For Arkansas Libraries
Submitted Sept. 2007

The Value of Our Libraries:
Impact, Recognition and Influencing Funders

by Stephen Abram, MLS, FSLA, SirsiDynix

Introduction

I've been thinking a lot about the role that libraries play in society and the impact we have – for good or evil – in how society works and progresses. I was moved by the impact of a story that I heard at ALA Midwinter 2005, which I will paraphrase here:

Sharon Terry has an amazing story. You can watch a video and hear her tell it online at http://arl.cni.org/sparc/meetings/ala05mw/. Terry tells a story that makes it crystal clear why libraries must be at the front of open access and unfettered access for research and learning. Terry and her husband became activists through a very personal route. She was a college pastor and her husband a construction worker. Their two young children were both diagnosed with a rare form of cancer and were given little hope of any course other than the loss of their eyesight and other complications. At ALA she described the hoops she had to go through to access publicly supported libraries and databases in search of a cure for her children. She schemed to become an 'authorized user', paid fees, fines, ILL fees, etc. At some points she had to resort to borrowing and stealing passwords to access content. In the end, despite library policies but because libraries exist she succeeded – and how! Terry and her husband researched the medical literature, built a definitive chart of the disease, patented the gene they found was responsible for the disease, and wrote articles that were published in the prestigious medical journal *Nature*. Despite being laypeople, they did quite well with the research literature once they got their hands on it. They formed the Genetic Alliance (http://www.geneticalliance.org/), an international coalition of advocacy groups that has collected hundreds of case studies on parents and advocates who have suffered from the lack of open access to current medical literature. Terry also formed the Alliance for Taxpayer Access (http://www.taxpayeraccess.org/) to secure public access to research funded by taxpayer dollars, especially through the US National Institutes of Health (NIH). More examples presented by Terry demonstrate the importance of open access and the particularly obvious case for Open Access to publicly funded research results. She responds bluntly to the charge that the NIH proposal will harm the financial stability of publishers saying "Since when is the NIH/government in the business of ensuring the sustainability of companies?" There's a happy ending to this story. Today, the Terry's children are doing well and the treatments that their parents vigourously pursued have worked. Some at ALA Midwinter were moved to tears – some by the simple story of the power of research, others, I suspect, in fear of how many have been hurt by library rules that restrict access to our collections and services. (http://library.ucsc.edu/science/ELD/2005/ACRLSPARC.doc).

So, as I said, this story got me thinking about proofs to how the unfettered access to information and information services makes a difference in our various communities: public libraries, school libraries, university and college libraries, and special libraries. What is the real value of public, academic, school and special libraries? Here are the highlights of what I found. I've included a selected webliography at the end of the article so you can enjoy the reading more too.

Value of Public Libraries

Dividends: The Value of Public Libraries in Canada, a study done in 1996-1997, was a seminal work in exploring the impact – both soft and hard measures – of public libraries on the communities in Canada. Key conclusions were that:

- Public Libraries have an increasing role to play in Canada
- Public libraries, however, are under increasing financial pressures
- Public libraries are cost-effective information providers
- The value and importance of information is increasing
- Public libraries support the local economy
- Public libraries support the cultural industry sector
- Public libraries support Canadian culture
- Public libraries support a democratic society
- Public libraries support and promote literacy
- Public libraries support children and students
- Public libraries support lifelong learning
- Public libraries help bridge the digital divide

Pretty powerful stuff! Many of the measures in this study were soft or polling data with some anecdotal stories to support the conclusions. I understand that a new study is now under serious consideration by the Canadian Urban Libraries Council. This would clearly be a most welcome update.

Recently, several jurisdictions have taken library system impact measures to another level. In Sept. 2004, a comprehensive taxpayer ROI study on the impact of public libraries in Florida found:

- Overall, Florida's public libraries return $6.54 for every $1.00 invested from all sources. (all figures US$)
- For every $6,448 spent on public libraries from public funding sources in Florida, one job is created.
- For every dollar of public support spent on public libraries in Florida, gross regional product increases by $9.08.
- For every dollar of public support spent on public libraries in Florida, income (wages) increases by $12.66.

Another major study, released in Jan. 2005, in South Carolina by the School of Library and Information Science at the University of South Carolina in collaboration with the South Carolina Association of Public Library Administrators and cooperatively with the South Carolina State Library on the impact of public libraries found indications that the public library:

> "o Improves overall quality of life: 92% said yes.
> o Increases local property values: 47% said yes.
> o Attracts new businesses to the community: 38% said yes.
> o Attracts patronage to local businesses: 44% said yes.
> o Enhanced personal fulfillment: 73% said yes.
> o Nurtures a love of reading: 73% said yes.
> o Is a source of personal enjoyment: 64% said yes.
> o Helps manage personal finances or saved money: 32% said yes.
> o Helped to obtain a new job: 11% said yes.
> o Helped improved or start business: 15% said yes.
> o Helped with a business opportunity: 25% said yes.
> o Assisted workers to be more productive their job: 37% said yes.
> o Introduced users to new technologies: 28% said yes.
> o Helped users with primary education work: 18% said yes.
> o Helped users with life-long learning: 47% said yes.
> o Contributed to their home schooling efforts: 12% said yes.
> o 49% of business users indicated that they obtained most of the business/research information from their public library.
> o 78% of business users indicated that information obtained from the public library contributed to the success of their business.
> o Without access to the information in their public library, 23% of the business users indicated that they estimated their cost would increase between $500 and $5,000 and 7% estimated costs would increase by $5,000.
> o 41% of business users said that if they did not have access to the public library it would have some negative impact and 33% said it would have a major negative impact on their business.
> o 59% of personal investors said they obtained the information needed for making investment decisions from their public library.
> o 48% said "definitely" the investment information at the public library had contributed to their financial well-being and 34% said "somewhat".
> o 32% of the respondents said the dollar value of the information obtained from the public library was between $10,000 and $1 million and 2% said over $1 million."

Among the economic impact findings are the following:
1. The direct economic impact of all SC public library expenditures is $80 million.
2. The existence of SC public libraries brings to the state (from federal and private sources) almost $5 million each year that it would not otherwise have.

3. The value of the loans and use of books, videos, cassettes, CDs, newspapers, magazines, etc. to users each year is approximately $102 million.
4. The value of reference services to users in SC each year is approximately $26 million.
5. The total <u>direct</u> economic impact of SC public libraries is estimated at $222 million, while the actual cost of these services to the state and local governments is only $77.5 million. This means that for every $1 spent by state and local governments on SC public libraries the return on investment is $2.86.
6. The <u>indirect</u> economic impact of SC public library expenditures (wages, supplies, books and related materials, construction, etc.) on the state's economy is almost $126 million. This means that for every $1 expended by SC public libraries, the state receives $1.62 of indirect economic impact.
7. The total direct and indirect return on investment for every $1 expended on the state's public libraries by SC State and local governments is $4.48—almost 350%!"
(http://www.libsci.sc.edu/SCEIS/exsummary.pdf)

Another value study was accomplished in Pennsylvania and, more importantly, reported in the newspaper (the Wilkes-Barre Pennsylvania Times Leader). It builds on what we learned from the Florida, South Carolina, Buffalo and Ohio studies. Libraries greatly help local economies. Congratulations to these librarians for getting the word out. Here are some samples from the article:

- "Luzerne County public libraries are a private-market powerhouse, adding more than $16 million to the economy in 2006, according to a new, federally funded study. Not bad for a system that costs taxpayers a total of about $3.7 million, proponents argue."
- "Libraries save users another $84 million by providing information they otherwise would not be able to find on things like home repair and bargain shopping."
- "Libraries themselves spur the economy through wages paid to employees and the purchase of equipment and supplies. If all the state's public libraries closed for a year, that would mean a total of $248 million never pumped into the economy. And businesses around the library would lose $80 million in sales as well."
- "To get that bottom-line return on investment, the study added up all these estimated losses – which Aerni stressed were very conservative calculations – to total nearly $1.4 billion statewide, then divided that by the total tax money used to support libraries – $249 million."

There are loads more nuggets in the article and the other studies in the webliography. Isn't it time for everyone in public libraries to do this process and localize this knowledge? When Buffalo and Erie County Public Library did their report, they received more budget than they asked for!

There was another study on the heels of Florida and South Carolina about the economic value of public libraries by the Carnegie Mellon University Center for Economic Development. It documents an impressive array of benefits flowing from the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh, which has 19 neighborhood locations in the city, including the main library in Oakland. According to the study, which surveyed 1,300 individuals and interviewed several focus groups, the Carnegie Library sustains 726 jobs and more than $63 million in economic output in Allegheny County annually. For every dollar the city of Pittsburgh and the Allegheny County Regional Asset District provide the Carnegie Library, the study contends that the library provides more than $6 worth of benefits."

Glen Holt, of the St. Louis Public Library has written numerous studies on their role in the community. There are other studies across the land.

There may never be enough of these impact studies. There are certainly too many if we don't use the data to influence the folks who control the purse strings! Read them and use what you need. If they're not right on for what you need, then do your own study, talk to your library schools and encourage more research, contract the survey you need . . .

Value of Academic and College Libraries

The value of academic libraries is often strongly tied to the value of colleges and universities themselves. There are many reports on the impact of universities and colleges and higher education on the economics of a community.

In this particular sector, I am fond of a study called "Libraries Designed for Learning" by Scott Bennett. This is an articulate report on what needs to be considered to place the library at the heart of the new university – virtual and bricks. As we create information and learning commons we need to consider many new and mutated issues (including our Millennial users) and this report is a god place to start.

Another study that makes a good point is OCLC's "White Paper on the Information Habits of College Students" (www.oclc.org). This excellent, free study provides data on students' preferences in dealing with the library and research information. It concludes with some tough questions for libraries and library staff to ponder, strategically.

What should libraries' strategies be if students:

- prefer web access from home?
- naturally gravitate towards the most popular web tools?
- prefer single-point access using web search engines?
- want assistance any way at all - although they prefer personal and face-to-face?

- want access to resources - wherever they are or whomever owns them?
- clearly want to know more about library services?
- base their opinion and perceptions of library service on evening and weekend experiences?

"The Digital Disconnect: The Widening Gap between Internet-Savvy Students and Their Schools" (August 14, 2002) and "The Internet Goes to College: *How Students are Living in the Future with Today's Technology" (*September 15, 2002), both from Pew Internet and American Life (www.pewinternet.org), are based on decent data. It's scary data too. There is an emerging proof of a severe generation gap between students and the teachers, professors and librarians that serve them in their learning environment. Some might say that's just the student's perception and they need to learn more. Great marketers live by the adage that 'perception is reality" since few individuals differentiate between their real and false perceptions.

The Pew Internet and American Life Project do hundreds of studies on user behaviours and value systems. They're too numerous to list here but searching their website turns up many diamonds.

The article titled "The Impact of Facilities on Recruitment and Retention of Students" appeared in the March/April 2006 issue of Facilities Management. It contains loads of great data, comments, analysis and charts which show that the actual physical library ranks very high in potential students decision making process in selecting their college or university. More importantly, poorly maintained or inadequate libraries ranked high enough on the reasons for potential students to reject a college or university. Hey, it works both ways! This might be an article to print out and leave lying around for decisionmakers to trip over... or maybe just send it to them with a cover note -- Time for a new Learning Commons, a new building, an Information Commons, Paint job, rugs, wireless, PC's, ...? What's on your wish list?

"Dimensions and Use of the Scholarly Information Environment" from CLIR/DLF (http://www.clir.org) was published after the Digital Library Federation and Council on Library and Information Resources commissioned Outsell, Inc. to conduct a large-scale study of undergraduates, graduate students, and faculty members from academic institutions to better understand how users' expectations of libraries are changing. A summary report, including 158 tables, is now available online. This report is fascinating in its detail about how students, professors and librarians are using electronic resources from e-journals and the OPAC to the web and subscription databases.

I do worry that my research finds too few empirical studies of the broader role of the college and university library on learning and research in the academic setting. Are they just difficult to find? Is the position of the academic library so unassailable that the research isn't needed? I wonder.

Value of Special Libraries

Having spent many years in a special library setting, I am all too aware of the position in which special libraries are placed – you're only as good as your last reference question or research project. You are under constant pressure to justify your services, role and budget in the specialized environment in which you practice.

There are quite a few studies on the value of special librarians and their services. However, each is often narrowly focused and its results limited to the sector in which it was done.

Two examples which I particularly admire were accomplished by Joanne Gard Marshall. The first sought to discover the impact of the medical library on the decisions of doctors. It's referred to as the "Rochester Study." In 1991, physicians were asked to request some information related to a current, real clinical case and then to evaluate its impact on the care of their patients. There were fifteen participating hospitals. As a result of the information provided by the library, 80% of the 208 physicians who returned their questionnaires said that they probably or definitely handled some aspect of patient care differently than they would have handled it otherwise. Specific changes that were reported by the physicians were:

- Diagnosis   29%
- Choice of Tests   51%
- Choice of Drugs   45%
- Reduced Length of Hospital Stay 19%
- Advice Given to the Patient   72%

Physicians also said that the services and information provided by the library contributed to their ability to avoid the following:

- Hospital Admission   12%
- Patient Mortality   19%
- Hospital-Acquired Infection   8%
- Surgery   21%
- Additional Tests or Procedures   49%

Yes! You do see in these data that working with medical libraries helped to avoid patient mortality. Librarians save lives too! Excitingly, the physicians rated the information provided by the library more highly than that provided by other information sources such as diagnostic imaging, lab tests, and discussions with colleagues.

Professor Marshall also performed another impact study for SLA in 1995. She studied the impact of the library on corporate decision-making in the five major Canadian banks. This study, published by SLA, shows powerful impacts of library delivered research and reference on decisions having total impacts of over $1 million each. The impacts usually changed the course of the research of the end user and/or saved significant money.

There are other studies that have been done in the fields of patents and in pharmaceuticals that show the impact of the library on improving regulatory compliance and speeding approvals from authorities, for example.

Again, there is too little hardcore research and study, but what is out there is very compelling.

Value of School Libraries

In the school library field, there are numerous studies and seemingly increasing stupidity in just ignoring them. I heard the word 'anegnosis' once. It's similar to 'amnesia' although instead of forgetting knowledge and experience, it means to willfully ignore or be unaware of facts and knowledge. Dr. Ken Haycock, (professor and former director at the graduate School of Library, Archival and Information Studies at the University of British Columbia and now Director of the SLIS at San Jose State University), has summarized most of the major studies, internationally. This was published in 2003 by the Canadian Coalition for School Libraries. It clearly shows that students, who attend schools with well-funded, properly-stocked libraries managed by qualified teacher-librarians, have higher achievement, improved literacy and greater success at the post-secondary level. Duh! So why are we having a crisis in school libraries, where they're threatened routinely?

The study is entitled *The Crisis in Canada's School Libraries: The Case for Reform and Reinvestment*. "The evidence is there for all to see," says Dr. Haycock. "That's why governments in the U.S., Europe and Asia are aggressively investing in their school libraries. What's disturbing is that Canadian policy-makers are ignoring the findings of literally decades of research that shows why school libraries and qualified teacher-librarians are essential components in the academic programming of any school." Standardized scores tend to be 10 to 20% higher than in schools without an investment in a school library program. "The relationship between library resource levels and increased achievement is not explained away by other school variables (e.g., per student spending, teacher-pupil ratios) or community conditions (e.g., poverty, demographics). In fact, no fewer than forty years of research – conducted in different locations, at different levels of schooling, in different socioeconomic areas, sponsored by different agencies and conducted by different, credible researchers – provides an abundance of evidence about the positive impact of qualified teacher-librarians and school libraries on children and adolescents." (Haycock 2003)

"Two leading U.S. researchers in the field offer this arresting conclusion: "In research done in nine states and over 3300 schools since 1999, the positive impact of the school library program is consistent. [They] make a difference in academic achievement. If you were setting out a balanced meal for a learner, the school library media program would be part of the main course, not the butter on the bread." (Lance and Loertscher, 2003)

In 2006 ALA and AASL promoted a new national report emphasizing that school library media programs are critical to high school reform. It points to the work of The Partnership for 21st Century Skills (the Partnership). Their report is, "Results That Matter: 21st Century Skills and High School Reform." The report designs a compelling framework for 21st century learning that focuses on the results that matter for today's high school graduates' success in the workplace of the present and future.

The American Association of School Librarians (AASL), an active member of the Partnership, applauds the report's findings and considers school library media programs to be crucial to the success of high school reform.

According to the report (available for download at www.21stcenturyskills.org) high schools must focus on improving student learning, achievement and competencies based on the needs of today's work environments. Schools must teach skills and attributes that are increasingly important for every high school graduate, which are different than traditional metrics. Today's graduates need to be critical thinkers, problem solvers and effective communicators who are proficient in both core subjects and new, 21st century content and skills. These 21st century skills include learning and thinking skills, information and communications technology literacy skills, and life skills. Twenty-first century skills are in demand for all students, no matter what their future plans—and they will have an enormous impact on students' prospects.

School library media specialists have an active role in instruction beyond the scope of the traditional library setting. Teachers collaborate with media specialists to engage their students in complex writing, integrating facts and ideas from a range of sources, learning to critically assess them and arrive at well-reasoned and well-supported conclusions. Effective school library media programs teach students how to learn, how to think critically and how to use the tools and information available to solve complex problems. Those skills, taught in library media centers, are what today's employers seek. Without them, graduates are inadequately prepared for the workplace and adult life.

We need to continue to get the word out. The Ontario Library Association has committed $100,000 CDN to the completion of an Ontario study on the impact of the school library on learners. This will add more Canadian content to the corpus of evidence-based research proving the relationship of teacher-librarians, school library workers and school libraries to the success of students.

Again, it will all be for naught if we don't promote it and build understanding in the education decision making communities. We need to be at the table, and we need to be heard. Support the advocacy efforts of our fellow professionals in the library movement.

OCLC Advocacy Initiative

In recent years, OCLC has gifted the library community with many items of value. They have launched an advocacy campaign to raise awareness of critical library issues and to help libraries demonstrate their value. The OCLC *Environmental Scan* as well as the "Libraries: How They Stack Up" document are examples of tools that can be used by libraries to influence their communities and finding bodies.

Conclusion

These are challenging times for libraries. We need to communicate our value strongly and in many ways. The studies and opportunities outlined above are fabulous initiatives. We must take our basic statistics and turn them into measurements and then we must share our measurements. Raw statistics are just representations of effort – something bureaucrats view with cost-cutting eyes. Well chosen measurements can demonstrate the amazing value and impact of libraries to their communities, host organizations and funders. All players – vendors, publishers, library workers, institutions, and communities - in the information space have a vested interest to ensure that we communicate this impact and value well. Finally, we must enliven these measurements with the real life experiences of our users. We must share our stories and provide forums for our users to share their stories. It's these stories that provide the narrative to strongly engage our communities to invest in their own success.

Libraries play an essential, non-partisan role in providing the information that allows citizens to make informed decisions. Libraries make a difference. Libraries transform lives. Let's never forget that. Let's speak up.

Stephen Abram, MLS, is Vice President of Innovation for SirsiDynix and has been President of the Canadian Library Association and the Ontario Library Association. He is president 2008 of SLA and the author of ALA Editions Out Front With Stephen Abram. *He would love to hear from you at* stephen.abram@sirsidynix.com.

Selected (mostly free) Web References

Public Libraries

Dividends: The Value of Public Libraries in Canada
http://www.nald.ca/fulltext/dividend/contents.htm

OCLC Community Advocacy and Awareness Site
http://www.oclc.org/advocacy/default.htm

Libraries: How They Stack Up (OCLC)
http://www5.oclc.org/downloads/community/librariesstackup.pdf

IFLA Value of Public Libraries
http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla71/papers/119e-Aabo.pdf

Online Value of Public Library Services Tool
http://www.masslib.org/LibraryValue.html

The Public Library: A National Survey
http://www.nyla.org/index.php?page_id=801

Return on Investment in Your Library (Buffalo & Erie County)
http://www.buffalolib.org/aboutthelibrary/ect.asp

Study: Libraries Offer Big Returns
http://www.timesleader.com/news/20070807_07libraries_mg_ART.html

Value For Money: Southwestern Ohio's Return from Investment in Libraries
http://9libraries.info/docs/EconomicBenefitsStudy.pdf

Placing a Value on Public Library Services
http://www.slpl.lib.mo.us/libsrc/resresul.htm
http://www.slpl.lib.mo.us/libsrc/restoc.htm

Public Library Benefits Valuation Study Methodology and Key Findings
http://www.slpl.lib.mo.us/using/valuationc.htm
http://www.slpl.lib.mo.us/using/valuationg.htm

The Role of Public Libraries in Local Economic Development
http://www.ku.edu/pri/resrep/pdf/m260.pdf

Enhancing Economic Development through Libraries
http://www.iira.org/pubsnew/publications/IIRA_Reports_18.pdf

National Arts and Economic Prosperity Impact Study: Executive Summary
http://www.ci.pasadena.ca.us/planning/arts/Documents/ecoimpactstudy.pdf

Panel on Measuring the Value of Library Services
http://www.nclis.gov/libraries/foru96-2.html

Making Book: Gambling on the future of our libraries (Kansas City)
http://www.haplr-index.com/Making%20Book%20KCConsensus%20Library%20report-execsum.pdf

South Carolina Public Library Impact Study
http://www.libsci.sc.edu/SCEIS/home.htm

Taxpayer Return on Investment in Florida Public Libraries
http://dlis.dos.state.fl.us/bld/roi/publications.cfm

St. Louis Public Library: Placing a Value on Public Library Services
http://www.slpl.lib.mo.us/libsrc/rescbec.htm

Impacts of the Pennsylvania Nonprofit Sector
http://www.pano.org/economic%20impact%20study.pdf

British Library: Measuring Our Value
http://www.bl.uk/cgi-bin/press.cgi?story=1399
http://www.bl.uk/pdf/measuring.pdf

Academic Libraries

Libraries Designed for Learning by Scott Bennett
http://www.clir.org/pubs/reports/pub122/pub122web.pdf

Editorial: Sizzling chapter / A new study shows the impact of Carnegie Library
http://www.post-gazette.com/pg/06137/690631-192.stm

Dimensions and Use of the Scholarly Information Environment
http://www.diglib.org/use/grantpub.pdf

The Impact of Facilities on Recruitment and Retention of Students
http://www.appa.org/files/FMArticles/fm030406_f7_impact.pdf

Pew Internet and American Life
www.pewinternet.org

OCLC White Paper on the Information Habits of College Students
http://www5.oclc.org/downloads/community/informationhabits.pdf

The Economic Impact of Public Universities
http://www.nasulgc.org/publications/EconImpact.pdf

The Economic Impact of Higher Education
http://www.commonwealthnorth.org/uastudy/pitneyecon.html

School Libraries

The Crisis in Canada's School Libraries: The Case for Reform and Reinvestment
http://www.peopleforeducation.com/librarycoalition/Report03.pdf

21st Century Skills' Education Initiative
http://www.21stcenturyskills.org/

The Value of School Libraries in learning
http://www.det.wa.edu.au/education/cmis/eval/library/value/val2.htm
http://www.asla.org.au/research/

Library Research Service
http://www.lrs.org/impact.php

Special Libraries

Joanne Gard Marshall's studies on the impact of special libraries
http://www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov/articlerender.fcgi?artid=225641
http://www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov/articlerender.fcgi?artid=225794
http://www.sla.org/Presentations/sldc/joanne_LAB2002pp.ppt#310,25,References

Marshall, Joanne G. *The impact of the special library on corporate decision-making*.
Washington, DC: Special Libraries Association, 1993.

Statistics

Normative Data Project for Libraries
http://www.librarynormativedata.info/

NCLIS Statistics and Surveys
http://www.librarynormativedata.info/

NCES: National Center for Education Statistics
http://nces.ed.gov/

Canada. National Core Library Statistics Program
http://www.collectionscanada.ca/8/3/r3-203-e.html

Canadian Libraries: Bibliography
http://www.collectionscanada.ca/8/3/r3-800-e.html

ARL statistics and Measurement Program
http://www.arl.org/stats/

ALA Office for Research and Statistics
http://www.ala.org/ala/ors/statsaboutlib/statisticsabout.htm
http://www.ala.org/ala/alalibrary/libraryfactsheet/Default1446.htm
http://www.ala.org/ala/ors/researchstatistics.htm

Library Research Service: Research and Statistics about Libraries
http://www.lrs.org/

Other

Valuing Libraries by Ian McCallum and Sherrey Quinn in *Australian Library Journal*
http://www.alia.org.au/publishing/alj/53.1/full.text/mccallum.quinn.html