, chiefly Google. He commented that of the percentage of students who search for information, 83% start on a search engine. 0% start on a library website. He noted that the majority of students feel that library sources are more reliable, but 93% still use Internet search engines in preference. He commented that the trend for library website usage between 2005-2010 went down amongst people between the ages of 25-64. On a more positive note, however, he remarked that when students have used the library website, the trend has been upward for repeat use. Once a student has used the library website, they will tend to use it again.

So why don't students use the library website? Neds-Fox quoted the following reasons/statistics:

- Other sites have better information (23%)
- Prefer to use physical library (21%)
- Website doesn't have what I need (17%)
- Fines are too much (12%)
- Can't find what I need (11%)
- Don't know about it (10%)

Libraries are competing with other information providers who have better websites.

Libraries need to assess the design and look of their websites and make them more attractive and accessible. Neds-Fox noted that there are many ways to assess a website. One is the business assessment, which promotes a "call to action" design. This would include a large graphic portion on the page with a logo or slogan which exhorts the user to do something. This design doesn't adapt well to the academic needs of a library.

So what can you try? Neds-Fox presented a model he called WHALE:

- Who is it for and what does it do?
- How will we know when we did it?
- Ask your question.
- Learn what you can.
- Execute and evaluate.

The first thing that you need to do when designing a website is to determine who it is for: old patrons, students, new patrons, faculty, lifelong learners, visitors, government, clergy, prisoners, librarians, employees, etc. Once you have identified your populations, you can pick one or two of them and target your website to these groups. You can ask questions about your initial design and get feedback from your populations to improve the design.

After you have identified your target audience, decide what you want the website to do. Once the website is designed and implemented, you are at the assessment stage – "How will we know when we did it?" You need to measure to see if the website does what you want it to do. You can use heuristics to do this.

Some examples of heuristics for library websites include the following:

- Clarity
- Simplicity
- Accessibility
- Consistency
- Redundancy
- Language (No jargon)

There are many ways to record and assess data from the website. Log analysis is one way to record data on website use. Some log analysis softwares include: 1.) AWStats, 2.) Open Web Analytics, 3.) Webalizer and 4.) Piwik.

Cookie analysis can also be used to record data from a website. This is what Google Analytics and Yahoo Web Analytics do. Cookie analysis is not quite as accurate as log analysis.

Another method of gathering data on website usage is click analysis. This will show which links are clicked the most by users. This can help you determine if the placement of key elements on the site is hindering use. An example of click analysis software is Clickheat.

Neds-Fox noted that you can also create your own custom analysis program. You can write your own scripts and store them locally.

A final way of assessing your website is usability testing. Is your website usable? This kind of assessment is task-based, observational and tests the site with actual users. Some usability testing forms are 1.) Talk alouds, 2.) Paper prototyping, 3.) Card sorting, 4.) Use recording, 5.) Focus groups and 6.) Simple surveys. Usability softwares include: 1.) Silverback, 2.) Hypercam and 3.) Camtasia. These programs record the user's video and audio while they complete tasks on your site.

The final step to assessment is to execute and evaluate:

- Make indicated changes to your site.
- Evaluate the changes.
- Repeat.

Following the final presentation, there was a brief question and answer period. The meeting adjourned at 4:01pm.

Submitted by: Margaret L. Danowski
June 9, 2011