Chapter 9

If You Build It, They Will Come:
Creating a Library Statistics Dashboard for Decision-Making

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ABSTRACT

Like many academic libraries throughout the United States, the James C. Kirkpatrick Library at the University of Central Missouri has increasingly documented its impact on the university and its students. A library statistics dashboard tool was developed internally to assist with increased assessment activities. The Information Technology Librarian and the Library Assessment Team collaborated to create the dashboard tool. This case study discusses the impetus for developing the tool and provides a detailed explanation of the creation and testing of the dashboard. The chapter also describes the outcomes of using the dashboard tool in the library's assessment activities, along with recommendations for how other libraries may develop similar tools and skills within their organizations.

INTRODUCTION

Cultures of assessment have been growing within American universities and academic libraries over the last 20 years. Interest in assessment has expanded since the Great Recession of 2008, due to limited state and university budgets. Many states began implementing specific performance indicators required for universities to obtain funding, shifting the focus from the number of students enrolled to student-focused goals, such as graduation rates and employment rates after graduation (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2015). As university budgets become more constrained, academic libraries must demonstrate their value to their larger organizations, using a variety of methods that include expressing measurable impact on student and faculty success in both quantitative and qualitative terms (Hernon, Dugan & Matthews, 2015; Oakleaf, 2010).

The James C. Kirkpatrick Library (JCKL) at the University of Central Missouri (UCM) faced the same increased levels of accountability that many academic libraries across the United States must satisfy. To demonstrate library impact, JCKL created a Library Statistics Dashboard that collected and visualized various library data, and allowed entering and visualizing data in one place. JCKL also used Application Program Interfaces (APIs) to pull data from different resources into the Library Statistics Dashboard. This dashboard enabled JCKL to maintain its assessment data and show administrators that the library had direct and positive value for college students.

Many academic librarians have felt that they lack the skills or resources necessary to build such a tool internally. However, building a tool such as a library statistics dashboard within a library organization is both doable and worth doing. This case study will show how a team at JCKL internally created a data dashboard. The authors will describe the impetus for developing a statistics dashboard, technological details of how it was built, the outcomes of using the dashboard, and recommendations for how a library organization can support an environment for developing internal tools.

BACKGROUND

The University of Central Missouri (UCM) is a master's-level public university situated in Warrensburg, Missouri, 50 miles east of Kansas City. Like many universities across the United States, UCM has had to increasingly demonstrate its value to students, parents, and the state. In 2015, UCM implemented a new performance-based funding model, known as the Strategic Resource Allocation Model (SRAM), which emphasized outcomes-based budgeting (University of Central Missouri, n. d.). The university appointed a cross section of university administrators, faculty,

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