

## **Assessment Report 2012-2013 University Library**

### **Unit-Wide Process-level Planning for Assessment**

The Library has had staffing challenges for the past two years that have contributed to a lack of focus on assessment. The Associate University Librarian position was vacant for the 2011/2012 and 2012/2013 academic calendar years. Tara Lynn Fulton served as both dean and department head. In addition, the Library lost the service of the Information Literacy faculty librarian for a year while she served as interim department head in another department. This individual traditionally led the student learning assessment initiatives.

That being said, because of the complex structure and coordination of acquiring, organizing, and making print and electronic research materials available to students and faculty, units within the University Library frequently work together to assess materials, instruction, customer service, technology infrastructure, and workflow to ensure research needs of EMU students and faculty are met in an efficient manner.

The Library consistently strives to ensure patrons have a positive experience while using the building and resources of the library. Therefore we look at user satisfaction surveys for feedback, and refine our services accordingly. Locally we look at the Graduating Senior Survey and every few years we participate in a nationally normed survey called LibQual. We are due to repeat the LibQUAL® survey this upcoming academic year to identify areas for improvement.

Most of our assessment has fallen into the category of programmatic assessment, e.g. assessing a particular new service after one year to decide continuation or refinement. Other assessment initiatives within the Library in the past have concentrated on metrics that are data-driven, e.g. peer comparisons of library expenditures per student FTE or analysis of collection usage compared with collection expenditures in various print and electronic formats. Being effective stewards of resources on behalf of the EMU community leads us to regularly conduct collection assessments in particular. Considerable time and effort is spent pulling reports to gather information from different resources and vendors and analyzing results to drive future decision-making.

In terms of student learning outcomes assessment, library faculty are actively involved with departments and faculty across the EMU campus to integrate information literacy skills into the curricula. This includes instruction in traditional, hybrid and online classrooms to help students identify, locate, evaluate, and use information effectively and ethically in order to prepare students for academic success. While librarians have had students assess and evaluate the individual sessions they teach in the classroom, meaningful assessment to gather true impact of information literacy instruction on student learning and development requires commitment by both the library and the discipline faculty. The library already created a rubric and outcomes for information

literacy, but information literacy is not formally built into general education at EMU as it is at many universities. Therefore, we must rely on relationships with individual faculty members in particular disciplines who might be interested in assessing their students, but even then librarians are rarely granted access to student work, which is essential to measurement. So we are currently at a crossroads in that key area of assessment.

Each year we establish library-wide priority goals for the following year, including extensive assessment projects. Individual units and teams also conduct assessment within their areas. Two library faculty members provide support for assessment projects on an informal basis -- one in qualitative designs and one in quantitative. When we have a department head in 2013/14, that person will create a system for centrally archiving assessment projects and help to provide better coordination across projects. Most urgent is the need for a real plan for assessment, which we plan to integrate into a more general strategic plan in 2013/14.

### **Summary of highlights of achievements**

- A pilot program was initiated to investigate and assess the use of Patron Driven Acquisitions (PDA), also referred to as Demand Driven Acquisitions or DDA. This is a growing arena in academic libraries and we wanted to determine if the EMU community would use and benefit from this type of access. DDA allows patrons to have access to an electronic format of a book for a significantly reduced cost to the library. If a particular ebook is viewed more than limits set by the vendor, say four times, then that action triggers the library to purchase the ebook at the full retail price. This type of access allows for a greater breadth of content in subject areas without having to front the money to support the e-content.

During the 2012-2013 academic year, 18,175 electronic book records were downloaded into the Library catalog with a list value of the total DDA collection at \$1,682,063. The total spent on trigger purchases of the 36 DDA titles at list cost was \$3,311 and these titles were used 30,210 times. The total number of ebooks that were used at least one time was 3,784 and their list price was valued at \$338,534. 20.8% of the titles were viewed from the total that was made available. Of that 20.8%, one percent triggered a full purchase. The total cost spent on the DDA program was \$13,232 on 3,784 titles whose list price value is \$338,534 and had 268,666 uses.

Based on these figures, we are encouraged and the pilot program will continue this next year. Continued assessment will be necessary to identify subject areas that the DDA program particularly targets and this will aid us with collection development decisions.

- Circulation staff undertook an assessment of current policies for circulation to determine if policy changes should be recommended. This project involved benchmarking against peer institutions and studying the rationale libraries have for more or less restrictive circulation policies. While the end result was a decision to make a very minor change to one policy among many; such a decision is just as valid of a "closing the loop" decision as one that might have involved changes. (see Appendix A)
- Librarians worked with graduate students from the School of Information at the University of Michigan to produce two assessment reports to (1) analyze the support the Library provides to its patrons who have special needs and (2) evaluate past modifications to the reference system and analyze communication between the four main service points – the information desk, the circulation desk, the Academic Project Center (APC) and virtual chat reference. (see Appendix B)

**Examples of assessment plans and reports are included as appendices A & B**

## Appendix A

### *Policy Review-2012-2013*

In the Fall 2012 semester a faculty member inquired about and questioned our Faculty borrowing policies. During the 2012-13 fiscal year we have been doing a review and analysis of borrowing policies in other academic libraries, specifically focusing on faculty, but beginning to assess students, especially in context of migrating to totally new library systems.

We reviewed policies of 37 peer institutions using MAC schools, an EMU peer institution list and a Library Collection Development peer institution list. There was much overlap between the lists. Upon beginning the research library staff noted that policies were varied, and sometimes difficult to find. Even the faculty questioning the policies added “I have looked around at borrowing policies and there is notable variation in our immediate area, with Michigan State and Univ. of Michigan, Ann Arbor seemingly the most open-ended for faculty.”

Our current borrowing policies are online and state that faculty receive an end of term due date and can renew materials online 3 times. Further renewals may be requested if the material is brought into the library. While the end of term loan period is used by 64% of the libraries surveyed, renewal policies were varied and scattered. The loan periods for the remaining 36% ranged from 180 days to 365 days for the loan period with renewals varying once again. We did find that our borrowing and renewal policy is similar to at least 30% of the peer institutions. We are identical to UM-Dearborn, Western Michigan University, Middle Tennessee State University and Wayne State University.

We found we were more liberal than Saginaw Valley State University and the University of Toledo, and we are very similar to University of Texas San Antonio, Ferris State University, George Mason University and Michigan Technological University.

Also, it is not uncommon for libraries to require that materials be brought in yearly as a method of inventory control. Wayne State University and University of Delaware are two such examples.

At the same time we have been reviewing student policies and are seeing that 43% of the peer institutions give a three week borrowing period with a variation on renewals. Our current student policies do not appear out of line.

We have been reviewing billing and refund procedures for students. Currently 40 days after a book is due the student is billed replacement charges of \$69 (or cost if higher), a \$20 processing fee and a \$10.00 lost book fine. If the book is returned after the billing, the cost of the book is refunded. We'd do this no matter when the book was due, if we could trace it online. In reviewing policies we found that refund policies were just as varied as renewal policies. Ferris State gives no refund for materials after 6 months, Central Michigan 1 year and Northern Michigan 30 days for example. In discussion with Acquisitions and Collection Development it was suggested we initiate a one year after

billing refund policy. Collection Development suggested the following wording which we will implement in July 2013.

"University Library billed materials in good condition may be returned up to 1 year after the billing date for a refund of the billed cost of replacement amount. No refunds will be issued for materials returned after 1 year. Exceptions to this policy are at the discretion of Coordinator, Circulation Services."

During the initial implementation and education process there may be more complaints from patrons. Presently I'm working with a patron who is questioning a 10 year old bill. The rewording of the policy does give some flexibility which may be exercised at the beginning of the process as the new culture is established. This policy change has been reviewed and approved by both the Library Personal and Services Committee and the Library faculty as a whole. We'll be updating the website and overdue and billing notices during the Summer Semester so this can go into place at the beginning of the Fall 23013 semester.

At the present time that's the only policy change we are suggesting, but will be doing a continuous review of policies as we gear up for transitioning to a totally new library platform within the next couple of years as we investigate new Integrated Library Systems.

## Appendix B

### *Optimizing Halle Library's Reference System*

#### Executive Summary

Halle Library is the primary research library of Eastern Michigan University. Within the library is a reference system comprised of four main service points—the information desk, the circulation desk, the Academic Project Center (APC), and a series of specialist librarians in departments throughout the library. The main goal of this system is to answer and refer patrons' questions in an accurate, consistent, and efficient manner. Two tools play a part in this work: LibStats, used to record the number of questions at each service point and reflect use of the system, and Questionpoint, used to make referrals amongst specialist librarians with dedicated question queues.

Past modifications to the reference system led to significant improvements. Deep Maize was invited in to evaluate this modified system and analyze communication between service points, identifying breakdowns that hinder proper patron service. We conducted a series of interviews with staff and student workers, covering all service points. This data led to the creation of a set of models used to analyze the reference system and identify any problems.

Our primary findings are:

Finding 1: Circulation and information desk breakdowns

Recommendations: Homogenize student training; consolidate information and circulation desks

Finding 2: Inconsistent use of LibStats

Recommendations: Formalize LibStats policy; inform all service points of policy

Finding 3: LibStats needs to be modified

Recommendations: Simplify LibStats entry; modify Warner Model labels

Finding 4: Lack of access to a dedicated referral system

Recommendations: Provide students with access to Questionpoint, or establish dedicated referral system used by all

Finding 5: No calendar access for student workers

Recommendations: Online calendar used by all specialist librarians, updated regularly; provide online access to this calendar for all service points

Finding 6: Lack of clarity in navigation aids

Recommendations: Change labels in catalogue, or stress difference in existing labels; put up signs that are directional and explain Library of Congress use

#### About Halle Library

Halle Library is the research library of Eastern Michigan University. Its mission is to promote teaching, learning, and research within both the university and the greater community. To accomplish this mission, it promotes quality customer service and effective internal communication among its staff. A primary task this staff is responsible for is the answering and referral of questions made by library patrons. It is the

communication system and reference process designed to accomplish this task that the library wished to have evaluated.

This system is comprised of four main service points—the circulation desk manned by a student employee, the information desk manned by a student employee and a librarian, the Academic Project Center (APC) manned by a librarian with student assistance, and a series of specialist librarians. As the system is meant to function now, when a question is presented at one of the above service points, the employee first classifies it by its level of complexity using the Warner model. The question is determined to be a level 1 (directional), level 2 (basic research assistance), level 3 (general librarian research assistance), or level 4 (highly specialized librarian research assistance). Depending on this classification and the training and knowledge possessed by the employee, the question is either immediately answered, or referred to the next appropriate service point—the information desk, the APC, or a specialist librarian. This reference interaction and its outcome are then recorded in LibStats, an existing question-recording program used by the library to track the use of its reference system.

This system is meant to function library-wide, promoting cohesion and consistent customer service across the various service points in the library. It is particularly meant to prevent the “bouncing around” of patrons during the question answering and referral process, i.e., service that impedes the patrons’ ability to reach correct and helpful information in a timely manner. The concern of the library is that this system may not be as widely and consistently implemented as desired, resulting in opportunities for the inefficient service it wishes to prevent. Our project focused on addressing these concerns. Accordingly, we evaluated the library’s existing reference system, and looked for places in the communication system and reference process where consistency and efficiency could be increased. We found several such points in the library, and have prepared recommendations to eliminate existing problems. Overall, we found a system that accomplished its main tasks; it could simply be further improved with some key adjustments.

## Methodology

### Data Collection

Data collection began with an initial meeting with members of the Halle Library staff. At this time, project scope was discussed, along with details of the library’s communication process. Following this initial meeting, six interviews were conducted over a monthlong period. The team collaborated with the client contact to produce a group of interviewees that encompassed employees from each service point and each level of the question-answering process. Similar questions were asked throughout each interview so that answers could be compared across service points, but sometimes different questions were appropriate depending on the interviewee. Interviewees included:

- A librarian at the Information Desk
- A librarian in the Academic Project Center
- Two librarians in specialist departments
- A student worker from the information desk
- A student worker from the circulation desk

### Data Analysis

Each interview was quickly followed by an interpretation session where all team members analyzed the data collected during the interview. Notes and models were created during these sessions. Each interview produced five models where data could be represented in a way that visually displayed the library's communication process. Items used during communication, sequence of tasks, communication flow, physical space, and cultural pressures were all organized into models that helped display breakdowns. After completing all of the interviews, notes were consolidated into an affinity wall where data was organized into shared categories. Models from each of the interviews were also combined. The consolidated data contained in these products allowed us to identify breakdowns in the reference system, and create recommendations for optimizing the system as a whole. At the completion of the affinity wall, six major clusters of data appeared in the following categories:

- Specialist Duties
- Specialist Librarian Accessibility
- LibStats Problems and Usage Patterns
- Referral Process
- Training
- Questionpoint Usage

From these groupings, patterns and inefficiencies became apparent, which aided us in making recommendations. Our final recommendations were then selected according to the amount of impact they would have on the accuracy, efficiency, and consistency of the library's reference system and whether we believed such changes were achievable.

#### Finding 1: Circulation and information desk breakdowns

##### Finding and Evidence

As seen in our consolidated sequence model (see Appendix A), repetition of reference tasks occurs between the information and circulation desks without equal training to support these actions—both the circulation and information desk answer level 1 and level 2 questions, but circulation desk workers are not trained to answer level 2. This results in inconsistent and inaccurate patron service. Our models also display the occurrence of an unnecessary step in the referral process due to the desks' separation. When a patron comes to the circulation desk needing to be referred to a specialist librarian, he or she is sent over to the information desk to be referred again, rather than sent directly to the specialist needed. This unnecessary step lessens the efficiency of the referral process and may result in patron frustration or dissatisfaction.

##### Short-term Recommendations

We recommend that all student workers go through the same training process to answer and refer questions. Whether at the information or circulation desk, student workers should be trained to answer level 1 and level 2 questions, and refer patrons to the appropriate specialist librarians directly. This will promote accuracy, consistency, and efficiency of patron service within the reference system, and could be enacted within one to two years by adapting existing information desk training materials.

##### Long-term Recommendations

We also propose the eventual physical consolidation of the information and circulation desks. Since student workers will be performing the same reference tasks at each, the two locations could be consolidated, or at least moved next to one another. This would prevent the need to send patrons across the room to contact an information desk librarian,



and would further streamline and consolidate the reference system, encouraging consistency and efficiency through the elimination of unnecessary separation.

#### Finding 2: Inconsistent use of LibStats

##### Finding and Evidence

The intent of LibStats is to record all questions asked during the reference process, in order to reflect use of library resources. It is meant to be used by all service points to record every patron interaction in a uniform and regular manner. As seen in our consolidated sequence model (see Appendix A), however, LibStats is used inconsistently across the library's service points. While LibStats is used at the information and circulation desks, questions asked in the Academic Project Center are recorded through a separate system based in Excel, and questions asked of specialist librarians are rarely entered into LibStats. Inconsistency in LibStats usage creates inconsistency in reflections of resource use. It also hinders the goal of library management to encourage uniform reference work across the library.

##### Short-term Recommendations

A formalized LibStats policy that is communicated to all employees would establish guidelines for recording questions, a key step of the question answering and referral process. This policy can be communicated through an email message and emphasized during training of new staff. Such a modification could be made within a year, and would require little expenditure of funds and resources. It would also encourage uniformity in reference actions across the library, and provide accurate and complete data to those who use LibStats for internal library decisions.

#### Finding 3: LibStats needs to be modified

##### Finding and Evidence

LibStats records questions asked at different service points in the reference system in order to determine the utilization of library resources. When data is entered into LibStats, the user must choose the service point, patron type, question type—using Warner model labels—time spent answering the question, question format, initials, and finally staff type.

Based on analysis of patron interactions as represented by our consolidated sequence model (see Appendix A), although LibStats stores information such as questions asked and answers provided, this information is used neither for reporting purposes, nor to answer and refer questions. LibStats thus collects more information than is actually used, burdening staff with unnecessary data entry. Since every patron interaction should be logged into LibStats, requiring this extra information eats up time that could be better spent helping more patrons, and makes the question answering process less efficient overall.

Warner model labels used in LibStats entries also do not always fit the questions being asked, e.g., there is no label for technology questions. Confusion over which label might apply leads to delays, or the decision to simply not record the interaction. Problems with question labels once again lessen the efficiency of the question answering process.

##### Short-term Recommendations

Simplify the data being entered into LibStats. Simplifying data entry fields will save time on every patron interaction and make the reference system as a whole more efficient. Additionally, it may make LibStats more useable and appealing for staff not currently

using it. Management would need to determine the minimum amount of data they need to reflect use of the reference system, and modify LibStats to collect only this information.

We further recommend that question labels used in LibStats be modified to better fit the questions. Labels should be more intuitive—e.g., directional question rather than level 1 question—and should be available as pre-entered options with an additional empty field for questions that do not fit under these pre-entered categories. This modification would streamline the recording of questions, encouraging consistency and efficiency in the reference system. Both recommendations could be accomplished within a year with little expenditure of funds or labor.

#### Finding 4: Lack of access to a dedicated referral system

##### Finding and Evidence

Staff has access to Questionpoint, an interlibrary system dedicated solely to making referrals. When questions come in through email or online chat, they are assigned to the relevant specialist librarian's queue so they can be answered in a timely fashion.

Although staff can actively make referrals to each other through this system, student workers do not have access to this, or to any similar referral system. Student workers instead need to rely on making referrals verbally, through email, or by phone. When the relevant specialist librarian is available immediately, there are no major issues with this format; however, when a librarian is not currently available, the lack of a dedicated referral system can lead to slow turnaround time for questions. For example, an email or phone message could get read or heard, and forgotten about because these modes of communication are also used for other purposes. Lack of a dedicated system for all referrals leaves room for inefficiency and inaccuracy.

##### Short-term Recommendations

If possible, student workers would benefit from gaining access to Questionpoint for making referrals to specialist librarians when they are unavailable. Instead of having to utilize more unreliable methods, risking the delay or loss of patrons' referrals, access to the system would streamline the referral process and make it more efficient and accurate.

##### Long-term Recommendations

If access to Questionpoint is not a viable option for student workers, it would be beneficial for the library to set up a dedicated referral system for use by all members of the referral process. This modification would require more time and labor than the former, but would be a worthy investment in referral efficiency and reliability.

#### Finding 5: No calendar access for student workers

##### Finding and Evidence

As seen in our consolidated sequence model (see below), student workers do not have access to an up-to-date online calendar for use during referrals. Some student workers have access to paper calendars for specialists, but these are not easily updateable. Some specialists also maintain online calendars, but not all, and student workers do not currently have access to those that exist. Lack of access to an easily updateable online calendar for specialists results in the referral of patrons without the most accurate information on specialists' availability, lessening both the accuracy and efficiency of the referral process.

##### Short-term Recommendations

Establish an online calendar used by all specialist librarians to regularly update their availability information. Provide student workers with access to this calendar for use

during referrals. This recommendation could be carried out within one to two years with little labor and cost to the library if free and well-known calendar tools like Google calendar are used.

#### Finding 6: Lack of Clarity in Navigation Aids

##### Finding and Evidence

A large number of questions received by the library's service points are directional—where to go to find a particular book, where a specialist department is. Interviews with staff and observations of the library during interview periods reveal a lack of clarity in aids used to answer these questions—i.e., the library's catalogue and directional signage. Abbreviations used in the library's catalogue for archival materials frequently confuse experienced employees and patrons alike. For example, an employee will see the listing 'ARC' in the catalogue, which signifies an item in archival storage, and will tell the patron the item is immediately available in the archives department, a location which is actually represented by the listing 'ARCH.' The patron will follow through on his referral to the archives department, and will find an unexpected wait, rather than the item he was told would be there, resulting in patron delay and dissatisfaction. Confusing abbreviations in the catalogue thus lead to incorrect referral information and unsatisfactory service.

Navigation of the library and the Library of Congress system is another area of confusion for patrons. They often have difficulty navigating the physical layout of the library and using Library of Congress call numbers to locate books. The absence of clear directional signage plays into this confusion. A patron may be referred to a specialist department, and then be unable to find it without the assistance of clear signs. He will either give up, the referral ending in failure, or have to ask for assistance again, leading to further delay. A patron may receive correct referral information, but if he does not have the tools to easily reach his destination, the referral is unsuccessful. The absence of clear directional signage can result in inefficient referrals and patron frustration.

##### Short-term Recommendations

To address the lack of clarity in navigational aids and its resulting impact, we recommend that confusing abbreviations in the catalogue either be changed, or that their differences be explicitly defined and stressed during employee training.

We also recommend that directional signage be placed throughout the library. These signs should be easy to spot and read, and should clearly explain how to navigate the library and Library of Congress call numbers.

Both recommendations would be short-term, able to be enacted within one year. These changes would increase the accuracy and effectiveness of referral information, and would significantly improve patrons' ability to navigate the library during referrals. This in turn would decrease the number of directional questions asked, freeing up time for more in-depth research assistance. This increase in referral efficiency and success would come with limited cost and adjustment for the institution as a whole.

#### Conclusion

Halle Library is a well-run library that enhances student success at Eastern Michigan University. A willingness to work towards improvements that benefit students is apparent upon talking with all staff members. There is also overall worker satisfaction,

along with open communication between service points. Many librarians have worked there for years and know the system well. Others, like students, are newer to the library and display satisfaction as well. Continued teamwork is encouraged. Suggestions in this report serve only to supplement the changes that have already occurred within the library. Many librarians spoke during the interviews about the large amount of duties they have which can often keep them from performing everything asked of them. Changes to how LibStats data is entered can ensure speedy entries so that more employees might be willing to use it consistently during their busy schedules. Combined information and circulation desks, along with more student access to referral systems like Questionpoint and librarian calendars will facilitate well-informed referrals. The inclusion of helpful navigation aids will further optimize the reference system, lessening demands for directional assistance and helping patrons follow through on referrals without confusion. These changes will ensure that communication between the service points will continue to improve, leading to the efficient, consistent, and accurate patron service the library desires.