

Flyer 233

The Role of ARL Libraries in Extension/Outreach

August 1998

INTRODUCTION

Increasingly, universities are maximizing efforts to promote the positive impact of the university to external constituents and to help the public understand the significant benefits of research and other higher education contributions. In response to a competitive marketplace and reductions in traditional funding sources, many academic libraries are expanding the role of outreach to cultivate new advocates external to the university's traditional clientele.

DEFINITIONS

For the purpose of this survey, extension/outreach was defined as the provision of library services to clientele outside the university community, including both affiliated and unaffiliated remote users, and the service contributions provided by individual librarians outside the realm of their regular teaching, research, and job responsibilities. Library outreach was intentionally defined broadly to allow for variance in local institutional definitions, as well as the rapidly evolving concept of the virtual library. SPEC Kits have been published for *Fee-Based Services* (Kit #157, 1989) and the *Role of Libraries in Distance Education* (Kit #216, 1996). While this survey may overlap with these two, it is differentially broader in that the terms extension and outreach may or may not refer to fee-based services. Library outreach includes distance learning and education, but also includes provision of resources, expertise, collections, and services extended beyond the university community, i.e., not limited to faculty, staff, or students. Also, whereas outreach includes the land grant vision of education and information available to all state citizens, it has evolved to include collections, services, and programs provided to a broad range of constituencies on and off campus, often encompassing the global community.

The purpose of this survey was to determine how ARL libraries are participating in extension/outreach through three objectives: (1) identify the level of involvement; (2) determine the types of outreach service, as well as user populations; and (3) ascertain the impact on the library, including its financial donor programs. A secondary goal of the survey was to identify any major issues and trends related to extension/outreach. Please note that the terms extension and outreach are used interchangeably in the following report.

SURVEY RESULTS

In the fall of 1997, the survey was distributed to 121 ARL libraries, of which 61 (50%) responded. Response rates varied somewhat for individual questions, i.e., not all participating libraries answered all the questions.

Background. Thirty-six of the respondents indicated that the mission statements of their libraries include a component for outreach. Note that while some responding libraries do not have a mission statement on extension/outreach, they nonetheless provide services and perform activities that fulfill the definition. Of the 61 libraries that responded, only 11 are not involved in extension/outreach services in any way. For 42, a library department administers the extension/outreach program. In 37, the library funds the outreach services primarily through the operating budget. Other funding sources indicated by the respondents for extension/outreach services include a cost recovery or self-supporting operation, distance education and learning office, extension/outreach office, friends of library, development/foundation office, and grants.

Types of Services. ARL libraries are involved in a wide range of outreach programs. Reference and information services are the most heavily provided outreach library programs, followed by distance education, learning, and support; academic partnerships; and locally produced digital collections. Respondents report that the method most frequently used in promoting outreach services is the use of flyers and brochures, followed closely by home pages and word of mouth. Fifty-seven respondents maintain a home page, while 56 have a library catalog available to remote users, and 35 participate in a state-wide network of academic online catalogs. Access services provided to remote users include circulation of library materials, document delivery and direct interlibrary loan, and electronic reference services. Seven of the respondents noted that these services are only provided to the university community, i.e., faculty, staff, and students through distance education.

Methods and Approaches. Twenty-eight respondents report telephone use as the most frequent point of contact for outside users, followed closely by onsite use or visits. Fifty-three respondents provide some non-fee-based services to outside users. For 39 of the respondents, affiliated users take

precedence over nonaffiliated users with respect to services provided. Four of the respondents noted that users receive assistance without regard to affiliation, only with respect to the no-fee services. Thirty-five of the respondents provide fee-based services, while 30 provide fee-based services to all who request them.

Contributions of Individual Librarians. Twenty-seven of the respondents indicated that librarians at their institutions provide service to professional organizations outside the university in a wide variety of professions and disciplines. In 25 of the libraries, librarians team with faculty in academic departments to provide extension services. Collaborations include continuing education classes for parents and teachers, Internet instruction, training for extension staff, developing web-based curriculum support, team instruction with cooperative extension, and library-centered programming. With 25 of the respondents indicating faculty status for librarians, 12 measure extension/outreach activities of individual library faculty for the purpose of promotion and tenure. Whereas 13 do not measure librarian participation in outreach, three of these noted that for most faculty outreach is an increasingly important role in their service units, primarily through remote reference services.

Impact. Eighteen of the respondents reported that five percent or less of the total number of library users are extension/outreach clientele. Only six of the respondents indicated that their libraries have statistics showing that increased gifts and revenues result from extension/outreach efforts. While 28 of the respondents do not utilize benchmarks for extension/outreach, six use ARL member institutions, two use land grant institutions, and one uses its respective university's extension department for benchmarks.

Forty-four respondents noted a strain on limited resources as the most significant problem resulting from library extension/outreach efforts, followed by difficulty balancing primary users with outside clientele. However, for 33 of the respondents, the library staff perceived that the benefits outweigh the problems associated with extension/outreach services. Benefits perceived by staff include:

<i>Benefit</i>	<i>Respondents</i>
Increase in the visibility of the library and its staff	35
Opportunities to form new alliances and cultivate academic partnerships	27
Broadening of library staff perspectives	19
Encouraged innovation of library staff	18

ISSUES AND TRENDS

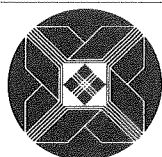
Academic libraries have a long tradition of service to the public, including those not directly affiliated with the university. This is especially true with institutions that are land grant by statute, where there is a legal obligation to make education and information available to state citizens. Moreover, the land grant mission is steadily evolving to an international and global community. While many libraries have not yet packaged outreach into a designated formal program, outreach is more manifest, especially with respect to the vision of the virtual library. This is evidenced by the projection of a value-added web presence, the use of locally produced digital collections, and other electronic resources.

Current literature suggests that university libraries are forming new alliances on and off campus to develop commonalities of interest and collaboration. In some cases this leads to significant grants and other alternative funding options. Services to off campus constituencies help show the significant role of the academic library and its need for support. Through outreach programs and services, libraries are assisting their universities in educating the larger community about the practical benefits of the university to society.

The breaking of clientele barriers and expanding of capabilities, through the promotion of research collections and services and expertise of librarians, indicate that the vision of the virtual library is alive and well. The concept of the virtual library, although still in its infancy, has been demonstrated through existence of homepages that highlight services and digital resources on library online catalogs in a significant number of responding libraries. Linking creative uses of technology with innovative approaches to broad-based user populations may move that concept further toward reality, as shown by cooperative resource sharing of networked electronic information sources in several regional wide area networks. Through such networks, libraries are poised to serve state citizens, as well as the scholarly world at large.

This Kit and Flyer were compiled by Tamera Lee and Claudine Jenda, Auburn University, and were prepared as part of the ARL/OLMS Collaborative Research/Writing Program.

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