



# NASIG Newsletter

North American Serials Interest Group

Vol. 29, no. 4

December 2014

eISSN 1542-3417

## Serials & E-Resources News

### **The Signal and the Noise: Libraries & Institutional Data Analysis: 34th Annual Charleston Conference Report**

Elizabeth Ten Have

This session provided strong evidence of new roles for librarians and libraries in the burgeoning area of institutional assessment and evaluation. H. Austin Booth, Kathleen O'Brien and Charles Lyons from the University at Buffalo Libraries (SUNY) spoke about their libraries' role in building the university's institutional data analytics program. For many years academic libraries have routinely provided data for various accreditation reports and tenure and promotion packets. As evaluation and assessment become an integral part of academia, librarians' expertise in bibliometrics, metadata, and data management are an added value for the institution as a whole and present a new opportunity for librarians to provide leadership in data analytics programs at the institutional level.

Booth, dean of Libraries at University at Buffalo (UB), set the stage by reviewing the current environment in higher education that is driving use of analytics. She noted that libraries are well-placed to aid new efforts of measuring impact with long-standing knowledge of data management and bibliometrics. Senior university leaders often underestimate the time and effort necessary for building and maintaining a data analytics program and research offices are overwhelmed with internal and external data report requests. Librarians joining institutional conversations about these issues will find opportunities to deploy their expertise at the

institutional level. Booth noted that the experience at UB demonstrated that issues about data governance such as origin, quality, ownership, standardization, access, and disposition are a natural place for libraries to lead and educate the university community.

O'Brien, UB's data & assessment officer, addressed the particulars of the UB experience. She outlined the factors that brought the libraries into the data analytics conversation. Drivers included UB's preparation for its regular Middle States Commission of Higher Education re-accreditation and the need to quantify institutional effectiveness. Since joining the conversation in 2011, the Libraries have helped define and grow the university's Office of Educational Innovation & Assessment through participation in planning assessment boot camps, assessment days, and evaluating and adopting tools for evaluation (e.g. Campus Lab's "Baseline" and Tableau for data visualization). She noted that the Libraries are helping to foster a culture of collaboration around the data analytics program and are helping to maintain the momentum necessary for sustaining a robust data analytics program.

Lyons, UB's electronic resources librarian wrapped up the session by returning to more familiar ground - bibliometrics and associated programs offered in support of faculty tenure and promotion, as well as research metrics. He noted that libraries' expertise with bibliometrics can help with faculty's biggest fear that administrators will either misinterpret data or inappropriately apply it. Librarians can help "tell the

story” by explaining origins of data and why seemingly similar data is, in fact, not. Lyons reminded us that librarians are trusted in these conversations because of their neutrality—they do not dictate policy or allocate financial resources for the use of the data. Following the theme of his colleagues he also stressed the importance of clear data governance structures especially regarding access to potentially sensitive data.

For those interested in pursuing involvement with their institutional data analytics programs, the UB Libraries speakers referenced a tool from the Voorhees Group (a higher education consulting firm) which helps assess institutional readiness for data analytics activities, it can be found at

<http://www.voorheesgroup.org/tools/institutional-data-readiness-assessment-tool/>.