Initial Concept Framework
New Metrics for Research Libraries
A Pilot for ASERL Libraries?

Introduction

Research libraries are having a far greater impact on students and faculty than ever in our history, and it is possible illustrate this both through stories and numbers. While stories about the roles and impact of libraries in the research community carry compelling messages, they can be made stronger with the support of quantitative measures that speak of and to today's educational environment. Traditional library statistics, such as "gate count" and "number of volumes in the collection," speak only to declining use of outdated modalities. Continued use of outdated metrics can only lead to reduced support for and investment in research libraries. This document is intended to introduce a concept for how ASERL member libraries can work together to devise new measures that re-focus our data gathering and assessment efforts toward better representations of the nature of modern research libraries.

The Need for New Measures

Old measures do not reflect the current ways that research libraries contribute to academia. For example, circulation figures are not as meaningful in a community that relies much more today on digital formats and disintermediated access to collections. Continuing to report on old metrics, which may often show declines (such as the 43% decline reported by ASERLM libraries in circulation since 2000), is dangerous to the extent that such numbers are often mistaken for proxies for the "success" or "effectiveness" of libraries and librarians. For those prepared to view the Internet as a cheap replacement for libraries, these old measures make it difficult to advocate for adequate collection funding or for supporting the work of highly-trained professionals.

Current metrics do not capture the successes libraries are experiencing. However, this threat pales by contrast to the brilliant promise of new and better ways to document and describe the work of research libraries and their support for teaching and learning. It's clear that shifting our focus from print circulation to data that demonstrates the full breadth of collections and their use is the first of a three-part narrative of library success: <u>In collection use, information mediation, and facility usage, research libraries are stronger and more effective than ever before.</u>

- We can prove that library-purchased and curated collections are used far more heavily today than they ever have been in the print era.
- We can assemble a better representation of our mediation services that: includes the roles played by, and potentially impact of, reference and instruction librarians; incorporates the work we do in and with digital formats; and reflects the value research librarians provide in designing and developing web-delivered instruction, finding aids, LMS integrations, etc.

- Libraries can create far more effective measures than gate counts to capture our dazzling success in building truly innovative and effective teaching/learning spaces.

A path forward for ASERL
ASERL proposes to create a pilot project intended to establish small groups of use variables in these three areas: collection use, mediation services, and facility usage. The specific variables would be chosen for their ability to represent a broader range of library activity than traditional statistics, for their relevance across research libraries, and for their simplicity to measure and interpret cost-effectively.

ASERL proposes to recruit a group of 10 -12 research libraries to compile these data for up to three years.
- During that time, the data points will be assessed for their ability to "tell a complete story" of the work of research libraries to friends and skeptics. It is anticipated that variables will be tried, refined, modified, and possibly replaced as part of the pilot in an effort to identify data points that paint a succinct yet nuanced picture.
- ASERL proposes to convene a panel of university-level administrators to serve as a focus group to review models and interim reports to provide feedback on the effectiveness of the data and reporting methodologies.
- The desired end product is a well-documented model that provides clear instructions for any interested library on the data points needed and the reporting tools used to provide a complete, up-to-date portrayal of the work of the complex and rapidly-evolving work of research libraries.