Communicating library impact on retention: A framework for developing reciprocal value propositions

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**Abstract:** This article explores the trends identified in a survey of library directors on efforts to document and communicate library contributions to student retention. Library deans/directors have little in the way of communication methods for sharing library impact on retention. Methods that are used tend to be unidirectional in nature. Based on these results, this article also presents a framework of stakeholder markets and examples of reciprocal value propositions library leaders could develop around library contributions to retention efforts. This in turn can assist with advocacy and the communication of academic library value to university leaders and other higher education stakeholders.

**Keywords:** library value, retention, communication, value proposition, advocacy, assessment

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The role of the academic library in student retention is one part of a research agenda set forth by the Association for Colleges & Research Libraries in the 2010 report by Oakleaf (2010). The “Value of Academic Libraries” initiative and research agenda has at its heart a distinctly political undertaking: to improve the value proposition that academic libraries represent to stakeholders.

The concept of a value proposition is variously defined and lacks a clear definition even within the field of communication studies (Skalen, Gummerus, von Koskull, & Magnusson, 2015). Golub et al. (2000) provided a commonly used definition, describing a value proposition as “a clear, simple statement of the benefits, both tangible and intangible, that the company will provide, along with the approximate price it will charge each customer.” Ballantyne, Frow, Varey, and Payne (2011) examined the concept of value propositions through a service-dominant logic, rather than the more traditional – and industrial – goods-dominant logic. They defined a value proposition as “the marketing offer or value promise formulated and communicated by a seller, with the intent that it be accepted by a buyer” (p. 203). These traditional perspectives of a value proposition are grounded in an industrial, goods-dominant logic of value, with the communication of value being a unidirectional process that merely utilizes the customer as the receiver of communication. This logic emphasizes that the value is delivered, rather than co-created with the customer. Changing marketing practices, brought about in large part by the expectation for interactivity as a result of technology advances, created an environment in which customer and enterprise co-create value propositions in order to fulfill a service need. In this configuration, the “value expected is not merely delivered,
but is a consequence of mutual adjustment” (Ballantyne et al., 2011, p. 204). The development of this type of reciprocal value proposition makes “explicit the benefits expected to be gained and given up” by all involved parties, may be informal or formal, allows for coordinated meaning-making, and serve as the basis of trust for longer-term relationships (Ballantyne et al., 2011, p. 204-205).

Expressing library impact on student retention is a value proposition, and one that the authors argue should be approached through a reciprocal value proposition perspective rather than through a unidirectional method of communication. Defining the stakeholders who derive value from understanding library impact on student retention allows for the development of reciprocal value propositions. This helps to place the academic library in a position of advocacy for itself and the services it provides to a university community, the community of academic libraries, and to American higher education.

This article includes a brief literature review of the growing field of studies into academic libraries and student retention, as well as findings of a study on academic library deans/directors’ methods of documenting and communicating library impact on retention. This article uses the six-markets model outlined by Ballantyne et al. (2011) and Payne, Ballantyne, and Christopher (2005), originally used in industry to describe potential markets, to draw attention to the variety of stakeholders with an interest in student retention, and how academic library leaders may approach communication with these stakeholders in order to progress towards reciprocity.

**Literature Review**
Following the publication of Oakleaf’s *Value of Academic Libraries: A Comprehensive Research Review and Report* in 2010, there has been an increase in studies on the potential impact of academic libraries on student retention. These studies tend to fall into two broad categories, focusing either on correlations between individual use of library resources or services and retention or on correlations between broad institutional figures such as library funding/expenditures and student retention. In the former category, studies such as those conducted by Soria, Fransen, and Nackerud (2013; 2014); Murray, Ireland, and Hackathorn (2016); Haddow (2013); and Haddow and Joseph (2010) found consistent correlations between use of specific library services and retention by tracking library use of individuals and analyzing these use patterns with individual retention data. The second category, including such studies as Mezick (2007); Emmons and Wilkinson (2011); and Crawford (2015) used institutional data reported through the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), ACRL, and other national reporting agencies to examine library impact of on retention across institutions.

While these and similar studies examine potential impact or correlations with retention, there is a gap in the literature on using these types of findings for the purpose of library advocacy. Oakleaf (2010) recommended mobilizing library administrators not only to support assessment work within libraries, but to connect library value to institutional missions and communicate the results of such studies to library stakeholders. Allen (2014) conducted a literature review of studies on academic library impact on retention in order to extrapolate a conceptual map for partnerships on retention efforts. Allen argued that “the future of library retention efforts lay not so much in the isolated efforts of librarians, but in librarians working with other departments to retain students
through graduation” (2014, p. 16). The conceptual map of institutional stakeholders included those in information technology, student affairs, the diversity office, the registrar, curriculum committees, offices of institutional effectiveness or research, academic departments, and instructional designers. This conceptual map was developed based on partners with whom the library could work to improve retention. While not mutually exclusive, the conceptual map does not articulate partners for communicating the impact of library contributions to retention initiatives in order to further library advocacy.

Mezick (2015), in a study on the relationship between library assessment practices or policies and student retention, concluded “when presenting impact results to outside stakeholders, such as academic administrators or accreditation teams, care should be taken to avoid library jargon. Language used in institutional or higher education documents should be employed. Data and analysis should be organized and presented in ways that are meaningful for targeted audiences” (Mezick, 2015, p. 35). This article begins to bridge the gap in library literature related to communicating library impact on student retention. It presents the findings of a study on library deans’ communication methods and outlines a framework of stakeholders who affect the academic library’s value proposition and advocacy in the realm of student success.

**Survey of Library Deans’ Communication Methods**

A study conducted in 2014 (Murray, 2015) explored the perspectives of academic library deans with regard to library involvement with high-impact educational practices influencing student retention. In addition to the findings reported in the 2015 paper, the study also sought to answer two additional questions:
1. How do academic library deans/directors document the impact of library services and resources on student retention?

2. How do academic library deans/directors communicate the impact of library services and resources on student retention?

Methodology

The population under study was academic library deans/directors at the 271 public comprehensive universities in the United States with a Carnegie classification of master’s level as of January 2013.

Data was obtained through a survey which solicited qualitative information on current methods of documenting and communicating academic library impact on student retention. The survey was distributed by email to 271 academic library deans/directors. Ultimately, a response rate of 25% (N = 68) was achieved. Qualitative data from the survey were coded in NVIVO using an iterative analysis technique to identify prevalent trends.

Results

Emergent themes for methods of documenting and communicating academic library impact on student retention are described below.

Documenting Library Impact on Retention. Several key themes were identified in the data related to the documentation of library impact on retention. A highly prevalent theme was the development or use of information-literacy assessment mechanisms as a method of documenting library impact on retention. Responses in this theme ranged from collecting data on information literacy student learning outcomes in first-year seminars to student feedback or evaluation data collected at the end of more
traditional instruction sessions. Information literacy data tended to be collected from instruction sessions, orientations, or credit-bearing information-literacy courses. Responses from those at several institutions acknowledged that assessing student learning outcomes in the area of information literacy is not a direct measure for documenting impact on student retention. However, responses from those at two institutions noted a mechanism that served as a direct measure of the impact on retention. Library employees at these institutions measured the impact of attendance in mandatory freshman library-orientation sessions on retention and found absenteeism to be highly predictive of dropout. Personnel at one of these institutions have adopted a proactive approach using these findings and have started reporting the names and identification numbers of those who did not attend to the institution’s center for advising.

Another theme identified in the data on how those in libraries document impact on retention was the use of surveys and other user/student satisfaction or feedback instruments. Comments within this theme revealed two basic purposes for deploying surveys or other instruments, such as focus groups, to collect user feedback. Overwhelmingly, surveys and other user feedback instruments were used to collect user satisfaction data on different library services or resources. A secondary purpose was for the collection of self-reported data on library impact on students’ academic success and learning outcomes. Occasionally it was indicated that this self-reported data was to be used as part of a larger assessment project regarding the library’s impact on student success measures, including retention. In other instances, this self-reported data comprised the entirety of data collection for such an assessment project. Comments on
the theme of surveys and other feedback instruments were usually accompanied by statements about the use of anecdotal evidence to document library impact on retention.

A less prevalent theme was the development of an assessment process specifically seeking to examine library effects on student retention and other measures of student success. Consistently, these developing processes included the accumulation of longitudinal data, particularly of various types of library-use data such as circulation statistics, attendance in library instruction sessions or courses, and analytics on the use of online and electronic resources. These methodologies are similar to those used by Soria et al. (2014), Murray et al. (2016), Haddow (2010), and others. Often, these comments were accompanied by language indicating those at the responding institutions were still seeking best methods for calculating impact or correlation, as the volume of data was overwhelming or was not yet organized in a way to facilitate examination in relation to retention.

A final, strongly prevalent theme identified in this data was the lack of any known methods to document library impact on retention. Several respondents commented that, while they desire to initiate a process, they do not know how to start.

**Communicating Library Impact on Retention.** As with the data regarding current methods used to document impact on retention, data regarding current methods used to communicate library impact on retention were examined for the identification of themes. One of the highly prevalent themes was simply “none.” Some respondents elaborated, indicating that they had no communication methods in place, because they had no assessment mechanisms built and therefore no data or findings to convey. Other responses in this theme indicated that while the library collects data on usage and
satisfaction, there are no methods in place for connecting the data with student success measures such as retention.

Another prevailing theme was the use of formal presentations with university leadership to communicate library influence on retention. Comments in this theme indicated that these presentations take place annually or bi-annually and are conducted most often with the president or provost. Often these formal presentations on library impact were included as part of an annual budget presentation. A few responses from those at libraries currently developing methods of direct measurement or correlation indicated they will be presenting their findings independently from budget meetings in forums with university leadership and boards.

According to respondents, formal presentations to university leadership often use a formal annual report document as a vehicle for conveying various types of information. This represents a third theme identified in the data on communicating impact. Within this theme, respondents indicated that the annual reports often contain statistical reports, user satisfaction data, and data gathered through the institutional effectiveness process regarding meeting library goals and objectives. These reports also tend to contain value statements and anecdotal evidence of library impact. At a few libraries with retention assessment mechanisms already in place, a portion of the annual report is dedicated to findings in this area.

Though not as prevalent as the annual reports theme, respondents consistently noted the use of annual assessment reports as a method of communicating library impact on retention and other student success measures. Because of the prevalence of information literacy student learning outcomes as a theme for documenting library
effectiveness above, responses in the theme of assessment reports tended to highlight data gathered through information literacy assessment. Taken in conjunction with the prevalent theme of formal presentations to university leadership, several respondents noted the connection between assessment reports containing library impact data with budget planning and the formulation and evaluation of the university’s strategic plan.

A final and less-prevalent theme under the communication of impact was informal communication. Respondents who noted the use of informal communication mechanisms described periodic verbal conversations among groups such as the dean’s council and faculty senate and the sharing of annual reports and assessment reports on the library website or through social media.

These prevalent themes for both documenting and communicating library impact on student retention indicate an overall lack of strategies available or employed by library administrators to communicate with university administrators. The communication strategies that do exist tend to be unidirectional in nature, reflecting a communication-as-transfer process that does not allow for the co-creation of value propositions or for developing the reciprocal partnerships inherent in researching library impact on student success. As a proposed strategy borrowed from business literature, the following section outlines a framework of stakeholders with whom library leaders should develop multidirectional communication strategies in order to enhance library value.

**A Framework for Reciprocal Value Proposition Development**

Inherent in the purpose of the *Value of Academic Libraries* (Oakleaf, 2010) initiative and its associated research agenda is the concept of library advocacy. Library advocacy that combines the results of studies with library contributions to retention
provide an opportunity to improve the value proposition of the academic library to a wide variety of stakeholders with a goal of protecting or increasing library resources such as funding, positions, equipment, or facilities.

Reciprocal value propositions take the form, either formally or informally, of “if we...will you.” Ballantyne et al. (2011) explained that this deceptively simple structure is important because it creates an environment where reciprocity is made explicit. “What is important is the intent to offer something of value to another party and the subsequent creative conversations, dialogue and adaptations that follow from this initial expression” (Ballantyne et al., 2011, p. 206). Ballantyne et al. also argued that reciprocal value propositions can be initiated by any partner and evolve over time, empowering grassroots activities by teams or units that may not be at the top of an organization’s hierarchy.

This type of reciprocal approach acknowledges that the implementation and outcomes of a strategic plan changes as a “consequence of complex interactions which cannot be known in advance” (Ballantyne et al., 2011, p. 207). Participants of this dialectic process acknowledged that undertaking a reciprocal value proposition forced them to “confront hidden constraints and interdependencies” and “experienced a shift in ideas about how value was co-created, evaluated, and possibly extended over time” (p. 206). This allowed for altering traditional mindsets – an important activity for libraries struggling to be viewed as a service provider with value beyond their collections.

Reciprocal value propositions also acknowledge multiple stakeholders, with different perspectives of value and varying levels of reciprocity. Ballantyne et al. (2011) and Payne et al. (2005) described a six-markets model, used as the framework for this paper. The six markets are customer markets, internal markets, supplier and alliance
markets, referral markets, recruitment markets, and influence markets. Payne et al. (2005) stated that “the six markets model provides a structure for managers in organisations to undertake a diagnostic review of the key market domains and stakeholders that may be important to them” (p. 859). This framework can help academic library leaders identify key stakeholders with regard to library contributions to student retention (or any of the value initiative research agenda areas) in order to initiate or tailor reciprocal value-proposition development. Below is a brief description of each stakeholder market, along with explorations of these markets in a higher education environment and examples of reciprocal value propositions that could be developed for each. It is important to note that the degree of transitioning unidirectional value propositions to reciprocal value propositions may become more difficult – and yet more influential – further up the institution’s organizational hierarchy.

**Customer Markets**

Payne et al. (2005) defined customer markets as the final consumers of the organization’s product. With respect to student retention, students serve as the customer market. Different populations of students, such as transfer students, full-time first-year freshmen, graduate students, and first-generation students represent various customer submarkets. Each of these student populations experience different pressures and needs that may influence a decision to withdraw from a higher education course of study. Indeed, withdrawal can be conceptualized quite differently for each population, with adult students being more likely to stop-out temporarily due to external circumstances, even though the stop-out time may count as a formal withdrawal under institutional definitions (McGivney, 2004).
Communicating Library Impact

Studies into student retention are dominated by two major models, each proposing constructs which may be used to develop reciprocal value propositions for different student populations. The primary model of retention, developed by Tinto (1975), proposed that a student’s decision to stay enrolled or depart is an iterative, cost/benefit decision-making process based on the degree to which a student feels integrated academically and socially at a particular institution of higher education. This model tends to apply most closely to traditional student populations in residency at or near the institution in which they are enrolled. The competing model of retention is Bean and Metzner’s (1985), who rejected Tinto’s sociological model and looked to behaviorism to explain retention. This model was initially more applicable to non-traditional students due to its inclusion of the influence of environmental factors on students’ decision to withdraw. These factors include finances, hours of employment, outside encouragement, family responsibilities, and opportunities to transfer. However, as more traditional students become employed in order to pay for the rising costs of college, these environmental factors have an increasing impact on the persistence of all students, rather than primarily that of non-traditional students (Arum & Roska, 2011).

The co-creation of value with students as a customer market should take into account the constructs from both of these paradigmatic models on student retention. Academic librarians and library leaders can engage in the development of reciprocal value propositions with students through communication that targets their academic integration (such as various types of assistance with writing-, research-, or technology-intensive courses or assignments), social integration (providing spaces that facilitate not just studying together or collaborating on an assignment, but also providing an
atmosphere that makes students of different populations feel comfortable and able to interact across cultural divides), and environmental factors (such as operating hours that accommodate students’ work schedules, providing access to and advocating for open educational resources that may help lower costs of college). Depending on the size of the student body, this co-creation of value will most likely not happen at the individual level; however, libraries can publicize and follow up on open lines of communication and feedback stemming from outreach around such issues.

**Internal Markets**

Internal markets are defined as the employees of the organization (Payne et al., 2005). Regardless of whether library employees interact directly with students, their work helps enable the university to engage students academically, foster an environment that nurtures social integration, and mindfully provide services that accommodate the environmental factors impacting students. Co-creation of value with library employees around student retention presents itself through professional development and training opportunities. Helping library employees have a greater comprehension of the importance of retention within the context of higher education – and at their particular institution – allows for greater engagement with them in the refinement of existing and the development of new resources and service models. Sharing the outcomes of studies into library impact on retention can also help library employees understand how their day-to-day activities may directly or indirectly contribute to persistence decisions for the many individuals in the student body. An example of a reciprocal value proposition with library employees could be, “if we provide professional development on retention efforts,
and share findings of retention studies, will you think creatively about ways in which your work can contribute to retention efforts?”

**Referral Markets**

Referral markets consist of two types of stakeholders: customers and noncustomers (Payne et al., 2005). Customer referral sources are people or units who are themselves customers of the library who might refer others to the library’s resources or services.

Perhaps the most critical customer referral market is the university’s faculty. Librarian liaisons who interact directly with faculty can leverage their knowledge of faculty needs to further faculty understanding of library value in the area of student retention. This also provides a venue for the development of “if we...will you?” propositions; for example: “If the library offers a sequence of information literacy interventions in and out of class to help you meet your class’s learning outcomes, will you include the contact information for the librarian liaison in your syllabus, refer your students to their liaison, and accept help from the librarian in updating the assignments for the course to reflect current library holdings?” If successful, the development of these types of arrangements results in a viral expansion of library users as faculty and students refer others to library resources or services.

Faculty could also potentially be considered a primary non-customer referral market, along with parents and other student support networks. Many libraries provide services or resources that are specifically targeted toward the needs of students. Awareness of such services or resources among these groups could help drive students to engage with services. Similar “if we...will you?” proposition opportunities include, “If
the library offers extended hours and subject-specific research assistance for students, will you refer these services to students as they encounter information needs that are new to them?” Similar to creating value propositions with students, it is unlikely that faculty, parents, and other student-support networks will be reached on a one-by-one basis, but institutions often have opportunities for communicating with these groups via newsletters or through new student or new faculty orientations. These forms of unidirectional communication provide a venue for soliciting or closing the loop on feedback, facilitating the formation of relationships that lend themselves to more multi-directional, reciprocal communication.

Supplier/Alliance Markets

This stakeholder group actually consists of two subgroups that provide different resources to the library. According to Payne et al. (2005) suppliers provide resources to the organization, while alliance partners supply “competencies and capabilities that are typically knowledge-based rather than product-based” (p. 861). For an academic library seeking to create and leverage a reciprocal value proposition to enhance or preserve the library budget, or to secure funding for renovations or new construction, the supplier market is critical. In this context, the supplier market consists of just a few individuals: the provost/chief academic officer (or the library dean/director’s supervisor), the university president, and potentially the institution’s board members. The supplier market also acknowledges the more corporate roots of this framework and includes library vendors as suppliers of some of the resources that libraries provide to students and faculty.
As the survey findings discussed in this article show, communication of library impact tends to be mostly unidirectional, and housed within an annual report or budget presentation, rather than reciprocal. Working with a provost and president prior to a formal budget request opens up opportunities to craft “if we...will you?” propositions that are not only in the interest of the students, the library, and the university but are also arrangements that each administrator would feel comfortable presenting to the institution’s board. An example of such a proposition could be, “If we proactively provide predictive retention data based on student use of library resources to the appropriate retention specialists, will you provide the funding necessary to improve the library services or resources with the most impact on predicting or improving retention?”

Library resource vendors provide the products with which libraries serve their users. Their infrastructures, built to deliver this product, may also provide an understanding of library users’ behavior that is inaccessible through other means. For instance, knowing that a user logged in through the proxy server may show the time of day, week, or semester that the user is attempting to fulfill a research need. Proxy server data is directly accessible to the library. The end product’s technological infrastructure may enhance that data by offering analysis of the number of queries tied to individual users, alongside the time spent between queries. Reciprocal value propositions with vendors could take the form, “If we make long-term commitments to your products, and pledge to expand our agreement to additional products when possible, will you provide enhanced analytics of our users’ behavior within your platforms and products, attending to the responsibility of individual user privacy?”
Partners allied with the library could include university employees with knowledge and skills that are not necessarily housed within the library. Such allied partners may include methodologists, institutional researchers, members of institutional effectiveness offices, and retention specialists. Reciprocal value propositions with such alliance markets would depend heavily on the type of relationship established and the needs of the library and the particular ally. For example, a reciprocal value proposition for a methodologist could be, “If we include you in publications or presentations resulting from this study, and pay you a stipend for your work, will you review our retention-study methodologies and conduct appropriate statistical analyses?” A reciprocal value proposition for retention specialists could be, “If we provide you predictive data of students at risk of dropping out, will you include information about library resources and services in your outreach to those at-risk students?”

**Influence Markets**

The influence market is the broadest stakeholder group. According to Payne et al. (2005), this stakeholder group includes financial and investor groups, unions, industry bodies, regulatory bodies, political and governmental agencies, and competitors. Ballantyne et al. (2011) further defined the influence market as the “institutional stakeholder context in which the focal firm operates” (p. 206). This stakeholder group is able to provide influence on the direction of a single institution or the whole of higher education.

Within an institution of higher education, a library’s influence markets could include such groups or individuals as the student government, other deans, the vice president/dean of students, and the vice president/chief financial officer. These groups or
individuals have the ability to influence the supplier-market individuals (provost, president, board members). They also represent competitors for institutional funding, making the co-creation of a value proposition with them a challenging opportunity to jointly seek funding. An example of a reciprocal value proposition for this institutional influence market could be, “If we develop a resource or service that benefits your area with regard to student retention, will you advocate for related funding requests to the provost or president?”

External to the institution, but still operating on a local level, are influence markets consisting of library consortia, higher education oversight or coordinating agencies, state libraries, and other state government agencies. An example of such a state-level value proposition could be, “If we [library consortium] collectively study our contributions to retention in the state in light of the impact of withdrawals on student debt, will you include capital level funding for relevant library resources and services in the state budget?”

Finally, the influence market includes national and international associations with impact on the discourse of student success across the field of higher education. Such associations include the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU), the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), the Association for the Assessment of Learning in Higher Education (AALHE), the Association of Governing Boards (ABG), the Association for Orientation, Transition, and Retention in Higher Education, the Consortium for Student Retention Data Exchange (CSRDE), and other student affairs or retention related groups. These groups represent an opportunity for library value propositions to connect with national higher education initiatives, raising
awareness of provosts, presidents, and other higher education leaders collectively rather than individually. Reciprocal value propositions for such associations could be developed by library associations, taking the form of, “If we prioritize and organize research into library contributions to student success, will you collaborate with us on methods of raising awareness of these contributions among your members?”

**Recruitment Markets**

Recruitment markets represent all potential employees (Ballantyne et al., 2011). For academic libraries, the recruitment market consists of both experienced library employees on the job market as well as recent graduates of library schools. As with the customer market of students, the development of reciprocal value propositions with the recruitment market cannot be done at the individual level, unless that effort is limited to candidates for vacant positions. However, as with referral markets, unidirectional communication to large groups may facilitate multi-directional communication through influence and relationship building. In the case of recruitment markets, library leaders who communicate the importance of efforts directed specifically at retention (and the other value initiative research agenda areas) to students who are pursuing education for employment in libraries, particularly through schools for the graduate study of library and information science, will be emphasizing the importance of the value initiatives to practice. Reciprocal value propositions could be offered during formal internship, mentoring, and assistantship opportunities, and could take the form, “If we agree to strongly consider your applications for employment within the profession, will you prioritize this agenda and consider taking advanced courses in research methods and educational theory of higher education?”
These six stakeholder markets represent the wide array of audiences academic libraries should consider when seeking to communicate the impact of their services and resources on student retention.

**Conclusion**

Matthews (2012) argued that library data collection and assessment needed to evolve past user-satisfaction metrics, instead utilizing large data sets of individual library use records to examine the library’s impact on areas of institutional importance, such as retention. Following the publication of Oakleaf’s (2010) report and the cascade of studies conducted in response to the report and through the ACRL Value Committee’s *Assessment in Action* program (searchable at https://apply.ala.org/aia/public), a great deal more is known about the value of libraries in higher education. While many more such studies are needed, it is now time for academic librarians, academic library leaders, and library associations to begin leveraging findings to develop reciprocal value propositions within and across universities, from a local to a national scale.

This article contained findings from a national survey of academic library deans/directors at master’s-level universities, in which respondents were asked to provide information about how they document and communicate library impact on student retention. The responses on survey items probing these issues show that academic libraries, on the whole, have no methods for either the documentation or communication of library impact on retention. Among these responses were many comments by library deans/directors regarding a lack of knowledge on how to go about documenting library impact on retention.
For those libraries that are attempting to document impact on retention, the prevalent themes were on the use of information literacy assessment or survey and self-reported data, most of which was oriented to user satisfaction. This is consistent with Haddow and Joseph’s (2010) assertion that academic libraries tend to rely on user satisfaction and information literacy outcomes as the most common methods of conducting research into library impact on larger institutional priorities. Responses in these themes were at times accompanied by acknowledgements that these methods are indirect and based on an assumption of connection with retention. A small sub-set of responses indicated some libraries are seeking or are piloting research and assessment methods that are more direct, using library use data in connection with student success metrics.

For those libraries communicating statistics or findings, as well as anecdotal information from surveys or focus groups, the annual report publication and formal presentations with university leadership are the most common methods of doing so. These represent a predominantly unidirectional method of communicating library value in the area of retention.

Academic library leaders who develop and implement new methods of measuring library impact on retention should request special meetings with university leadership to share findings in order to develop reciprocal value propositions, while integrating those findings into budget and personnel requests. University leadership, while expecting academic libraries to develop more relevant measures of value, is not united in a recommendation in how this should take place. Folding new methods of assessment into established annual reports, assessment reports, or budget presentations may result in
university leadership overlooking the findings. This is a missed opportunity for university leadership and library leadership to co-create value that benefits the institution as a whole, the library, and the students.

Based on this study’s findings regarding documentation and communication of library impact on retention to the supplier market, one recommendation for further research is to conduct a study with provosts and presidents in order to determine their preferences for communication from library deans/directors, and the impact of studies into library involvement with items of institutional importance on swaying funding decisions. Likewise, future studies into the needs and communication preferences of other stakeholder markets such as those identified in this article will help library leaders work collaboratively to develop meaningful reciprocal value propositions, as well as investigation into whether public and private institutions have differences in said potential markets for value propositions.

University administrators are under pressure from many sources to demonstrate the performance of institutions of higher education, particularly in the area of student success. While provosts have indicated that demonstrating impact on student learning outcomes is important (Lynch et al. 2007), it is necessary for library deans/directors to look into more direct methods of assessing library impact on retention, and to take a more deliberate approach to communicating – and co-creating value from – those findings with university leadership.
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