

University Library Advisory Committee's Value for Faculty, Library, and University

Eileen McElrath, Ph.D., MSLS. MA in English

Assistant Professor

School of Library and Information Studies

304 Administration Drive

Texas Woman's University

Denton, Texas 76204, USA

Abstract

The recent economic downturn resulted in reduced budgets for universities worldwide and, in turn, for the academic libraries residing within them. Library budgets have suffered greatly in the latest recession. Funding levels have not returned to needed levels yet. Academic library directors/deans can develop and support a University Library Advisory Committee of faculty members to help communicate the needs of the library as it carries out its mission to support the academic mission of the university. The article shares some literature about University Library Advisory Committees, how to develop them, and strategies University Library Committees can use to contribute to the communication needed to support library needs. The committee can provide valuable support that communicates the library's value to the greater university community.

1. Introduction

The recent economic downturn resulted in reduced budgets for universities and, in turn, for the academic libraries residing within them. Library budgets suffered greatly in the latest recession and have not yet returned to needed levels. Rush Miller calls it “the deepest “correction” of the economy since the Great Depression almost 80 years earlier” (Miller, 2012). Past economic downturns resulted in challenges for academic libraries, of course. The need for faculty support is nothing new to academic libraries or, for that matter, any other libraries functioning in their educational institution.

1.1 Importance of the Issue

It is primarily the academic library director/dean who communicates with university administrators and faculty. Heidar Mokhtari's 2016 article, “What makes academic librarians organizationally silent?” shares her study that provides evidence that generally academic librarians themselves are organizational silent (220). In his 1981 article, “A Library Advisory Committee Reports to the University President,” Richard P. Kinkade states “The university library needs to find ways in which the faculty can speak to the rest of the institution, and most importantly to its leadership, in making known the needs of the library and faculty's real interest in seeing that the library is adequately supported (87).” An important way to accomplish this is to develop a University Library Advisory Committee. This committee should be advisory to the library dean or director on library collections, policies and services needed to carry out the educational mission of the institution. The faculty members of the committee can make a valuable contribution by “speaking to the rest of the institution, and most importantly to its leadership, in making known the needs of the library and the faculty's real interest in seeing that the library is adequately supported (87).” Kinkade relates that when the University of Connecticut Library was faced with reduced budgets that would adversely affect the library, they turned for support to “those who stand to lose the most—the faculty users.” The library informed the members of the Academic Library Advisory Committee of the “nature and extent of the problem and allowed their natural instinct for survival to propel them toward a series of meetings with top university administrators.” This provided valuable support to help the library dean increase “awareness and advocacy for the library's plight” (88).

Additionally, Kincaide asserts that the “library has been a victim of its own success.” Libraries' inviting buildings and improvements in service “resulted in a dramatic increase in the level of use and the demands for service from faculty.

At the same time, libraries operate on increasingly reduced budgets in economic downturns and are already operating with reduced personnel and lean operations (89).”Ironically, academic librarians themselves typically remain “organizationally silent” (Mukhtari, 220).

Libraries recognize that “in an increasingly tough economic climate for many libraries around the world, being able to demonstrate impact and value is crucial.” Libraries are struggling to find appropriate, and systematic, ways to capture evidence of their value for teaching, research staff, and library organization. There are some strategies that help support academic libraries in times of reduced budgets. In 2011, Sara S. Lowman and Mary D. Bixby stress that with “higher education and libraries struggles with budgetary issues as a result of the 2008-2009 recessions, outreach to the community and library friends groups becomes even more important ... (209).”

The increasing emphasis on establishing an Academic Library Advisory Committee is show in one Carnegie study whose findings show that 80% of the libraries surveyed have faculty advisory committees. The survey was sent to heads of public services or reference services working in 100 libraries in both public and private Universities. There was a 55% return rate (Carnegie, 2000). Interestingly, Gail K. Dickenson surveyed 358 school librarians in 2012 and found that 11% (43) had Library Advisory Committees. “The need for library advisory committees has been taught in library school for decades, was required by Library Power Grants, and is a major component of the “Empowering Learners Planning guide and Rubric. Yet, nearly 90 percent of our respondents said no, they do not have a Library Advisory Committee” (Dickenson, 35). She states, “there is little help in the literature or on conference schedules touting how to build strength in a library advisory committee” adding, “clearly there is a need for more research here” (935).

2. Organizational Information Theory and Marketing Theory

Two theories inform this research: Organizational Information Theory and Marketing Theory. “Organisational information theory is a complex theoretical framework which focuses on how an organisation adopts the information which is fundamental for them to sustain. Karl Edward Weick, an American organisational theorist developed this concept. His studies on organisational studies have been noted for the “introduction of concepts such as sense making, loose coupling etc. This broad concept can be applied to reduce equivocality and ambiguousness in communication process within the organisation. For an organisation to sustain it must afford the information needed to achieve the goals. The theory states that communication within the organisation regulates the environment which influences the behaviour of the people and thus the productivity. Thus, the main aim is to lessen ambiguity so as to accept only the essential information excluding the excess. The organisational communication must aim at the people’s understanding of the objectives more clearly to achieve goals. Maintaining a perspective is another method that should be adopted by the organisation to make a clear objective to the people. A narrow perspective can bring in ambiguity which effects the existence of an organisation. But a broader perspective can bring in clearer objective within the people thus reaching the goal easier. To understand the organisational communication it is important to familiarise with some of these concepts such as information environment, information equivocality, and required selection.” (Organisational Communication, Psychology, Behavioral And Social Science).

Marketing Theory is used most frequently in a business or for-profit setting A frequently used quotation by and unknown author states. “He who has a thing to sell and goes and whispers in a well is not so apt to get the dollars as he who climbs a tree and hollers.” (<https://findtheclient.com/advertising-and-marketing-quotes/>). This is true of university libraries as well as for profit businesses. Marketing Theory is useful for non-profits like publicly funded universities. “A non-profit organization (also known as an NPO) is an organization that uses its funding to pursue a specific purpose, such as a charitable cause, rather than pursuing profits for its own benefit as a for-profit business does. Some might not believe that investing in marketing strategies is necessary for non-profits, but it is quite beneficial for an NPO to effectively market itself. Non-profits use marketing tactics to assist with growth, funding and prosperity. Without these things, the overall mission of the NPO is diminished.” (<http://smallbusiness.chron.com/marketing-non-profit-organizations-747.html>). This article fills the gap for both library types. It will review some articles about University Library Advisory Committees that provide suggestions on establishing a university (and other library types) library advisory committee, and identify strategies that academic libraries (and other libraries) and the academic library advisory committee can take to improve communication about the library’s value as well as assist in marketing the library

3. University Library Advisory Committees and Establishing Them

In their article, “Working with Friends Groups: Enhancing Participation Through Cultivation and Planning,” Sara S. Lowman and Mary D. Bixby discuss strategies for library fund raising. They stress that “Rice University, founded in 1912, is consistently ranked one on the best teaching and research universities in the United States by *U.S. News and World Report* (210).” Rice, however, has been “negatively impacted by the recession” with the result that the university has implemented a staff hiring freeze,” and “loss of a five percent across the board budget cut (210)” The authors stress that with “higher education and libraries struggles with budgetary issues as a result of the 2008-2009 recessions, outreach to the community and library friends groups becomes even more important for a variety of reasons (209).” They “describe the activities and programs of Friends of Fondren Library at Rice University that foster participation, build loyalty from the library’s donor community to the campus, and raise much-needed funds (209). They state that “the economy and its impact on the library community is the most urgently discussed topic at library conferences and meetings (210).” Rice’s Fondren Library turned to its library friends group for fundraising help.”It is the primary vehicle for achieving this goal of community engagement.” They also “provide a broad suite of services to the library, including:

- Purchases materials and equipment for the library and provides resources to improve the facility and develop the collection.
- Sponsors a gifts and memorials program that provides the library purchasing power beyond its university allocations.
- Publicizes the library’s resources and services as well as acknowledges the generosity of its donors through the Friends of Fondren Library’s newsletter, the Flyleaf.
- Sponsors programs for the community such as lectures, a book sale, and a special reception honoring Rice authors.
- Organizes special fund raising events benefiting the library endowments and programs (212).”
- “Regular assessment is also part of the annual activities of the Friends of Fondren Library (218).”

3.1 Developing a University Library Advisory Committee

Maggie Farrell in her article, “Developing a Faculty Advisory Group” cautions that “faculty advisory boards are great tools for soliciting information on library collections and services, but they can also focus on operational issues or personal gripes with the faculty attempting to micromanage the library or the library dean.” She stresses “Managing faculty advisory boards is a challenge for academic library deans ... (189). However, with “planning, training, and attention, an advisory group can provide insight into services and be a strong advocate for the libraries to the university and community (189).” Farrell calls for “a clear focus for the purpose of the group, operating policies, and an understanding of how they relate to the library” to avoid negative pitfalls. According to Farrell’s article, “faculty advisory boards are created for a variety of reasons including:

- Providing advice for collections,
- Distribution of collection funds,
- Review and selection of journals for the collection,
- Providing advice and feedback on library services,
- Oversight or review of the library director or dean,
- Selection of the library director or dean,
- Communication between the faculty and the library,
- Oversight on fees collected for a specific library purpose,

Advocacy for the library to the university community, and Legislative advocacy for the library (190). “As a primary user or customer, university faculty are critical stakeholders in the success of the library and its collection. As such, “...they can be strong partners in developing relevant collections and services for the university (Farrell 191).” Farrell stresses that “the underline governing document is essential as this is the authority of the board. This document should contain:

- The goal of the advisory board,
- The objectives of the advisory board,
- Whom the board advises (e.g. the library director or provost),
- The membership of the advisory board,

- How members are elected or selected,
- The terms for members,
- The reappointment or reelection process for members,
- Reports and communication, and
- The officers of the advisory board—selection and responsibilities”

3.2 University Library Advisory Committee Missions and Roles

The criteria are varied and broad so it is important that a Library Advisory Committee’s role is clearly identified. It is critical for the committee’s success to have clear roles and mission statements. Samples of mission statements include:

University of Wisconsin, <http://www.uwstout.edu/lib/about/libadviscom.cfm> Assist the library in addressing the information needs and issues of users.

- Provide a forum which will assist the library in supporting University instruction, research and public service.
- Establish a formal communicating link between University library users and library staff.
- **West Chester University**, West Chester PA, http://www.wcupa.edu/library.fhg/advis_committee/Charge.htm
- “To provide user input concerning library policies, procedures, services and facilities.
- To be an advocacy group to support library needs in serving the campus community”. **University of Central Florida Libraries**, <http://library.ucf.edu/Administration/Committees/LAC/Default.php>
- “The Library Advisory Committee is a reporting committee of the UCF Faculty Senate that provides advice to the Libraries concerning materials and services needed by faculty and students in their teaching and research endeavors.

Duties and Responsibilities include:

To facilitate communication between the library and its academic clientele.

- To act as advocates of the Library in university-wide decision-making groups.
- To act as an Advisory Council to the Library Administration.
- The committee meets three times a year (one brief early session to elect a chair for the year, and two regular meetings, one each semester). Special ad hoc meetings may be called for emergencies if requested by members, the Faculty Senate, or the director of Libraries.
- To comply with the relevant provisions of Article IV.D.3.g and Article VIII.G of the Faculty Constitution.
- To bring any policy change recommendations to the Faculty Senate Steering Committee for consideration.”**University of California at Berkley**, <http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/give/boardadmin.html>
- “Formed in the mid-1990s to provide advice and assistance for the University Librarian, the Library Advisory Board helps to build partnerships between the University Library and the campus, alumni and friends, and the public. The Library Advisory Board is composed of University administrators, faculty, alumni, friends, and a student representative, and offers a diverse perspective to the University Librarian from the broader campus, Library patrons, and contributors.”**Virginia Commonwealth University** College of Humanities and Sciences, <http://www.has.vcu.edu/about/committees/library.html>
- “The Library Advisory Committee attends to and reports to faculty members on library developments that are of interest to the College. The committee files monthly, written reports to the president of the Faculty Council, in addition to an annual report to both the dean and the Faculty Council on its activities.”**Iowa State University**, <http://www.committees.iastate.edu/comm-info.php?id=66>

The Library Advisory Committee serves as the “primary faculty, student, and staff advisory body to the Dean of the Library. Its primary roles in representing campus faculty, students and staff include:

- Advising on funding needs necessary to efficiently provide the type and quality of services needed by the university community within the context of a research university environment.
- Advising on general policies related to the quality/depth of collections, services, instruction program, and infrastructure, as well as on major new initiatives and assessment processes
- Participating in strategic visioning with corresponding benchmarking criteria.
- Considering broad national issues pertinent to scholarly communication and open access, and communicating its perspectives, as appropriate, within and externally to the university.

- Facilitating communication with and obtaining feedback from the university community on library collections, programs, services, infrastructure, and communication mechanisms.”**Boston College**, <http://www.bc.edu/libraries/about/lac.html>

“The role of the Library Advisory committee is to offer advice to the University Librarian on issues of importance in the policies and the development of the Libraries and their contribution to the mission of the university.”

4. Strategies for University Library Advisory Committees to Communicate Value

“Working Together: Evolving Value for Academic Libraries’ was a six-month research project commissioned by SAGE to investigate the value of academic libraries for teaching and research staff. The objective was to provide the academic library community with a better understanding of connections between academic libraries and academic departments, and to identify practical ways to enhance their working relationship. It built on existing research to identify how libraries can better market their services, and how they can improve perceptions with key decision makers. In an increasingly tough economic climate for many libraries around the world, being able to demonstrate impact and value is crucial” (Creaser, 1). The study focuses on the value of academic libraries and how best to demonstrate its value especially for faculty and to students. Libraries are struggling to find appropriate, and systematic, ways to capture evidence of their value for teaching and research staff. The study reports three key issues identified by librarians as being central to working together with faculty. The issues are: value measurement and perception; working together with researchers and teachers; and raising awareness about library products and services” (1). The study identified a number of recommendations including: “For individual librarians: Reach out to users by improving communication, building personal relationships, using appropriate language, and following through to build on outcomes.

For library managers: Collect evidence of the value of library services –qualitative as well as quantitative—and use it systematically with the full range of stakeholders in the service. Document the processes and effective strategies for building partnerships with teaching and research staff, so that these can be replicated easily. For institutions: Recognize the library contribution by engaging with the library at all levels, not just liaison librarians with teaching and research staff, but also at senior management level. Uphold the status of librarians and information professionals on an equivalent level with teaching and research staff“ (Creaser, 1). One of the study’s participants, Purdue University library, focuses effort to “frame [the service] from a faculty perspective rather than from a librarian perspective” (Creaser, 10). “Raising visibility of the library and library services” is a challenge in today’s environment. “The disintermediation of information brought about by digital technologies has led to the modern academic library struggling with visibility. The changing role of librarians and their success in providing seamless remote access to digital information has engendered a growing disconnection between librarians and teaching and research staff. Raising awareness of what the library can do to support teaching and research staff, as well as students, and if its contribution to the wider institution, is a key component of demonstrating value” (Creaser, 10).

“Communication channels used by librarians to reach out to teaching and research staff vary, with different means of communication being thought appropriate for different messages. Librarians rely heavily on traditional channels, such as library newsletters, the website and emails to departmental library representatives to communicate with teaching and research staff about general library announcements, information about new resources and new initiatives undertaken by the library. The study’s participants reported that “time constraints,” particularly for teaching and research staff were the “major barrier to more effective communication” (Creaser, 11). One study participant reported, “Time. It is difficult to secure faculty time to talk about library resources and services” (Creaser, 11).

4.1 University Library Advisory Committee Website

One important strategy for the University Library Advisory Committee to use communicate the library’s value is to post information about the Academic Library Advisory Committee on the library’s webpage. The schedule of meetings, agendas of meetings as well as minutes from previous meetings can be shared with the broader university community. Interested faculty, library staff, or students can attend upcoming meetings, if they wish. The website can also collect suggestions for inclusion at future meetings from these constituents. Additionally, since members from the faculty will make up the members of the Academic Library Advisory Committee, it is vital that the members of the committee communicate with their departments. This communication creates an important link with all faculty and library services and needs, and vice versa.

4.2 University Award for Outstanding Service to the Library

Libraries typically have internal recognition awards for library staff but rarely does the broader university community give specific recognition of librarians or library staff. The Academic Library Advisory Committee can propose a university wide mechanism to recognize contributions from librarians and library staff. This recognition can take the form of an award for outstanding contributions to the library that benefits the university. It is important that the award be from the university administration so everyone knows it is not an internal library one. The award should be professional, permanent, inclusive, and come from the university community. Faculty, staff, and/or administrators in any department including the library should be able to nominate a librarian or staff for the award. And, since it is important that the entire university community participate in the award process, members of a selections committee for the award recipient must be faculty and staff from across the university including campuses at a distance. The University Library Advisory Committee can write the proposal including the timeline, the criteria for nominations, and the selection criteria as well as the criteria for membership on the selection committee. The Provost/Vice President of Academic Affairs' office is the ideal place for the award to be seated. This office can call for nominations, appoint the members of the selection committee, and host a reception for the recipient or recipients of the award. The reasons why the recipient was selected can be sent to local news outlet as a press release, posted on the library's website, and shared on the university's website. What a great way this is to include the whole campus community and share what librarians do that is valuable to everyone in the university.

5 Conclusions

There are many strategies the library can use to communicate value to the university community. Developing a University Advisory Committee is an important strategy. Additionally, it is important for faculty and librarians to continue exploring ways to develop and improve its University Advisory Committee and its mission and role. Many more articles and research need to be completed in the future to assess and improve communication of value and marketing the library through a University Library Community.

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