

8-2023

Guest Editorial for Alabama Libraries: The Role of Collaboration and Assessment in Libraries

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Recommended Citation

Jenkins, N. J. (2023). Guest Editorial for Alabama Libraries: The Role of Collaboration and Assessment in Libraries. *Alabama Libraries*, 61(1). Retrieved from https://jagworks.southalabama.edu/alabamalibraries_journal/vol61/iss1/6

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Guest Editorial for Alabama Libraries: The Role of Collaboration and Assessment in Libraries

There are so many opportunities for assessment and collaboration in libraries. As an extroverted introvert and an assessment librarian, I am always looking for new ways to analyze data and help libraries improve their services. If it can be measured, then rest assured I am calculating the numbers or imagining it in a spreadsheet. I recently attended an international conference with a focus on assessment in libraries that answered, as well as inspired, so many questions. The primary question is, What exactly do we want to know? As information scientists, we want to know our stakeholders and the impact they have on our profession. We also want to be aware of the impact of our assistance on our users. Traditionally, it was acceptable to present flat data that focused on outputs. Today, more compelling and meaningful outcomes-based data collection is preferred. This type of assessment reflects on the impact of projects, initiatives, programs, etc. in libraries (Fiels, 2016). The American Library Association's Logic Model also prompts libraries to demonstrate inputs, activities and services, outputs, and outcomes (Fiels, 2016). According to the Institute of Museum and Library Services (2000), outcome-based assessments are beneficial for libraries trying to "identify their successes and share their stories with a wide range of stakeholders" (p. 8). The articles found in this issue either focus on connections between resources that have historically been labeled as relevant to public libraries and their applicability to academic libraries, or academic library reactions to COVID-19. Inadvertently, they both also highlight the role of collaboration and assessment in libraries.

While librarians are known for their epic resourcefulness and data collection, they are also responsible for providing and preserving critical services. More often than not, these services are impossible without collaboration and data to support their viability. Throughout this issue, readers will be introduced to collaboration between librarians involved in research, collection development, and technical services. An article featured in this issue will demonstrate how several formal library processes were influenced by the need to collaborate during the pandemic. Another will explore collection development from a collaborative point of view.

During the height of the pandemic, I upheld my commitment to collaboration in conducting research and providing services, while doing my best to ensure the integrity of the profession remains intact. Many librarians, including myself, were required to demonstrate productivity at our respective institutions and to continue conducting original research. Now that the COVID-19 pandemic is largely behind us, I have done my fair share of collaborating to conduct research and provide services. While these responsibilities are often the byproduct of collaborative efforts in face-to-face settings, working remotely created both challenges for collaborating with peers and also providing access to users. According to Cramsie et al. (2020) collaboration--whether direct or indirect--positively impacts research productivity. Several factors can impede collaboration, such as infrastructure and competition (Saunders & Corning, 2020). Working remotely is an example of infrastructure constraints, limiting librarians' physical access to coworkers, teaching faculty, and peers. According to Ralph (2023), the lack of collaborative opportunities is a hindrance to the success of librarians working from home. Despite the distance between them, many librarians used this as an opportunity to collaborate with individuals at even greater

distances by using online communication. “Instead of building walls, we have built bridges, leveraging our ingenuity, technology, and collaborative spirit” (Pendse, 2021, p. 40).

While students and faculty were at home, we were expected to ensure physical collections were circulated, accommodate faculty and students who were now in an online learning environment, modify workflows based on physical environments, and more. Through the integration of SpringShare applications, academic streaming services, and altered collection development practices, we were able to maintain our status as an essential campus entity and as partners in research. This issue of *Alabama Libraries* contains articles written by multiple librarians at Alabama State University, demonstrating their ability to overcome previously mentioned hindrances while collaborating internally with one another, and externally with peers.

Opportunities for assessment and collaboration in libraries abound. While collaboration is important, it is imperative to recognize the role of assessment in collaboration. However, creating harmony between the two is not for the faint of heart despite the fact that assessment is vital to productive collaboration (Saunders & Corning, 2020). Academic librarians are often charged with collaborating with multiple entities to implement processes like purchasing equipment, selecting resources, and implementing relevant procedures.

While I enjoy understanding why things are done a certain way, how they are perceived, and whether they are functional, others may not. In my research, I have often found myself collaborating and collecting assessment data to assess the viability and necessity of various library processes. This collaboration often occurs with unenthusiastic individuals who are most

impacted by the data. As you may have gathered, opportunities to collaborate and conduct assessments are all around us. My hope is that this issue will inspire others to partner with their peers and provide valuable insight into the profession.

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