

Assessment Plan

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LIBS 681: Assessment and Evaluation in Library and Information Science

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Literature review

One case study found that was conducted at California State University from 2009 -2010 and published in 2012. Some of the results from the study included “1,452 observations in 2009; 70,607 gate counts for 2009; and 1,141 students completed computer-use surveys”(Thompson, S., 2012). As technology has progressed many more questions arise from this type of study such as: Are general use computers needed as much as previously implemented or should there be more of an emphasis on specialized equipment (graphic design/video editing/data science)? This is the ideal methodology to follow for the assessment processes proposed here, only through a multi-faceted approach using both research data collection methods can a full picture be truly evident in regards to public computer services access and outcomes.

Another study used the public library environment to evaluate the outcomes from the public use of computers and associated services and programs. It really brings up an excellent point that just because users are recorded quantitatively as logging in or coming into the library via gate counts and using a public access computer, this doesn't measure the outcome of this experience. Only through observational and patron input can answers such as these become more apparent in a library environment case by case. Some of the methods similar to the ones proposed here with a combination of quantitative and qualitative assessment could prove to provide information whether patrons/users as well as stakeholders gain social benefits, improve information technology skills, increase community engagement, and motivate the capacity to create local content as suggested by Paberza & Rutkauskiene (2010). The case study provided evidence through surveys (via a longitudinal multi-perspective method) for libraries in Latvia and Lithuania that suggested public access to computers provided the chance for users to gain computer literacy skills even if not through explicit courses in information/computer literacy

being offered (although workshops were also offered as well), by providing access services and having staff to answer general questions it allowed users to seek information using a computer and the internet who may otherwise be unfamiliar with the technology/points of access. Only through input/feedback from users via surveys and observations can this information be obtained.

At the University of Montana, a study was done to observe public computer usage spanning multiple years (1999, 2000, 2001, 2004, and 2005) in order to facilitate a better understanding for how staff library personnel could best provide reference/service as well as learning the students' needs. During this time the increase or demand of electronic resources is very evident and was also a newly emerging offering at the time (and using electronic resources over the physical collection is an increasing trend still nearly two decades later). The finding from this study resulted in a table to represent the computer trends which included from 2004-2005 observation year alone "Uses: 3,765 (74%), Vacancies: 1,335 (26%), Users Waiting (105), and total Observations: 5,100" (Granath & Samson 2008). Something absolutely worth noting that I saw pertinent from this study is the necessity to create a preliminary or pilot study with smaller scope and build upon its successes. It was noted that during the various stages or times this study was conducted that there were computer labs merged and that these library spaces are oftentimes refreshed (such as floor plan layout and furniture/desk orientation).

Finally it maybe worth contrasting the academic library setting assessment to the public library setting assessment, as it seems to deal with an almost completely opposite issue dealing with public computer-use/access services, there is a seemingly high or consistent demand for these services within a public library setting (within an academic library there are usually peak times that coincide with course schedules) and to efficiently allocate resources to public library

patrons the study done by Williamson assessed alternative strategies to the popular first-come-first-serve method implemented by most libraries. Those attending college or university could likely have one if not more personal computing devices now compared to just a little over a decade ago and especially during the initial turn of the millenia and following the internet boom, whereas public libraries are often serving a community in a different circumstance requiring usage assessments in order to plan accordingly for a future expansion (through procurement of more resources). The study by Williamson determined (out of 4 strategies) that the best course of action is to keep the first-come-first-serve method yet allocate some computers as “express computers using one of the non-FCFS queuing strategies”(Williamson, S., 2012) essentially to allow those doing short tasks perhaps taking less than 20 minutes to systematically have continual access (with grouped computers - preferably with a standing desk arrangement) versus those who likely want a comfortable workspace for an extended period of time. Essentially the article looks at more efficient ways to distribute public computer access with limited resources (which is probably very useful during high peak periods of the day) especially at public libraries. Relative to the two assessments proposed here, this method could be applied to the library’s computers that offer general public computers in the most efficient way possible should it be determined there are issues raised by patrons of limited access within the library common areas with regard to computer access availability. Therefore cutting down the total allocation of resources should determine either a reduction or procurement of more computers to offer patrons based on the assessment results.

What is being assessed

The hope through these two assessment methods proposed below is to help others determine whether they see a trend within the academic library setting (or another library

environment) that public desktop computer usage is either on the decline, adequate for the resources supplied, or in need of funding to expand (this could entail planning better strategies for the current commons area layout as well). To help others determine if their academic library should shift focus to other aspects of technology services provided. The deployment of this research or case study could potentially help out academic libraries, their students, and their community members determine if a reduction or procurement of more computers is the correct course of action and if so help others who perhaps suspect analogous declines more broadly across the academic library setting and take similar actions (or weigh other options such as repurposing based on patron feedback) if deemed necessary. In other words it may help determine if certain actions warrant a particular direction for others to take in potentially reducing budgets or allocating funds elsewhere within the library (specifically within the information technology space at academic libraries) without an actual impact to services, allowing libraries to adapt to their changing environment.

To summarize the academic library assessment being proposed here, the question that is being asked is the following: Are desktop computers still relevant in today's libraries' common areas as part of a broadly popular service most libraries offer (or in other words, what are the needs of today's academic library patrons when it comes to computer access), what are some of the patterns we can see through these qualitative assessments, and what are common inputs that come out of this assessment from patrons in regards to improving the service offered?

Purpose statement

The purpose of this proposed assessment plan is to gain an understanding about patron's utilization of the publicly available computers within the library based on user input/feedback in conjunction with quantitative data already being collected in many cases for most academic

libraries. I believe to get the most out of the survey portion it should be conducted after the observation portion of the assessment plan has been completed so as not to hint to participants/skew or impact the data for that portion of the assessment as it may potentially affect the participant's behavior. As well as after any changes have been implemented, I would hope to gain a more clear picture of the average library patron that utilizes the public computers and perhaps become aware of any nuances that aren't apparent through the quantitative data alone that the library collects already.

The stakeholders for this assessment within the library setting include patrons, community members, and library staff/faculty. Essentially anyone with a vested interest concerning the public access services program provided within the library common areas/spaces.

Method 1: Observation

The first qualitative portion of this assessment plan is an observation of what students are actually doing while at a public computer (behavioral patterns observed by staff/faculty); whether or not they are either logged into the computer and using it or not logged into the computer but using the space. The methodology I will use for my observational study resembles a longitudinal study type however limited in time. As noted in Paretta & Catalano (2013) due to limited time of observations there is the possibility of inaccuracies. Although their study accounted for only 3 to 10 second observations, the same can be said with the time set for the observation criteria proposed here. In which the observer would allocate approximately 5 minutes per observation to fill out the observational forms created for a record of the qualitative research. The forms (Figure 1) will include observation numbers (different subjects), different locations of observations (floor 1,2,3,4), date (time, day, calendar date), if the person being observed is logged into a computer or not, and finally a section for additional notes to be jotted

down. There will be a final analysis with a tally based on if the people being observed are using the public access computers or not. Making a table/graph based on location (floor). The notes taken may also show a pattern which may be used to support the conclusion of the narrative. Precaution should be taken to avoid potential bias within the notes section, perhaps only to be used for context/supportive information while conducting the observations rather than qualitative data within an assessment's final product. One of the most important ethical considerations I think that makes for the best research is to "present unbiased language at an appropriate level of specificity" (Creswell, 2014). By presenting the data as objectively as possible and avoiding any subjective rhetoric the research is free to be openly interpreted more so as raw data not inherent to any bias.

Observation Form

Observation # and Location:	Date:	User logged into computer: (appears to actively be using)	Notes:
Observation # 1 Floor Level: 1 2 3 4	____/____/____ M T W T F Time: ____ am / pm	Yes / No	
Observation # 2 Floor Level: 1 2 3 4	____/____/____ M T W T F Time: ____ am / pm	Yes / No	
Observation # 3 Floor Level: 1 2 3 4	____/____/____ M T W T F Time: ____ am / pm	Yes / No	
Observation # 4 Floor Level: 1 2 3 4	____/____/____ M T W T F Time: ____ am / pm	Yes / No	
Observation # 5 Floor Level: 1 2 3 4	____/____/____ M T W T F Time: ____ am / pm	Yes / No	
Observation # 6 Floor Level: 1 2 3 4	____/____/____ M T W T F Time: ____ am / pm	Yes / No	
Observation # 7 Floor Level: 1 2 3 4	____/____/____ M T W T F Time: ____ am / pm	Yes / No	
Observation # 8 Floor Level: 1 2 3 4	____/____/____ M T W T F Time: ____ am / pm	Yes / No	
Observation # 9 Floor Level: 1 2 3 4	____/____/____ M T W T F Time: ____ am / pm	Yes / No	

Figure 1

Method 2: Survey

The second method to be utilized as an assessment tool will be a questionnaire which will consist of several question types. One will be multiple-choice with only one option to choose “based on categories”(Applegate, 2013), this is the question about what academic year students are within for course credit milestones Which is one way that the data can be sorted effectively to produce results. Another question type included for practical evaluation within this questionnaire is a final open-ended question that allows library users to “specify some idea about categories missed”(Applegate, 2013) or in other words the question in this survey is worded in a way to give the participant an opportunity to bring attention to a detail or issue relative to the purpose of the survey. The Google Forms tools fortunately provides basic visualization of the results, within the responses tab. Which gives basic analytics data that can be exported to a Google Sheet for further manipulation if necessary. Customization options for the user interface are extremely user friendly as well, allowing for updates to be made to the survey/questionnaire quite seamlessly. Below is a shortened URL to the survey in its current form, which contains six questions in total.

Google Form Survey/Questionnaire: <https://forms.gle/Hi7raW8rw6EhWR3i7>

Figure 2

Survey (Questionnaire) for LIBS 684

The following is a library survey on the topic of public access computers within the VCU library spaces. Your participation will help us to better understand ways to improve upon this service provided.

1. What year student are you?

Mark only one oval.

- Freshman
 Sophomore
 Junior
 Senior
 Graduate
 Other: _____

2. How many hours do you usually spend within the library when studying or working on coursework?

3. On a scale of 1-4 how would you rate the availability of public computers within the library when you are in the library to study or access a public computer?

(1 - being no computers are available, 2 - being not many computers available, 3 - being computers are somewhat available, and 4 - being computers are very available)

Mark only one oval.

- 1
 2
 3
 4

4. Out of the following options, which (if any) applications/software program types would you like to see more options offered on public access computers?

Check all that apply.

- Video editing
 Audio recording/editing
 3D modeling
 Image/photo editing
 None

5. Does the availability of public computers impact you in any way when you are at the library to study or work on coursework?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
 No

6. Please describe any questions or comments you may have relative to public computer access you feel should be brought to the library's attention?

Concerns

Privacy concerns wouldn't be a factor for the survey and observation per se, however there are surely concerns in conjunction with any quantitative data seeing as this falls on the individual vendor's software security protocols as well as the library's duty to uphold the privacy principle standard outlined by American Library Association (ALA) when it comes to collecting the library's usage statistics from users. The concerns of privacy for the proposed assessment here qualitatively should not be an issue as this will be by nature of collection anonymized anyway upon initial collection (no names or identifiable information is collected via the survey form or observation form).

One of the voices missing from this assessment is certainly from non-library users, and potentially librarians (at least not directly from the two assessment methods) however I believe most assessments done at libraries have back-end/internal input throughout these types of processes and usually the awareness is brought up by library directors/managers. There is the option to take either of these assessment approaches via predetermined/prepopulated structure for questioning and/or open-ended questioning and observational study. The plan proposed here strives to take a mixed approach, allowing more possibilities to be discovered. This may pose the potential for results to become more complex when disseminating, however it may in the same turn show perspectives from the library user that library staff won't see.

Applying results

Using the correct tools for assessment is critical to gather the most accurate and applicable results and should include data that is elicited, identified, and categorized as suggested by Brajnik (2004). The results from these assessments will be categorized so that common themes

may be identified. Once appropriate categories are identified priorities can be assigned relative to user input via mode or most often categorical finding as well as most practical to implement to each and corrective/improvement measures can be planned. Comparative evaluation/assessment of these values will need to be done via this analysis method to see if certain observations and/or patron feedback might suggest/indicate ideas for initiatives or programs that can be planned accordingly. That is the application of results once clearly and defined findings have been established through the assessment results.

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