



# Library Impact Practice Brief

## **Assessing Library Information Services and Demonstrating Value through the Tailored Design Method**

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## Issue

Demonstrating the value of a biomedical library can be a daunting and somewhat ineffective task. The current literature base contains many articles attempting to achieve this goal by analyzing the collections through resource usage and citation analysis. However, with competing budgets across university campuses, it has become essential to investigate and develop methods in which libraries can correlate collections and services as it relates to their role as a partner across the scholarly, education, and service missions of our institutions. This practice brief will discuss various methods and strategies in which we sought to identify, compile, analyze, and disseminate relevant data to demonstrate our impact or added value to the research enterprise at Vanderbilt University and Vanderbilt University Medical Center.

The Annette and Irwin Eskind Family Biomedical Library and Learning Center (EBL) is one of nine campus libraries within the Vanderbilt University Library System. It is the primary information resource for the Vanderbilt School of Medicine, Vanderbilt School of Nursing, and the Vanderbilt University Medical Center. Overall, the biomedical library's primary users comprise the Vanderbilt health sciences community, which consists of 29 degree programs, 1,596 students, 3,234 faculty and nearly 30,000 medical center personnel. The respective educational, research, and clinical care missions are supported by the library's nine staff members, who provide services in information, instruction, collection development, and document delivery.

## Why It Matters to Research Libraries

- Shows breadth and extent of library engagement with the campus
- Reinforces the notion of the library as a partner in the education, research, and clinical enterprise
- Qualitatively and quantitatively demonstrates the value of the library unit and the institution's return on investment

## Objectives

- Create a more thorough picture of the work performed by the information services staff
- Promote basic and advanced services we can provide
- Identify staffing needs to scale services and projects
- Identify additional skills needed in the library for current and future services

## Key Performance Indicators

Through researcher self-reporting, we feel it is possible to directly demonstrate the library's value and correlate the library's role(s) in the institutions' scholarly activities.

- Quantify the role of the collections
- Quantify the role of library services such as general assistance or document delivery
- Quantify the role of our searching, training, and consultation services
- Quantify our partnership and engagement efforts by tracking our acknowledgements and co-authorships

## Data

1. What was the format of the data? The data is primarily quantitative, but there is a comment box for qualitative data. The dataset consists of demographic and transactional data and focuses on the human resource as opposed to collections usage.
2. From where was it procured? We utilized REDCap (<https://projectredcap.org/>) to create our surveys and store the data. REDCap was created at the Vanderbilt University Medical Center, is easy to use, well supported, and served all of our purposes. This was very helpful because we do not have subscriptions to survey software.
3. The data file is available as a report within the Vanderbilt Institutional Repository <https://ir.vanderbilt.edu/handle/1803/17506>.
4. What were the costs of gathering the data (in terms of time, and/or purchase)? It takes about an hour to analyze each spreadsheet.
5. What were the obstacles to getting the desired data? Initially, we were interested in getting researchers to complete the survey once their project was completed or accepted for publication. That became an issue for many reasons but we learned that flexibility was key as we saw the need to adjust our approach while remaining focused on the project's goal.
6. How were the obstacles addressed (or how might they more successfully be addressed in the future)? In the beginning, we would send reminders to the primary investigator or the research team contact. We also posted the impact survey on the library's feedback page. Lately, we began promoting the survey in our orientations and other outreach/instructional activities. Finally, we added

the survey questions to our information desk statistics to document the range of projects we are involved in.

7. What data was successfully gathered? The three data collection instruments comprise quantitative and qualitative data. The demographic data provides us with the respondents' status and affiliation. The project data provides us with a detailed view of what we are assisting with and the services or transactions allows us to see what our contributions are and what is highly valued.
8. How might it be more systematically or automatically gathered in the future? Or, is automation not worth the investment? We considered setting up auto-alerts in PubMed or Web of Science to acquire publications, but could not correlate library involvement with this process. That will also omit many other projects and scholarly activities.
9. How frequently should the data be gathered? We review the data quarterly and report annually.
10. How will the data be presented? Text versus visualizations? Does the audience dictate the strategy? Currently, our data is compiled in REDCap and converted to Excel csv format. The data is presented in tables and graphs. As we gather more data, we are considering the utility of statistical and visualization tools such as Tableau. The choice of tool is important for intended audiences in order for us to tell the most meaningful story. We would like to be more visual but must take into consideration its comprehensibility.

## **Resources Required**

1. **People:** number of researchers and roles: The library director and one informationist were involved in survey development. Data analysis is also performed by the director and informationist. The library director has been responsible for reporting. Other informationists have served as consultants with design and analysis. Everyone has rights to access the data at their convenience.
2. **Skills:** list the skills and expertise utilized (or missing). Skills included REDCap training, survey design, and Excel. We are currently seeking out additional training in statistical methods and visualization tools, such as Tableau, and presentation tools, such as Canva.
3. **Technical resources:** include hardware, software, digital storage, physical space, etc. REDCap is a freely available online survey and database software. Our data is also held on their servers.

## Lessons Learned

The Tailored Design Testing Method by Dillman et al. helped us tremendously with the survey design. It provides us with exactly what we need to capture, analyze, and report. It also enabled us to develop an instrument that fits within the many time constraints and demands of our user base.

Communication has also been essential throughout this process: first, communication with our stakeholders and champions; second, the respective communications directors at the schools of our primary users; and lastly, development and interpretation of survey questions. No matter how much we tested, there were 1–2 questions that seemed to confuse many respondents.

## Value

We thoroughly enjoyed working on this project. It allowed us to look into our needs and the literature in order to find the voids and improve upon our data collection and reporting. Though most of this is for internal reporting, it is our intent to generalize our metrics as part of the ARL initiative. Our biggest challenge was the self-reporting mechanism, but we feel it is the only way to truly get a sense of the biomedical library's role in the university and medical center scholarly activities. As mentioned in our 2021 *Medical Reference Services Quarterly* article, we encountered many challenges and responded to each one, which resulted in several evolutions of the original project.

## Recommendations for the Future

- Self-reporting instruments can be very tricky and disappointing. Be patient!
- Communicate the instrument's purpose to staff, administration, faculty, departmental chairs, and deans.
- Promote the instrument through library channels (webpage, newsletters, reports, wayfinders) and, when possible, departmental newsletters.

## Suggested Resources

Boyce, Gavin, Angela Greenwood, Amy Haworth, and Jacky Hodgson. “Visions of Value: Leading the Development of a View of the University Library in the 21st Century.” *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 45, no. 5 (2019): 1.

Dillman Don A., Jolene D. Smyth, and Leah Melani Christian. *Internet, Phone, Mail, and Mixed-Mode Surveys: The Tailored Design Method*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2014.

Oakleaf, Megan, and Martha Kyrillidou. “Revisiting the Academic Library Value Research Agenda: An Opportunity to Shape the Future.” *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 42, no. 6 (2016): 757–759, 761–764.

Project REDCap (Research Electronic Data Capture), <https://projectredcap.org/>.

Tableau Public Data Visualization Software, <https://public.tableau.com/en-us/s/>.

Walker, Philip, Heather Laferriere, Rachel L. Walden, and Camille Ivey. “The Never-Ending Evolutionary Saga of Assessing and Demonstrating the Value of Information Services in a Biomedical Library.” *Medical Reference Services Quarterly* 40, no. 4 (2021): 369–382.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02763869.2021.1987775>.

## Appendices

Links to the data collection instruments mentioned in each phase:

I Pilot Survey: <https://redcap.vanderbilt.edu/surveys/?s=DYYYDP97HP>.

II Revised Pilot Survey:  
<https://redcap.vanderbilt.edu/surveys/?s=NJK3LWLR3Y>.

III Library Statistics:  
<https://redcap.vanderbilt.edu/surveys/index.php?s=KKWMDK8EMW>.

IV EBL Staff Scholarly Activity and Collaborations:  
<https://researchguides.library.vanderbilt.edu/eblscholarly>.