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Lib-Value: Measuring Value and Return on Investment of Academic Libraries

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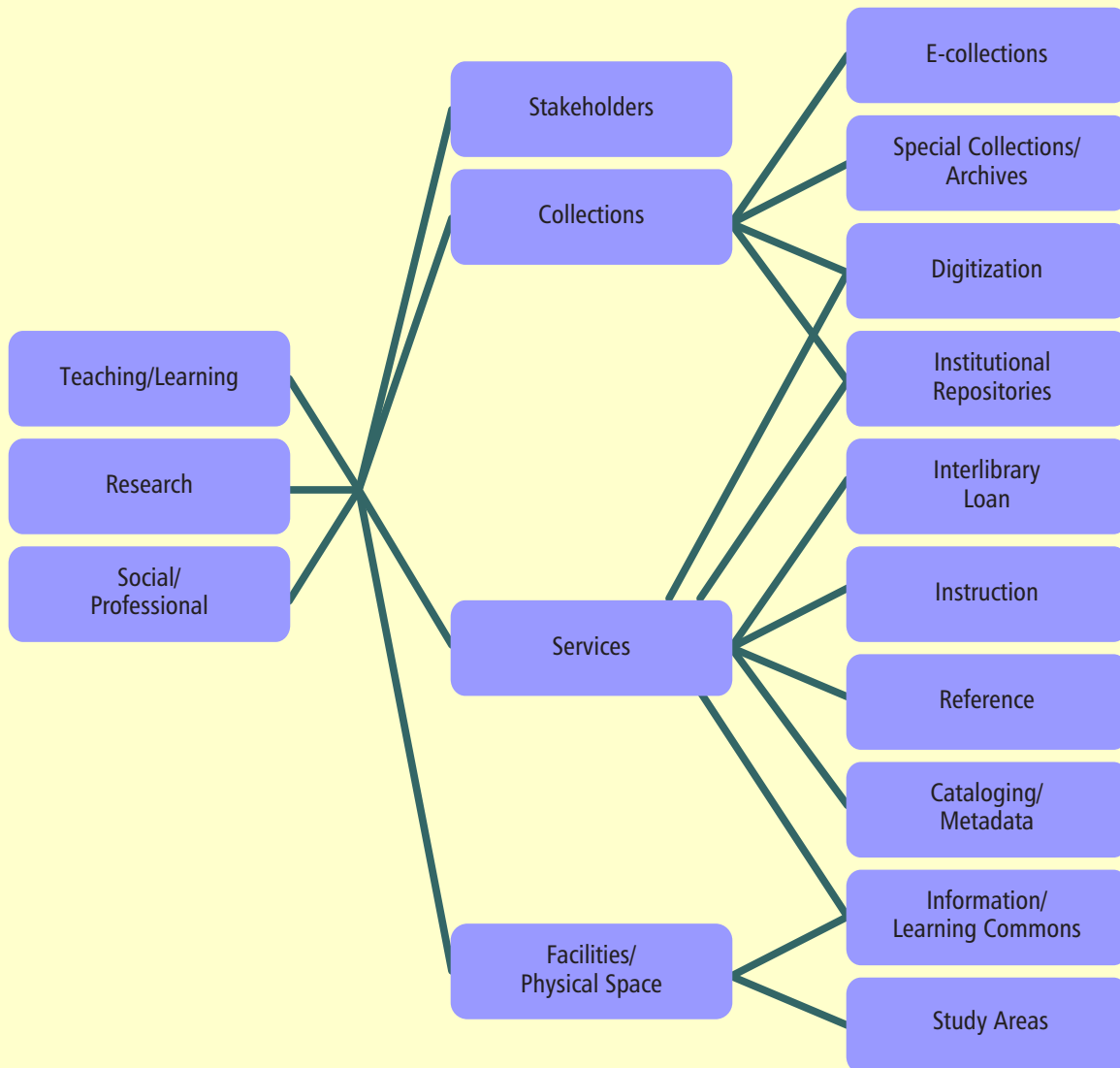
Library professionals are looking for new ways to measure and express the value of their libraries to their parent institutions and to measure how well they meet the rapidly changing needs and expectations of their users. They need both to find the best ways to meet patron needs and to communicate the value of their operations to administrators and funders. Developing a strategy to help libraries attain these goals is the focus of the Value, Outcomes, and Return on Investment of Academic Libraries project, “Lib-Value” for short.

Funded by a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), Lib-Value is a three-year study that began in December 2009. Carol Tenopir of the University of Tennessee (UT) leads the project as Principal Investigator (PI) with Paula Kaufman of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) as Co-PI. In addition to the teams at UT and UIUC, Donald King of UT and Bryant University, Bruce Kingma of Syracuse University, and Martha Kyrillidou and her team at ARL round out the partnership. Lib-Value builds on and goes beyond two previous studies that looked at return-on-investment (ROI) of grants income.¹ Lib-Value expands the focus of the research to consider both ROI and value more broadly, including the value of library collections and services to research, teaching and learning, and social and professional areas.

The first step in the Lib-Value project was to develop a fact-based articulation of all areas of value and ROI in academic libraries. Rachel Fleming-May and Crystal Sherline of the University of Tennessee are in the final stages of compiling a comprehensive bibliography on value and ROI in libraries of all types. This extensive review of the literature informs the Lib-Value team, and serves as a base for the end-product that Lib-Value will deliver: a customizable set of models for determining value and ROI in academic libraries.

A map of areas included in the Lib-Value study is based on three major functional areas reflected in academic libraries: research, teaching/learning, and other social and

Figure 1. Map of Functional Areas



professional issues (see Figure 1). These are the broad, over-arching areas within which more specific items are being studied. Examples of questions that are being answered are: What is the value of library collections to research, to teaching and learning outcomes, and to social and professional outcomes? How does that value differ for different stakeholders, such as faculty, students, administration, alumni, and others? What is the importance of library services and facilities and physical spaces in these three functional areas? This cognitive map reflects the foundation and structure for all of the individual studies that Lib-Value is conducting.

Because it is not possible to conduct original research on every area of academic libraries in a three year study, the Lib-Value team has focused on being as innovative as possible. In some instances, this means looking at areas that have not yet been widely studied because they have only relatively recently become of significant concern, as is the case for e-books, learning/information commons areas, and environmental sustainability. Innovation in this context also means looking with fresh eyes at more traditional areas, such as journal collections, library instruction, and special collections, as well as at well-known tools such as LibQUAL+® and MINES for Libraries®.

Work is already underway in several areas:

- An e-books study, headed by Tina Chrzastowski, Wendy Shelburne, and Paula Kaufman of UIUC, is incorporating a portion of the Elsevier E-books Use and Value Study that is currently underway at UIUC and other institutions. This study looks at the value of e-books as presently used by faculty and graduate students; how that value differs between those two groups and by publisher and subject; and how e-books are used by UIUC users.
- Gayle Baker, Teresa Walker, and Ken Wise of UT are leading an examination of how the information commons' spaces and services contribute to student success on multiple levels, as well as how commons are utilized by instructors and how they affect teaching outcomes.
- Bruce Kingma of Syracuse University is examining the environmental value of the library. For instance, providing online resources may yield savings in transportation and paper as users access collections from home and on their screens. Kingma, an economist, will also lend his expertise to all areas of the project, searching for ways to apply economic principles to every aspect of research.

- To study the use of library collections, Carol Tenopir and Donald King of UT are updating a cost and readership study at the University of Pittsburgh, first done in 2002–2004. In addition to collecting longitudinal data that will give an invaluable snapshot of the rapid changes in the processes and functioning of the library as well as the impact of these changes on costs, this study will look at how library journal collections affect the success and productivity of faculty and students.
- Rachel Fleming-May and Crystal Sherline of UT are conducting an experimental-design study of the impact and outcomes of library instruction on learning. This study is examining how multiple types of library instruction impact various measures of student success, including learning outcomes, library anxiety, and information literacy. The study will also investigate how the library as place affects students' comfort with, enjoyment of, and perception of the larger university.
- Ken Wise and Gayle Baker of UT are examining the value of special collections, including the role that special collections play in donations from alumni and the community, in recruiting faculty and students, and in generating goodwill and prestige for the university.
- Finally, Martha Kyrillidou and the team at ARL will be involved in multiple aspects of the project, from promoting public awareness to developing web-based tools that implement the models the larger team develops. In addition, Kyrillidou is working with the team to integrate data that has already been collected through existing ARL tools. This integration supports an important goal of the project: to make value and ROI assessments as easy and seamless as possible for overworked and overloaded professionals, largely by utilizing pre-existing data-collection methods wherever possible.

These projects are the beginning, but by no means the end, of what Lib-Value hopes to accomplish. Information will be distributed via the project website² and through ARL as the study progresses. Project feedback, updates, and presentations have been featured at the ARL Library Assessment Forum held on Friday afternoons prior to American Library Association Annual Conferences and Midwinter Meetings. The Library Assessment Blog is an additional venue for disseminating related news and information.³ An important factor in determining the research priorities for Lib-Value has been the feedback received

from library professionals around the world. The project continues to welcome feedback online at <http://libvalue.cci.utk.edu/>.

- ¹ Judy Luther, *University Investment in the Library: What's the Return? A Case Study at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign*, Elsevier Library Connect White Paper 1 (San Diego CA: Elsevier, 2008), <http://libraryconnect.elsevier.com/whitepapers/0108/lcwp010801.html>; Carol Tenopir, Amy Love, Joseph Park, Lei Wu, Andrea Baer, Regina Mays, Bruce Kingma, Donald W. King, *University Investment in the Library, Phase II: An International Study of the Library's Value to the Grants Process*, Elsevier Library Connect White Paper 2 (San Diego CA: Elsevier, 2010), http://www.elsevier.com/wps/find/librariansinfo.librarians/lc_home#White_Paper.
- ² Lib-Value website, <http://libvalue.cci.utk.edu/>.
- ³ Library Assessment Blog, <http://www.libraryassessment.info/>.

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