Faculty Creative and Scholarly Works

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Using Student GPA to Show the "Nutritional Value" of a Library Service

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Using Student GPA to Show the "Nutritional Value" of a Library Service

Students can interact, or not interact, with their campus library in a variety of ways and through a variety of services—circulation, interlibrary loan, instruction, using our physical spaces, accessing electronic materials, to name a few. Comparing the GPA of library users to non-users is a valuable assessment strategy for demonstrating the value-added impact or "nutritional value" of library services on our users

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NUTRITION INFORMATION
This assessment is based on a study that investigated interlibrary loan (ILL) use and non-use over a two-year period. Combining student use data for a library service with GPA and basic demographic data for those users, such as year in school and major or academic program, can provide clear correlational ties of a library service to greater student academic achievement. This recipe could be recreated at your institution to demonstrate the possible impact of traditional library services (circulation, ILL, instruction), library collections, or other library services, where student use or attendance can be tracked and the data can be harvested.

DIETARY STANDARDS
ACRL *Standards for Libraries in Higher Education* (2011) Principle 1, Indicator 1.5; Principle 5, Indicator 5.4; and Principle 9, Indicator 9.3

COOKING TIME
GPA studies can be designed as shorter assessments that focus on use over the course of a semester or academic year, or can be longitudinal and study the effect of use over a longer period of time.

The greater the time frame, the greater a case can be made for a library service having a demonstrative and consistent impact over time.

TECHNIQUE
The Microsoft Excel pivot table function is enough to manipulate the data and calculate mean GPA, but any statistical analysis software will do.

INGREDIENTS
- Anonymized student user ID numbers (or other student identifier): This will be your match point and how you'll easily link to GPA as well as other library service points (circulation, ILL, attending an instruction session, etc.)
- GPA and student demographic data for both users and non-users: Once the student ID numbers have been collected, these will be mixed or combined with student demographic data and student GPA. At the minimum, student demographic data should include academic program or major and the student's year in school

PREPARATION
Cross-institutional partnership: Your local institutional researcher will take your library users and use data and combine them with GPA and student demographic data.

Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval: This might be necessary at your institution as you will be dealing with student data.

THE ASSESSMENT
Data collection and collocation
Harvest patron and use data for the service or services that you have identified.
- Consider all of your use variables: Are there elements of the library service use that you will want to code or include in your initial data extraction? Including quantity of use or other variables that exist within the service allow for an expansion beyond just a simple evaluation of binary use versus non-use
- Pass anonymized data off to your institutional researcher

Analysis
- Determine the mean GPA of all library users and non-users
- Evaluate mean GPA alongside student demographic data

This data will allow you to take the temperature of the service and how the GPA of users may differ by academic level or academic program.

Be ready to pivot your research question and consider other variables. The original study focused only on ILL use versus non-use, but by pivoting and looking at ILL articles users the study was able to demonstrate a real value-added impact of ILL to its users.

ALLERGY WARNINGS
GPA assessment can be tricky. Sometimes the GPA differences between users and non-users can be minimal or insignificant and, therefore, it might be difficult to correlate use to academic impact. Again, be prepared to shift your research question.

Correlation versus causation: Studies like this will largely be uncovering correlational effect rather than causational. If you strike gold and uncover causation, that is even better. But when talking about your final findings, it important to keep this in mind.

CHEF'S NOTE
It is vital to paint the picture for library stakeholders of how local library services impact local users. Find opportunities across campus to share your findings and spread the message of measurable library impact on academic achievement.

REFERENCES
Scott, Mitchell. "Interlibrary Loan Article Use and User GPA: Findings and Implications for Library Services." *Journal of Access Services, 11*:4 (2014): 229-238.