

Using Statistics to Market Academic Law Libraries

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Introduction

The judicious use of statistics is one of the most effective ways for an academic law library to make its case to law school administration for more resources and to market itself to the law school community. The old saw that “statistics don’t lie” means that a library may use statistics to present concrete evidence of its case. A demonstration that the available seating in the library per student is below the average of peer institutions will make a more compelling argument to the dean for additional seating than a generalized complaint that the library is too crowded.

Law library statistics may also be used very effectively to toot the library’s own horn to the law school community, by showing how valuable library services are and how productive the library staff has been. Such numbers may publicize the fact that the library conducts substantial amounts of research for faculty members, assists students and faculty with countless reference needs and obtains a growing number of interlibrary loans for law school patrons.

Many academic law libraries boast their favorable statistics in annual reports, newsletters and other publications. The Wiener-Rogers Law Library at the University of Nevada at Las Vegas has woven its statistics into its annual report in a creative and readable manner at <http://www.law.unlv.edu/libraryFiles/2003AnnualReport.pdf>. Similarly, the Thomas L. Cooley Law School Library has used its statistics very effectively to announce “10 Things You Should Know About Thomas M. Cooley Law Library” at http://www.cooley.edu/library/public_service/libtopten.htm.

The statistics a law library chooses to keep may depend on the politics of its own institution, whether it is a public or private institution and its particular needs in a given year. The comparative time periods covered in each tally will depend on institutional needs, as well. Year-to-year, five-year or other comparisons may be appropriate, depending on the topic. In addition, a library may compare its own numbers with those of peer or area libraries to show the need for adequate funding to compete for students with other law schools, to attract high-caliber faculty and to carry out the law school’s mission.

Peer or area library comparisons, in competitive environments, may be particularly effective for convincing law school administrators of the need for additional library resources. For instance, the Washington College of Law Library at American University contrasted its own rather modest acquisitions spending with other DC-area law school library acquisitions

statistics to argue that its acquisitions budget should be increased to more closely approximate the per-student spending of its competitors. See *Continuing Toward Excellence: A Strategic Plan for the WCL Library*, prepared by The Strategic Plan Committee of the WCL Library Faculty, 2001.

Collecting statistics need not be terribly difficult or time-consuming. It may be as simple as having reference librarians note each reference question with a quick hash mark. Furthermore, libraries are so automated today that many, if not most, statistics may be automatically generated by acquisitions, cataloging, circulation and interlibrary loan systems. Automated statistics may be especially above reproach where the credibility of statistics is an issue. In any event, the documentation of statistics collection must be preserved to meet any potential challenge to the credibility of those numbers and the methods used to collect them.

While the act of statistics collection need not be terribly daunting, the process of collecting those statistics may have to be carried out over an extended period of time, possibly a year or more, in order to obtain meaningful results. In addition, the analysis of collected statistics may take time and some thought, as well. See Hafner, Arthur W., *Descriptive Statistical Techniques for Librarians*, 2d ed., Chicago: American Library Association, 1998 for a discussion of statistical data analysis and comparisons in the library environment, and Hiller, Steve, "But What Does it Mean? Using Statistical Data for Decision-Making in Academic Libraries," in *Statistics in Practice – Measuring & Managing* (LISU Occasional Paper No. 32), Loughborough, Leicestershire: LISU, 2002 at <http://www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/dis/lisu/Hiller.pdf>.

Where shorter-term statistics have been acquired, librarians may be able to use techniques, such as sampling and statistical inference, to draw longer-term conclusions about those results. See Hafner, *supra*, for a discussion of sampling strategies and Janes, Joseph, *The Logic of Inference*, 19 Library Hi Tech 96, 2001.

Academic law libraries already collect many kinds of statistics and these may be used again for other purposes. Law libraries collect statistics for annual submission to the American Bar Association and other accrediting bodies. See <http://www.abanet.org/legaled/questionnaire/questionnairefiles/library.doc> for the ABA annual questionnaire for libraries. Many also collect annual statistics for the Association of Research Libraries and other membership and consortial organizations. See <http://www.arl.org/stats/lawmed/> for recent editions of *ARL Academic Law Library Statistics*. In addition, academic law libraries gather statistics for the growing number of publishers who market law school rankings to prospective students. Finally, many universities collect their own statistics, which include numbers obtained from their libraries.

Statistics may be presented as prose or more visually in tables, graphs and charts. The visual impact of a statistical graph may be particularly persuasive, especially where comparisons with other libraries are being drawn. And it is often easier for a reader to quickly grasp the implications of a statistical argument when presented in a colorful "at-a-

glance” pie chart. See Hafner, *supra*, for a discussion of the presentation of statistics in tables and charts. Another helpful guide to presenting statistics in visual formats by the Skidmore College Sociology Department is at http://www.skidmore.edu/academics/sociology/resources/writing_statistics.html.

Public services statistics

Law school deans and other administrators may not be aware of the many reference and circulation services the library provides, nor the frequency with which such services are performed for the law school community. The use of such statistics to show the variety of public services offered by the library may be one of the best ways to impress administrators with the value the library provides to law school patrons.

Reference, circulation and interlibrary loan statistics may also be used to demonstrate that more staffing is needed in these high-demand areas, that better technology is needed to keep up with the high user demand, or that the specific operational costs of a service have increased, given the high demand for those services. Examples of some public services statistics that might be gathered are listed below. Finer breakdowns of each, such as how many reference queries are handled each hour, may be appropriate, as well.

1. Reference
 - a. Directional queries answered
 - b. Short answer queries answered
 - c. Research performed – for whom?
 - i. Time spent on each research request
 - d. Electronic searches run – for whom?
 - i. Cost of each search
 - e. Research classes/sessions taught
 - i. Topics
2. Circulation
 - a. Items circulated to patrons
 - b. Items reshelved per month/year
 - i. Number of items reshelved per library area
 - ii. Types of items reshelved
 - c. Number of holds placed for patrons
 - d. Number of successful recalls placed for patrons
 - e. Amount of overdue and lost book fines collected
3. Interlibrary Loan and Document Delivery
 - a. Materials received from other libraries this year/last year
 - i. Cost to obtain ILLs for patrons
 - b. Materials sent to other libraries this year/last year
 - i. Cost to send outgoing ILLs

- c. Materials copied or retrieved from collection for faculty this year/last year
- d. Serials routed to faculty this year/last year

Library user statistics

A good way to argue for additional funding for staff and collection budgets, or an expansion of library hours and staffing, is to show that library usage is increasing or that the library is used more heavily than other area or peer institutions. In addition, user numbers can show how valued an asset the law library is to the law school, and the larger legal, communities, especially if it is a public library that must justify itself in a more political environment.

User statistics used by some libraries include those listed below.

- 1. Visitors per month/year
 - a. Law school users
 - b. Local legal community
 - c. Non-law school university community
 - d. Public users (if open to the public)
- 2. New/total visitor borrower registrations (non-law school community)
 - a. Local legal community
 - b. Non-law school university community
 - c. Public users (if circulation to the public)

Collection development and expenditures/pricing statistics

Statistics that relate to a law library's collection are already kept by academic libraries who report such statistics to the ABA and other bodies each year. In addition, the ABA, ARL, OCLC and other organizations will generate a more tailored set of statistics based on a library's reported or automatically-generated numbers, for a fee. Other collection and expense numbers may be gathered by a library to document its collection and its growth (or stagnation), how patrons use the collection, and the rising cost of library materials, particularly serials and electronic titles. When compared to peer institutions, these statistics may be useful to show the need for an increase in the collection budget. Collection development and expense statistics a library might want to collect include those listed below.

- 1. Collection Development
 - a. Titles held this year/last year
 - i. Titles added
 - ii. Titles withdrawn
 - b. Active subscriptions held this year/last year
 - i. Subscriptions added
 - ii. Subscriptions withdrawn

- c. Volumes and volume equivalents held this year/last year
 - i. Volumes added
 - ii. Volumes withdrawn
 - d. Titles/subscriptions/volumes added
 - e. OPAC searches per subject heading
 - f. Usage per electronic title
 - g. Items reshelved per month/year
 - i. Number of items reshelved per library area/call number
 - ii. Types/formats of items reshelved
 - h. Serials titles borrowed via interlibrary loan more than 5 times per year
2. Expenditures and pricing
- a. Amount spent on new titles this year/last year
 - i. Amount spent on new monographs
 - ii. Amount spent on continuations
 - b. Percent increase in spending from previous year
 - i. Monographs
 - ii. Continuations
 - iii. Electronic titles
 - iv. Other lines
 - v. Faculty research/office collections costs
 - c. Total expenditures
 - i. Expenditures per student
 - ii. Expenditures per subject heading

Library staffing statistics

If a law library is understaffed, staffing statistics, when compared to peer or area institutions, can be particularly effective. Staffing directly affects the levels of service a library can deliver to faculty and students, so this is a good way to argue that with increased staffing, service levels could be increased. In addition, prospective students who review the law school rankings in the various published surveys, such as the annual *U.S. News & World Report* survey, may focus on the levels of service available at law schools. Low levels of library staffing may catch their notice and influence their decisions to attend other law schools. Staffing statistics used by many libraries include those listed below.

- 1. Number of FTE librarians
 - a. Per student
 - b. Per faculty
- 2. Number of FTE library staff
 - a. Per student
 - b. Per faculty

3. Professional activities of librarians and staff
 - a. May present as prose report if impressive, rather than as numerical chart or table

Library space and facilities statistics

Like the argument over library staffing, space statistics may be especially noticeable to prospective students and may drag down a law school's ranking in the growing number of surveys reviewed by prospective students. If space statistics do not compare favorably with area or peer institutions, a library director may have an effective argument to make for additional space, if any is available, or for additional funds for more aggressive space planning. Examples of space statistics may include the following:

1. Square footage per student
 - a. Seating per student
 - i. Numbers of tables, carrels, lounge seats per student
2. Number of computer lab terminals per student
 - a. Percentage of students who own law school-networked laptops
3. Number of group study rooms per student
 - a. Group study room use
 - i. Type of patrons using (JD, LLM, SJD, etc.)
 - ii. Use for particular purposes (exams, group, moot court, etc.)
 - iii. Number of hours used by each
4. Linear footage of shelving
 - a. Total
 - b. Occupied

Conclusion

There are no rules for statistics collection. What one library might find useful to compile might be meaningless to another. Thus, it is incumbent upon any librarian thinking about statistics collection to consider the needs of the library. What kinds of facts and figures might best make the case for additional resources? What statistics would present the library in the most favorable light? What comparisons with other academic law libraries would be useful to draw? It is a carefully tailored use of statistics that will make the winning case for an academic law library.