From Hash Marks to Hash Tags
Turning Statistics into Strategic Value Statements

Libraries everywhere are struggling to communicate value and relevance to their respective communities. We know the services we provide are valuable, but how do we track and quantify our services? A reference, instruction, or other type of patron interaction is more than a tick mark; it is time and expertise.   In September, 2013, a team of Lavery Library Librarians created what has become known as THE FORM (to rule all forms). While struggling to revise the Google Docs form we used to collect Information Literacy Statistics, we came up with an innovative idea. The idea can be easily replicated and may be used to communicate the added value we bring to patrons, and our key role in carrying out the mission, vision, and strategic plan of our organization.

As librarians, we believe instruction does not end in the classroom. We wanted to connect our Information Literacy Program Goals and core values to all patron interactions. Ultimately, all statistics we collect should relate to our mission, vision, values, and strategic plan. With the development of THE FORM, now all patron interactions at all contact points are collected in one form along with all interactions with all groups. The most innovative feature of THE FORM is the alignment of data with the appropriate Information Literacy Standard, Library Strategic Plan Goal, College Wide Learning Goal, or College Strategic Plan Goal.

This new tool also allows us to collect data that previously slipped through the cracks: conference presentations; presentations at department meetings and orientations; questions answered in our offices, the cafeteria, or the parking lot. The tremendous amount of support provided by paraprofessional staff at the Checkout Desk is now tracked and included in reports. We document long-term projects and track progress toward achieving our Strategic Plan Goals. Since we record more information, such as a patron's course number, we can connect online instruction, classroom instruction, and reference instruction to provide a complete 360-degree view of how we serve our patrons. For example, we can chart the amount of time the library has spent working with the School of Education and if it was in the classroom, at the reference desk, or via email. We can use data from a specific course to encourage faculty to bring their class in for library instruction, e.g. "10 of your students came to the reference desk with questions about which database to use. Would you like a librarian to come to your class to get everyone up to speed?"

Impact

As a result, THE FORM has become a tremendous tool for communicating value to our stakeholders and patrons. For example, we know how many classes we have taught for the School of Education, which Information Literacy Goals were addressed, which classes have formal assessment data we can share, and which College Wide Learning Goals were addressed. We can quantitatively describe the expanding role of our librarians into online education and embedded librarianship. For our faculty newsletter, we can report how many hours librarians have spent assisting faculty members.

We can report our problems as well. We wanted to know how often we were unable to use our library classroom and why. Is it double booked, too small, or at the request of a faculty member? As we prepare documentation for a proposal for more classroom space in the library, we will be able to document how many students we were unable to accommodate within our current facility -- and why. The Library is able to provide quantitative evidence for data-driven decision making instead of anecdotal complaints about a lack of classroom space.

We used this data from THE FORM recently to request more hours for Tech Help in our Lavery Library Learning Commons. Since each entry on THE FORM is time-stamped, we knew how many technology questions were answered during the hours not covered by Tech Help student employees. As a result, our Office of Information Technology adjusted the student worker schedule to cover the more popular hours and make more efficient use of their student worker budget.

In a recent report to the Provost, we were able to communicate library support of retention. There are documented practices which have a high impact on student retention. One practice is individualized instruction. Our report included this statement:

> **Individual assistance and personal attention** - Librarians spent over 197 hours this semester in one-on-one consultations directly supporting College Wide Learning Goal 3: Communication.

Aligning statistics to campus wide initiatives using the same vocabulary helps the stakeholder to understand what the library does, and how the library relates to the greater goals of the college.
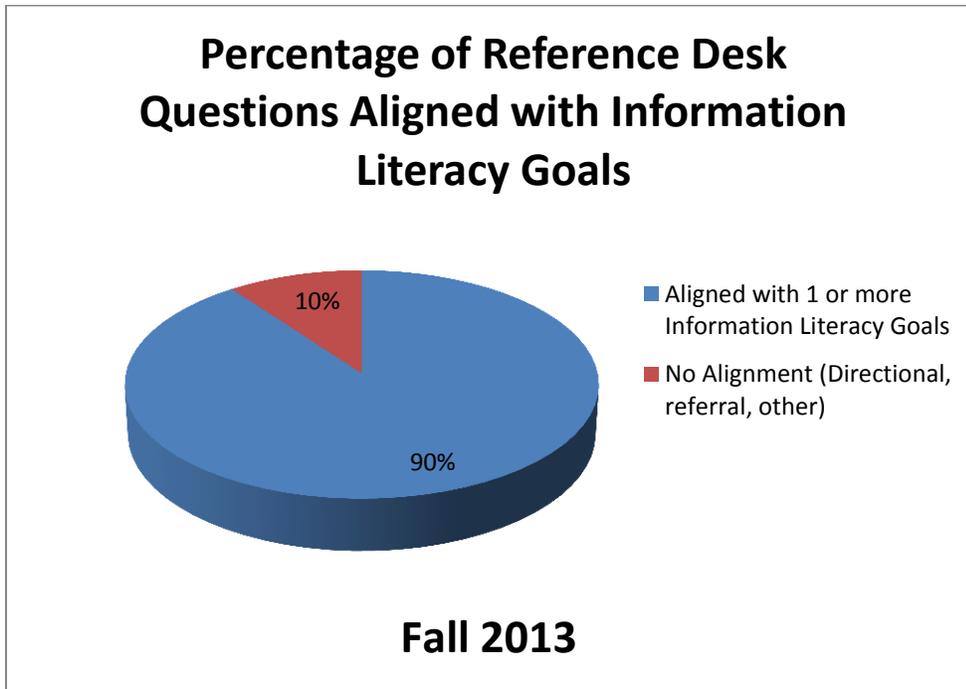
Creating the form is a great exercise in determining what information is important to collect. We asked ourselves; will it communicate value, will it support future requests, does it connect to our Strategic Plan and/or Information Literacy Goals? As we developed THE FORM, we had to carefully balance the amount of information we wanted to collect with how much time we wanted to spend entering data. THE FORM uses skip logic to keep questions to a minimum. We used check boxes and drop-down menus as often as possible to facilitate speedy data entry. Any type of library can make use of this approach, and, by using Google Docs, it is free.

After using THE FORM for one semester, we realized it could be better. Better front end design would lead to easier data collection and reporting. Rather than change the form mid-year, we took our time and analyzed our use of THE FORM over the spring semester. We determined some questions were unnecessary, and modified skip logic in several areas. In addition, we redesigned the front end to make data collection and analysis less cumbersome.

We all need to communicate value. THE FORM helps to make it easier to turn our daily tasks into value statements to share with our constituents.

1. **These are links to copies; feel free to try them out**. Version 1 of THE FORM http://bit.ly/1uiPnXm
   Version 2 of THE FORM http://bit.ly/1nfTdgM

2. Sample pie chart created with data from The Form

Percentage of Reference Desk Questions Aligned with Information Literacy Goals

10%

■ Aligned with 1 or more Information Literacy Goals

■ No Alignment (Directional, referral, other)

90%

Fall 2013

Sample value statements to accompany this chart:
- 90% of questions answered at the reference desk are aligned with Information Literacy learning goals and College Wide Learning Goal 3: Communication.
- This semester, Librarians spent over 130 hours providing one-on-one instruction in direct support of College Wide Learning Goal 3.

3. Brainstorming the creation of The FORM