

Editorial: Reflections on student learning, student success, and the student experience

In today's rapidly changing higher education environment, supporting students is an increasingly tall order. For academic libraries, this question challenges us in myriad ways, not the least of which is to demonstrate our value proposition to our campus academic and student affairs colleagues, who may be unfamiliar with the many ways our libraries contribute to student learning, student success and the student experience.

As we think about our contributions to student learning, student success and the student experience, there are four areas that merit our attention – definitions, accountability, strategic priorities and contributions themselves.

In terms of definitions, we suggest first identifying your own institution's definition of student success, and then considering whether your library's definition aligns with that of your institution. At the next level, you can self-reflect on whether your own internal definition of "student success" aligns with those. Finally, you can engage with your library colleagues and explore how your definitions compare to each other, to your library's, and to your institution's. What do the similarities and differences between the definitions reflect about differing perspectives on student success and the student experience?

Accountability is increasingly significant to both our regional accrediting organizations and across the academy and in our academic libraries. Consider who in your library is accountable for, or involved with, student success programs and services. You may have dedicated a position to student success (Student Success Librarian, Director of Library Student Success Initiatives, etc.), or these programs and services may be just part of a librarian's job portfolio. Consider also what programs or services your library offers. For example, the following have been shown to positively impact student success and the student experience: onboarding, engagement and first-year experience; degree planning and progress; next-generation advising; career development; financial wellness; and/or services or programs targeted to special populations. How does your library hold itself accountable and measure the effectiveness of these student success positions and program[1][2]?

Shifting gears, consider your library's strategic plan and how prominently it features student success. Student success may be a strategic directive, a separate goal, or it may be absent entirely from your strategic priorities. Reflecting how your institution and library drive student success, is it adequately reflected in your strategic plan[3]?

Last, but hardly least, what specific contributions does your library offer to student learning and student success on campus? A report issued by the Association of College and Research Libraries, "Academic Library Impact on Student Learning and Success: Findings from Assessment in Action Team Projects[4]," tells a strong story about the positive connections between the library and aspects of student learning and success in five areas:

- (1) *Students benefit from library instruction in their initial coursework.* Information literacy instruction provided to students during their initial coursework helps them perform better in their courses than students who do not.
- (2) *Library use increases student success.* Students who used the library in some way (e.g., circulation, library instruction session attendance, online database access,



- study room use, interlibrary loan) achieved higher levels of academic success (e.g. GPA, course grades, retention) than students who did not use the library.
- (3) *Collaborative academic programs and services involving the library enhance student learning.* Academic library partnerships with other campus units, such as the writing center, academic enrichment, and speech lab, yield positive benefits for students (e.g. higher grades, academic confidence, retention).
 - (4) *Information literacy instruction strengthens general education outcomes.* Library instruction improves students' achievement of institutional core competencies and general education outcomes such as inquiry-based and problem-solving learning, including effective identification and use of information, critical thinking, ethical reasoning and civic engagement.
 - (5) *Library research consultations boost student learning.* One-on-one or small-group reference and research assistance with a librarian enhances academic success, as documented by such factors as student confidence, GPAs and improved achievement on course assignments.

It has been shown that information literacy instruction strengthens general education outcomes. Consider if (or how) your library measures student success stemming from such instruction. Similarly, it has also been shown that library research consultations boost student learning. If library research consultations part of your library's reference/research services portfolio, then make sure that the positive connection has been noted, evaluated and demonstrated in your institution. The same for student use of your library spaces, collaborative programs between the library and other departments on campus, and other library services that promote academic rapport and student engagement. How can you tie these services not only to students' long-term academic experiences, but also to improved student retention?

In the next issue of *RSR*, we plan to take a deeper dive into these various topics through point/counterpoint and Q/A formats with several librarians who are dedicated to student success at their institutions. Our colleagues will speak to the issues outlined in this editorial, discussing how today's academic libraries impact and improve student learning, student success and the overall student experience.

Sarah Barbara Watstein

Lemieux Library, Seattle University, Seattle, Washington, USA, and

Tammy Ivins

*Randall Library, University of North Carolina at Wilmington, Wilmington,
North Carolina, USA*

Notes

1. Available at: <https://library.educause.edu/topics/information-technology-management-and-leadership/student-success>
2. Available at: <https://library.educause.edu/resources/2018/4/institutions-use-of-data-and-analytics-for-student-success>
3. Available at: <https://new.library.arizona.edu/giving/priorities/space>
4. Available at: www.ala.org/news/member-news/2017/05/new-acrl-report-highlights-library-contributions-student-learning-and-success