

Assessing the Value of Academic Library Consortia

Assessing the Value of Academic Library Consortia by Faye A. Chadwell, Donald and Delpha Campbell University Librarian and OSU Press Director, Oregon State University Libraries, 121 The Valley Library, Corvallis, OR 97331, Faye.chadwell@oregonstate.edu

This is a post-print of the article that appeared in *Journal of Library Administration* 51 (7/8): 645-661, 2011. To link to this article, use: To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01930826.2011.601268>

Assessing the Value of Academic Library Consortia

FAYE A. CHADWELL

Oregon State University, Corvallis, OR, USA

ABSTRACT. *The value proposition of academic library consortia often focuses on the benefits a member library expects to receive in return for its paid membership in a consortium. This article takes a look at the literature of library and information science as well as the websites of 45 academic library consortia to understand how consortia communicate their benefits, especially in terms of financial value. It initiates a discussion about how academic library consortia could adopt assessment measures that strengthen their value proposition and improve the ways they demonstrate their impact and the impact that their members wield within higher education.*

KEYWORDS *consortial benefits, financial value, impact value, library assessment, library consortia*

INTRODUCTION

Assessment has been a key area of focus for academic libraries and their respective institutions for more than a decade. Stakeholders of all kinds demand that higher education be accountable and that it implement assessment strategies to monitor and improve performance related to student learning and accessibility, community engagement and service, and research productivity. Published in January 2011, Richard

Address correspondence to Faye A. Chadwell, 121 The Valley Library, Oregon State University, Corvallis, OR, 97331, USA. E-mail: faye.chadwell@oregonstate.edu

Arum and Josipa Roksa's book *Academically Adrift* tracked the learning outcomes of approximately 2,300 university and college students. Because it ultimately questioned the value students receive for the tuition they pay, *Academically Adrift* intensified the national push for accountability (Jaschik, 2011). Moving forward, reports and exposés such as Arum and Roksa's will create an even stronger demand for accurate assessments of student learning outcomes as well as other outcomes, such as faculty productivity, throughout higher education.

In the aftermath of the economic crisis that began in 2008, many institutions of higher education will be even more compelled to make major reductions in programs or eliminate them altogether. Those programs or units that are unable to demonstrate their value effectively can expect to be targeted as university and college administrators look at every possible avenue to find savings. Library consortia will not be immune to budget reductions as the need to find savings will inevitably spread to library administrators.

Depending on its size, the average academic library in the United States spends thousands if not hundreds of thousands of dollars to take advantage of the offerings of bibliographic utilities, networks, and various consortia. Drawing on 2008 data that 135 libraries from Doctoral/Research Universities-Extensive institutions contributed to the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), this author determined that these libraries expended \$268,989 on average for services provided by national, regional, and local bibliographic utilities, networks, and consortia. The reported expenditures in this category do not include expenditures related to the purchase of electronic content or document delivery/interlibrary loan but they constitute roughly 2% of total library expenditures on

average. In comparison, the 2008 national average was \$35,424. This amount also represented 2% of the national average for total library expenditures at \$2,066,113. Though not as high a percentage of total library expenditures as library materials or salaries, 2% is not insignificant, and these expenditures won't necessarily be overlooked when academic libraries and their home institutions need to find savings. (The data for this comparison are available to library researchers through the National Center for Education (NCES) Library Statistics Program and can be found at <http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/libraries/>.) For these financial reasons alone, the library consortia that serve the academic library community, and by extension that also serve the higher education community, should seek to be accountable to evolving standards of assessment.

This article provides a preliminary investigation into the ways that consortia have attempted to provide tangible and sometimes quantifiable explanations for the value they offer to their academic library members, especially where the value proposition expressed exceeds the financial value of consortial membership dues. The investigation includes an obligatory but not systematic look at the library and information science literature. It also provides a more thorough examination of the websites of 45 academic library consortia with the intention of revealing how consortia are presently marketing their benefits and attempting to assess their impact for stakeholders. This article also opens a discussion about the challenges that consortia face in becoming more assessment-oriented and concludes with some incentives for why a stronger assessment orientation in the future will benefit consortia as well as member libraries.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Well before the publication of *Academically Adrift*, individual institutions as well as a variety of associations related to higher education had responded to the call for accountability with strategic assessment plans as well as a multitude of reports, panels, and symposia—all calling for greater accountability in terms of how higher education demonstrates its impact via outcomes related to learning, teaching, and research. The 2005 report *Accountability for Better Results: A National Imperative for Higher Education*, commissioned by State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO), concluded that “No effort to improve accountability and performance in U.S. higher education can neglect the need to increase both the quality and relevance of research” (State Higher Education Executive Officers, 2005, p. 28).

In 2006, the Spelling Commission led by Charles Miller released *A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education*; this report covered ways to improve higher education’s access, affordability, and accountability (National Commission on the Future of Higher Education in America, 2006). The final report of the National Conference of State Legislatures’ Blue Ribbon Commission on Higher Education (2006) called for states to rethink “investment in higher education and to reenergize the system so that all citizens have access to a high-quality and affordable education” (p. 1). The NCSL’s Blue Ribbon Commission also urged states to “set clear statewide goals, develop appropriate measurements, and provide incentives and consequences for institutional performance” (2006, p. 7).

Within the library profession, the American Library Association made academic libraries one of its foci with its 2003 *@your library campaign*, which was established to

improve communication about the value of libraries. In 2005, the Association of Research Libraries began actively assisting academic libraries in “developing effective, sustainable, and practical assessment programs that demonstrate the libraries’ contributions to teaching, learning, and research” (Association of Research Libraries, 2011). Articulating the contributions that academic libraries make to higher education also became an important strategic priority of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL). As a result, ACRL’s Value of Academic Libraries Initiative responded to the demands for accountability measures by publishing *The Value of Academic Libraries: A Comprehensive Research Review and Report* in the fall of 2010. Authored by Dr. Megan Oakleaf, this ACRL report provides a comprehensive review of the literature, methodologies, and best practices for library assessment, and it provides a clear understanding of what value entails. The report provides an excellent starting point for anyone seeking to become immersed in higher education assessment.

ASSESSING ACADEMIC LIBRARY CONSORTIA

Let us enter the landscape of academic library consortia. Collaborative efforts among and between libraries have been documented as far back as the late 19th century. Academic library consortia in the United States have existed for multiple decades, having gained momentum in the 1970s with the development of shared catalogs and then having moved full speed into the shared purchases of electronic resources in the 1990s. Several library and information science (LIS) authors have covered consortial history and development, notably Weber (1976), Alexander (1999), Kopp (1998), and Bostick (2001). The longevity or persistence of consortia speaks to their success. It also sets the stage for

arguing that if academic libraries must adjust to a new climate focused on assessment and accountability, then consortia and other partnerships in which academic libraries participate must consider seriously how they might demonstrate their value more effectively.

An unsystematic review of the library science literature on library consortia suggests that there is considerable literature explicating the advantages or benefits of consortial activities. The literature reveals a preponderance of articles that talk about the benefits of library consortia from the perspective of shared purchasing of electronic resources and collection development along with resource sharing (circulation and interlibrary loan) and networked systems. McKee (2005) talked about the benefits accrued by consortial partners leveraging their power as a group not just for pricing but for other licensing rights (cancellation, “blow up” clauses, interlibrary loan, etc.). Kinner and Crosetto (2009) also pointed out a number of benefits that come from libraries that collaborate for collection development purposes. In addition to leveraged buying power, Guzzy’s (2010) review reported several positive attributes of academic library consortia: “strong sense of community and commitment,” “professional development components,” and helpful and knowledgeable consortia staff members.

Lugg and Fischer (2010) expounded on the benefits related to network-level services as well as the benefits accrued when meeting the demands for managing print collections. In their examination of the successful implementation of OCLC’s VDX software to create a shared interlibrary loan system for the Ontario Council of University Libraries (OCUL), a consortium of 21 Ontario universities, McGillivray and her co-authors added the benefit of being able to gain from and contribute to the consortial

vision (McGillivray, Greenberg, Fraser, & Cheung, 2009, p. 4). They also mention the benefit of new knowledge that individuals as well as participating institutions acquire from collaborative activities. In addition to resource sharing, Krieb's (2011) dissertation work suggests that academic library directors join consortia for the benefit of centralized technical support. Finally, even *The Chronicle of Higher Education's* Scott Carlson (2003) has extolled library consortial benefits, focusing specifically on how various academic library consortia successfully expanded the buying power of members.

To expand the base of information about consortial benefits, this author examined the websites of 48 library consortia to uncover how academic library consortia are conveying their benefits. (The list of the consortia checked is available in Appendix A. The list of consortial websites examined was developed using the International Coalition of Library Consortia's list of consortia and was limited to consortia serving predominantly academic libraries in the United States. Despite not having deeper controlled access to consortial websites, the author was able to glean that most of the consortia examined do not explicitly list their membership benefits as a separate specific list. There are some excellent examples of consortia that market the advantages of membership in this way and these include:

- CARLI or the Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries in Illinois (<http://www.carli.illinois.edu/mem-lib/benefits.html>);
- Amigos Library Services (<http://www.amigos.org/node/13>);
- Center for Research Libraries (<http://www.crl.edu/membership/>); and

Assessing the Value of Academic Library Consortia

- New York State Higher Education Initiative
(<http://www.nyshei.org/membership/benefits/>).

In some cases, some of the membership brochures or websites do not necessarily discuss benefits as much as they list membership criteria. Highlights of the benefits covered are:

- Shared purchasing of digital content;
- Sharing library materials through interlibrary loan or courier services;
- Shared catalogs;
- Advocacy; and
- Expanded access to content not held by member libraries.

A few consortia provided specifics on benefits for library users, both students as well as faculty: OhioLINK (<http://www.ohiolink.edu/ostaff/marketing/olstudentbrochure.pdf>, <https://www.ohiolink.edu/ostaff/marketing/olfacultybrochure.pdf>); Virtual Library of Virginia or VIVA (<http://www.vivalib.org/outreach/benefits.html>); and the Georgia Library Learning Online or GALILEO (<http://www.usg.edu/oiit/about/factsheets/galileo.pdf>). It is noteworthy that these three consortia are located in states that provide some level of statewide funding in support of consortial operations and/or services. Whether or not this support requires that these consortia provide specific marketing and communication of benefits beyond member libraries is not known, but the reality of such requirements and their specifics could be uncovered via more in-depth analysis of the marketing of consortial benefits for academic library members and their users.

While not all the consortial websites examined communicated a distinct set of benefits either to member libraries or users, almost all emphasized the advantages of consortial membership via their mission statements and descriptions of their services. Most mission statements emphasized the consortium's purpose in optimizing access to resources in a way that maximizes savings or minimizes costs and reduces duplication. Among the services commonly delineated are:

- Resource sharing networks (union catalog);
- Reciprocal borrowing;
- Institutional repositories;
- Digital collections;
- Database licensing;
- Cooperative collection building; and
- Courier services.

The mission statement of the Orbis Cascade Alliance, which serves 36 academic libraries in the Pacific Northwest, states: "The mission of the Alliance is to strengthen member libraries through collaboration in order to support the work of our students, faculty, staff, and researchers. Alliance members join together to enhance our services, share our information resources and expertise, enrich and preserve our collections, and develop library staff to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing information environment" (<http://www.orbiscascade.org/index/mission-statement>). The New York State Higher Education Initiative mission statement reads: To establish through the public and private academic and research libraries of New York an "information infrastructure" that

empowers students, faculty, entrepreneurs, and innovators with access to high quality digital information in the most cost-effective manner (<http://www.nyshei.org/about/>).

DEFINING VALUE

While the literature about consortia and consortial websites provides more than adequate information describing the benefits of academic library consortia, the literature of marketing and sales argues that benefits and features alone do not represent value. More specifically, Barnes, Blake, and Pinder (2009) argued that “a value proposition statement is a clear, compelling and credible expression of the experience that a customer will receive from a supplier’s measurably value-creating offering, where Value = Benefits minus Cost. It is not a description of what your organization does for a customer” (p. 37). Barnes et al. continued by stating that a value proposition statement must include: “capability or what you can do for a customer; impact—how that will help the customer to succeed; cost—what the customer must pay for the privilege” (2009, p. 28). In her report for ACRL on the value of academic libraries, Oakleaf’s discussion on financial value echoed this thinking. Oakleaf (2010) stated: “Another common definition of value, sometimes termed financial value, cost/benefit analysis, return-on-investment, or value for money, is based upon the following formula: Library value = perceived benefits/perceived costs” (p. 20).

As Thompson (2004) reported, most libraries justify consortial membership costs by arguing that they realize savings through consortial deals for journal packages or databases (p. 1). Several other good articles have analyzed the benefits of consortial participation with a focus on savings that resulted from cooperative collection

development efforts. Bosch, Lyons, Munroe, Perrault, and Sugnet (2003) identified performance measures and data points to determine if cooperative collection development activities were successful, especially in reducing costs. Kohl and Sanville (2006) argued that libraries ought to focus on long-term strategies for improving cost effectiveness rather than responding to short-term goals to reach necessary budget reductions. They demonstrated how this focus can have impact on “four rather different areas of library service agendas” and “can improve the cost-benefit ratio of library expenditures: sharing printed books, storing print materials, providing access to the journal literature electronically, and providing access to electronic versions of library special collections, faculty publications, or university projects through a consortial institutional repository” (Kohl & Sanville, 2006, pp. 394–395).

Even in the arena of collection development and database licensing, however, much of the focus on cost effectiveness is actually more about cost avoidance rather than on true costs savings. Multiple websites of academic library consortia scrutinized by the author provide this type of cost evidence to demonstrate the financial benefits that consortia provide to members and/or to stakeholders. On its fact sheet, GALILEO reports that \$1,161,825,107 is the “number of dollars libraries did not have to spend for full-text articles over their 15 years of GALILEO access”

(http://about.galileo.usg.edu/site/galileo_facts_and_figures_for_marketing). The Partnership Among South Carolina Academic Libraries website reports that PASCAL “leverages by more than five times the overall purchasing power of each dollar spent through cooperatively and collaboratively sharing resources and costs”

(<http://pascalsc.org/content/view/188/46/#value>). The 2011 brochure for the Utah

Academic Library Consortium advertises how UALC is “saving Utah \$600,000+ per year” (http://www.ualc.net/Media/UALC_Brochure%202011.pdf). MERLIN, the Missouri Education and Research Libraries Information Network, asserts that its licensed e-resources “represent the research and teaching components of all of the campuses in the MERLIN cluster. These consortial purchases save the University of Missouri millions of dollars in licensing fees each year” (<http://merlin.missouri.edu/about>).

It is beyond the scope of this article to explain and debate cost-benefit analyses thoroughly, but there is a dearth within the LIS literature of true or actual cost-benefit analyses or return on investment (ROI) studies. Oakleaf (2010) wrote that a “good portion of library literature refers to this aspect as ‘return-on-investment’ which, technically, is a particular form of financial value estimation” (p. 22). There is also some concern that ROI studies are not effective in an academic environment. Neal (2011) stated, “For purposes of measuring ROI, both the initial and final value of an investment must be clearly stated, and the rate of return can be calculated over a single period, or expressed as an average over multiple periods. This vocabulary and this level of precision do not translate well into the input and output measures which define the work of academic libraries” (pp. 424–425). Nevertheless, as Pan and Fong (2010) reported, “CBA [cost-benefit analysis]/ROI studies have become increasingly popular in librarianship” (p. 189). Pan and Fong’s own study describes a consortium-level cost-benefit analysis for a consortium made of five separately administered libraries in the University of Colorado System that focused on licensing electronic resource for all campuses involved. Other notable CBA/ROI studies include Luther’s (2008) work on behalf of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Tenopir’s (2010) follow-up study to demonstrate ROI in

relation to the grants process at 8 institutions in 8 different countries, and the work of King, Aerni, Brody, Herbison, and Knapp (2004) to ascertain the ROI for the University of Pittsburgh Library's print and electronic collections.

Despite the growing popularity of CBA/ROI studies in academic libraries, Neal (2011) argued passionately against overemphasizing financial value as the most important value of academic libraries. Neal deemed ROI "a relentless and in many ways foolish effort to quantify impact in the face of budget challenges and the questioning of our continuing relevance to the academy in an all-digital information world" (2011, p. 424). In fact, in his essay, Neal praised the ACRL publication by Oakleaf (as well as Tenopir's work). He called Oakleaf's work a positive development because of its focus not just on financial value but what Oakleaf describes as impact value or value on investment (VOI) or value as results (Oakleaf, 2010, p. 23). Oakleaf quoted Saracevic and Kantor when she described the concept of "value as results" as "one focused on the impact of library service" (p. 23). Saracevic and Kantor equated value with "the subsequent results from the [information] interaction and their worth or benefits" (as cited in Oakleaf, 2010, p. 23). Value as results answers the question: how does library service help individuals change?

Value as results is more meaningful to many stakeholders in higher education because it demonstrates what an academic library enables its users to do, not just what financial investment in an academic library returns to the investor, in this case the home institution or other stakeholder. Determining impact value requires eliciting information from library users. Impact value, according to Oakleaf (2010), links an academic library's

value more to services and librarians than to products and collections, but the services have to result in an experience or condition that helps users improve their state—the value experience. She eventually states that value as results “helps academic libraries articulate ‘value on investment’ or ‘VOI’ ” (p. 24).

In the case of academic library consortia, soliciting this information would mean using one of several assessment methods to survey member libraries and their users. Such assessment would begin to answer the question, “How are academic library consortia having an impact in higher education?” To determine the level of assessment activities within academic library consortia, this author examined the consortial websites of the same 45 academic library consortia. In this case, the author’s review of consortial websites focused on strategic plans. Strategic plans are an ideal communication tool whereby consortia might embed measures or metrics to guide and assess the implementation of strategic goals. In his course outline on the creation of value in the nonprofit sector, Matt Evans (n.d.) stated that “the strategic planning process usually starts with some form of assessment” and then assessment is incorporated into the plan to ensure some degree of continuous improvement (p. 7). Almost all consortial sites examined provided links to strategic plans or initiatives. However, most strategic plans did not include meaningful indicators or metrics of how the consortium would evaluate whether its objectives were successful. The author’s review of consortial websites did reveal three positive examples of academic library consortia having attempted to demonstrate their value through gathering user input and feedback. VIVA provides user testimonials from both students and faculty who exclaim about the impact that access to VIVA resources has had on their teaching as well as research

(<http://www.vivalib.org/outreach/testimonials.html>). OhioLINK solicits stories from its users, asking them to respond to the question “How has OhioLINK helped you?”

(<http://www.ohiolink.edu/about/share-story.html>). GALILEO conducts an annual survey to gauge both user satisfaction as well as user habits. A version of this user survey has been conducted annually since 1997

(http://about.galileo.usg.edu/assessment/annual_user_surveys/).

The key in these examples appears to be focusing on how consortial services contribute to the success of the ultimate users of consortial services, not just the member libraries themselves. Oakleaf’s (2010) study outlined a number of areas where academic libraries can focus assessment efforts in their endeavor to show their value to stakeholders: student enrollment, student retention and graduation rates, student success, student achievement, student learning, student engagement, faculty research productivity, faculty teaching, service, and overarching institutional quality (p. 12). These are fertile areas for academic library consortia to consider as they strive to improve how they demonstrate their value to not only member libraries but also to stakeholders. Pan and Fong (2010) also provided some useful questions for exploring where consortia might focus their attention on demonstrating impact in their own search for “additional quantitative and qualitative data that demonstrate the impact on the university’s teaching and research mission” (p. 191). They asked: *How does access to these resources increase efficiency? How does it improve teaching? Can we trace the use of library resources to obtaining research grants and the dollars generated? Does access and use translate into scholarly articles, and is this quantifiable?* (Pan & Fong, 2010, p. 191). Coupled with studies about the cost-effectiveness of consortial purchasing, such results can provide

powerful statements demonstrating the value of consortia and thus the value of academic library members.

CHALLENGES

The previous section began to address some of the challenges that consortia might face in demonstrating their value. This is especially so in regard to the complexity of constructing and implementing effective cost-benefit analyses and determining how best to assess consortial services in relation to any number of areas that might demonstrate value, such as student success and engagement, faculty research productivity, or faculty teaching, service, and overarching institutional quality.

In actuality, the assessment challenges that consortia face are not tremendously different from what libraries face. These include developing an appropriate level of expertise in both quantitative and qualitative research methods to assess effectively; appropriating the time and money to complete adequate assessment in lieu of other priorities and commitments; managing issues of user privacy and/or anonymity; and making assessment a part of core consortial activities. It is not hard to imagine a group of libraries visualizing any number of good ideas for programs, services, and products to be pursued collectively, and yet academic library consortia—like their individual members—will struggle to clearly identify what the outputs are or to assess the outcomes adequately. One reason may be that in a consortial setting member libraries are also challenged to surrender independent decision-making ability so that they can exploit their strength in numbers and resources (Mark, 2007, p. 5). Likewise, if assessment is to become a core activity of academic library consortia, members ought to expect that

consortial costs are going to increase as consortial staff seek to create another customized service—the proper assessment and demonstration of value will demand this. Covey (2002) acknowledged in *Usage and Usability Assessment: Library Practices and Concerns* that “maintaining focus on users when research results challenge the operating assumptions and personal preferences of librarians” is already challenging for a single institution (p. 48). That makes the last challenge listed above, making assessment a core activity, that much more difficult to pursue in the consortial setting. If libraries as individual entities balk at change or change at glacial speed, a body of libraries balks at change exponentially.

Academic libraries represent a community of users that are based at individual campuses. It is already clear that academic libraries (and higher education) need to cultivate a stronger culture of assessment. As Ackermann (2007) said, “The primary disadvantage is that most library assessment is developed in relative isolation from the larger higher education community. It has been driven mainly by internal library needs, and has resulted in metrics and reporting protocols that are meaningful primarily to other librarians” (p. 7). This is doubly disadvantageous to academic library consortia and so can increase the difficulty of recruiting a representative sample of research subjects. Why? For many consortia, stakeholders are not just libraries. They also are people of the state or the legislature. And of course, the ultimate stakeholder is the user in the individual library. To assess adequately, consortia have to determine who their stakeholders are—state legislature, higher education, member libraries, students, faculty, or taxpayers—and to whom they are communicating their value. Additionally, in a consortial setting the ultimate customer or user and her or his needs are once removed

and most often communicated via member libraries. Given this scenario, academic library members need to take to heart perhaps the single most important factor for creating successful library cooperation:

Each library must have a clear idea of the community which it serves—its composition, its characteristics and its expectations. It should also know, of course, how it expects to meet these expectations in terms of collections, staffing and services. The needs of the home community are paramount. To neglect them is to do so at one’s professional peril. If each library has its own clear vision as to its mission, guiding principles, goals and objectives then perhaps there will be less danger that the urgent questions will obscure the important ones. (These might not be one and the same.) (Mark, 2007, p. 3)

That is, the process of assessment within a consortial setting begins at home. Each individual academic library member must determine what needs to be assessed to demonstrate its values and to be certain to communicate that in the consortial setting.

THE INCENTIVES

Thomas A. Peters (2003b) pointed out in his column “Consortia Thinking” that “geography certainly has played a role in developing the current consortial landscape” (p. 254). This author’s review of consortial websites would support Peter’s statement. This could mean that many consortia are “tapped out” and theoretically have little or no incentive to improve or advance themselves by taking on perhaps rigorous assessment activities on top of their usual operational fare. They have, if you will, a captive regional

or state audience, even when, as Peters (2003b) pointed out, affiliate membership can bring in some new members at a particular level (p. 254).

Reviewing the consortial websites again, however, this author finds that it is actually consortia with so-called captive audiences who appear to be making successful attempts at demonstrating their value. As mentioned earlier, it is not clear from the review whether GALILEO, VIVA, and OhioLINK are required to do some level of assessment that involves user satisfaction, but they are attempting to do so. What is also clear is that in the face of statewide budget reductions, it is a wise decision for a statewide consortium that receives state funding to focus on creating a value proposition that shows its impact value. The academic library consortia landscape has seen a few statewide consortia face serious reductions in recent years. *Library Journal* reported that the Missouri legislature had approved a proposal to cut \$650,000 in funding for MOBIUS, the Missouri Bibliographic Information User System; this proposed subsidy cut would have increased member dues 36% (Albanese, 2005, p. 21). In 2008, *Library Journal* reported that the South Carolina state legislature had “slashed state funding for PASCAL (Partnership Among South Carolina Academic Libraries), a consortium serving 58 colleges and universities statewide, from about \$2 million to around \$200,000 for the 2008–09 academic year” (Albanese, 2008, p. 18).

Predictably, as members of consortia begin to face budgetary challenges, consortia also will face challenges when academic libraries have to make tougher decisions on where to invest their dollars. Academic library consortial members will want to ensure that they are getting value from their consortial memberships, especially in

comparison to other commitments they make in terms of collection dollars and salaries. This pressure increases the challenge that some consortia already face. Academic library members can choose to join a new consortium or cooperative that supports new directions better or that provides more cost-effective services and acquisitions than existing consortia. There is ample opportunity or competition for academic libraries to join any number of more recently established “consortia,” such as HathiTrust, established in October 2008; the MetaArchive Cooperative, established in 2004; or the Western Regional Storage Trust, established February 2011. Leaving existing consortia or cooperatives, even long-established cooperative ventures, is not outside the realm of possibility. Heated debates characterized the respective decisions of California State at Long Beach and Michigan State to move their cataloging away from OCLC to SkyRiver (Chadwell, Boock, Sapon-White, & Miller, 2010).

These aforementioned reasons provide reactive incentives for why academic library consortia ought to develop and strengthen their assessment measures. It is advisable for consortia to think more proactively regarding the importance of improving the demonstration of their value. Primarily, an examination of the mission statements of academic library consortia demonstrates that helping members succeed is a central purpose or component to most consortia. Therefore, if academic libraries are striving to reconceptualize themselves in the face of demands for improved assessment metrics and greater accountability to stakeholders, then consortia ought to be situating themselves to help their academic library members do so. In actuality, consortia are positioned to help libraries establish themselves better on campus as units that add value to the student experience and have a positive effect on faculty productivity. For several decades,

libraries have been efficiently moving some time- or tradition-honored responsibilities—such as cataloging, the circulation of materials, and the development of collections or licensing/purchasing—from individual libraries to the consortial or network level. Therefore consortia are providing a path for academic libraries to spend valuable staff time focusing on how they meet institutional needs in new and more relevant ways than they have done historically.

As member libraries become more focused on supporting the institutional mission, then consortia also can begin to think about how they add value to student learning, teaching, and faculty research. In the process, consortia can reconceptualize themselves. For example, how could member libraries join forces to provide a stronger demonstration of their impact on teaching and learning that does not focus just on saving collection dollars? Such a reconceptualization might give consortia the freedom to abandon dead-end initiatives while framing and developing other initiatives more effectively so as to demonstrate how they are advancing higher education.

CONCLUSION

This article has presented an exploratory investigation of how academic library consortia communicate their benefits—not only to their members but also to stakeholders such as the general public, students, and faculty. It is clear that consortia have been endeavoring to provide solid evidence of the benefits they provide, though as Peters (2003a) said, “If library consortia are to be integral to information delivery and scholarly communication in higher education, we need to develop better methods for calculating the costs and

benefits of consortial activities” (p.113). However, it is not just about consortia showing the return on investment for academic library members and their stakeholders; it is also about demonstrating value. In that vein, this article also has attempted to initiate a conversation about how more consortia can begin to embrace assessment measures so that the highest rewards of the consortium’s joint effort are supporting excellence within higher education and expanding the visibility of its members and itself.

REFERENCES

- Ackermann, E. (2007). Program assessment in academic libraries: An introduction for assessment practitioners. *Research & Practice in Assessment, 1*(2): 1–9. Retrieved from <http://www.virginiaassessment.org/rpa/2/Ackermann.pdf>
- Albanese, A. (2005). Subsidy cut for MOBIUS Consortium. *Library Journal, 130*(11), 21.
- Albanese, A. (2008). Drastic consortium budget cut in SC. *Library Journal, 133*(13), 18.
- Alexander, A. W. (1999). Toward “the perfection of work”—library consortia in the digital age. *Journal of Library Administration, 28*(2), 1–14.
doi:10.1300/J111v28n02_01
- Association of Research Libraries. (2011, April 11). Statistics and assessment. Retrieved from <http://www.arl.org/stats/initiatives/esp/>
- Barnes, C., Blake, H., & Pinder, D. (2009). *Creating and delivering your value proposition: Managing customer experience for profit*. London: Kogan Page.
- Bosch, S., Lyons, L., Munroe, M. H., Perrault, A. H., & Sugnet, C. (2003). Measuring success of cooperative collection development: Report of the Center for Research Libraries. *Collection Management, 28*(3), 223–239.
- Bostick, S. L. (2001). The history and development of academic library consortia in the United States: An overview. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship, 27*(1), 128–130.
- Carlson, S. (2003, October 10). Libraries’ consortium conundrum. *The Chronicle of Higher Education, 50*(7), A30.

- Chadwell, F. A., Boock, M., Sapon-White, R., & Miller, A. (2010, April 19). *Is SkyRiver in the future for Oregon State University Libraries?* Corvallis, OR: Oregon State University Libraries. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/1957/15539>
- Covey, D. T. (2002, January). *Usage and usability assessment: Library practices and concerns*. Washington, DC: Digital Library Federation, Council on Library Resources. Retrieved from <http://www.clir.org/pubs/reports/pub105/pub105.pdf>
- Evans, M., H. (n.d.). *Course 15: Creating value in the nonprofit sector*. Retrieved from <http://www.exinfm.com/training/pdffiles/course15.pdf>
- Guzzy, J. (2010). U.S. academic library consortia: A review. *Community & Junior College Libraries*, 16(3): 162–184.
- Jaschik, S. (2011, January 18). Academically adrift. *Inside Higher Ed*. Retrieved from http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2011/01/18/study_finds_large_numbers_of_college_students_don_t_learn_much
- King, D. W., Aerni, S., Brody, F., Herbison, M., & Knapp, A. (2004, April). *The use and outcomes of university library print and electronic collections*. Pittsburgh, PA: The Sara Fine Institute for Interpersonal Behavior and Technology. Retrieved from http://web.utk.edu/~tenopir/research/pitts/Pitt_Use_Final.pdf
- Kinner, L., & Crosetto, A. (2009). Balancing act for the future: How the academic library engages in collection development at the local and consortial levels. *Journal of Library Administration*, 49(4), 419–437. doi:10.1080/01930820902832561
- Kohl, D. F., & Sanville, T. (2006). More bang for the buck: Increasing the effectiveness of library expenditures through cooperation. *Library Trends*, 54(3), 394–410.
- Kopp, J. (1998). Library consortia and information technology: The past, the present, the promise. *Information Technology and Libraries*, 17(1), 7–12.
- Krieb, D. (2011, March). Academic library directors' perceptions of joining a large library consortium sharing an integrated library system: A descriptive survey. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cehsedaddiss/54/>
- Lugg, R., & Fischer, R. (2010). Future Tense—The Library on the Ground: 5 reasons why consortia matter more than ever. *Against the Grain*, 22(1), 84–85. Retrieved from EBSCOhost
- Luther, J. (2008). *University investment in the library: What's the return? A case study at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign*. San Diego: Elsevier. Retrieved from <http://libraryconnect.elsevier.com/whitepapers/0108/lcwp0101.pdf>
- Mark, T. (2007). National and international library collaboration: Necessity, advantages. *Liber Quarterly: The Journal of European Research Libraries*, 17(3/4), 1–7.

- Retrieved from http://liber.library.uu.nl/publish/issues/2007-3_4/index.html?000209
- McGillivray, S., Greenberg, A., Fraser, L., & Cheung, O. (2009). *Key factors for consortial success: Realizing a shared vision for interlibrary loan in a consortium of Canadian libraries*. Librarian and Staff Publications, Digital Commons @ Ryerson. Paper 15. Retrieved from http://digitalcommons.ryerson.ca/library_pubs/15
- McKee, A. E. (2005). Consortial licensing issues: One consortium's viewpoint. *Journal of Library Administration*, 42(3/4), 129–141. doi: 10.1300/J111v42n03_09
- National Commission on the Future of Higher Education in America (“The Spellings Commission”). (2006). *A test of leadership: Charting the future of U.S. higher education*. Washington, DC: Department of Education. Retrieved from <http://www.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/hiedfuture/reports/final-report.pdf>
- National Conference of State Legislatures. (2006). *Transforming higher education: National imperative—state responsibility*. Washington, DC: National Conference of State Legislatures. Retrieved from <http://www.ncsl.org/Portals/1/documents/educ/BRCReport.pdf>
- Neal, J. G. (2011). *Stop the madness: The insanity of ROI and the need for new qualitative measures of academic library success*. Proceeding from the Association of College and Research Libraries conference, March 30–April 2, 2011, in Philadelphia, PA. Retrieved from http://s3.goeshow.com/acrl/national/2011/client_uploads/handouts/stop_the_madness1.pdf
- Oakleaf, M., for the Association of College and Research Libraries. (2010, September). *The value of academic libraries: A comprehensive research review and report*. Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries. Retrieved from http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/issues/value/val_report.pdf
- Pan, D., & Fong, Y. (2010). Return on investment for collaborative collection development: A cost-benefit evaluation of consortia purchasing. *Collaborative Librarianship*, 2(4), 183–192. Retrieved from <http://collaborativelibrarianship.org/index.php/jocl/article/view/108/72>
- Peters, T. A. (2003a). Consortia and their discontents. *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 29(2), 111–114. Retrieved from EBSCOhost
- Peters, T. A. (2003b). Graduated consortial memberships and rogue facilitators. *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 29(4), 254–256. Retrieved from EBSCOhost
- State Higher Education Executive Officers. (2005). *Accountability for better results: A national imperative for higher education*. Washington, DC: National Commission

- on Accountability in Higher Education. Retrieved from www.sheeo.org/account/accountability.pdf
- Tenopir, C., Love, A., Park, J., Wu, L., Baer, A., Mays, R., Kingma, B., & King, D. W. (2010). *University investment in the library, phase II: An international study of the library's value to the grants process*. San Diego, CA: Elsevier. Retrieved from <http://libraryconnect.elsevier.com/whitepapers/roi2/2010-06-whitepaper-roi2.pdf>
- Thompson, T. L. (2004). Library consortia in the 21st century: Beyond the buying club. *Trends in Law Library Management & Technology*, 15(2), 1–4. Retrieved from EBSCOhost
- Weber, D. C. (1976). A century of cooperative programs among academic libraries. *College & Research Libraries*, 38(206), 205–221.

APPENDIX A

CONSORTIAL WEBSITES EXAMINED

Consortium	Website URL
Academic Libraries of Indiana	http://ali.bsu.edu/
Amigos	http://www.amigos.org/
Arizona Health Info Network	http://www.azhin.org/index.cfm
ARKLink	http://arklinklibraries.org/
Associated Colleges of the South	http://www.colleges.org/
Association of Southeastern Research Libraries	http://www.aserl.org/
Boston Library Consortium	http://www.blc.org/
Bowen Central Library of Appalachia (BCLA)	http://acaweb.org/programs-services/faculty/bowen-library
California Digital Library	http://www.cdlib.org
California State University Systemwide Electronic Information Resources	http://seir.calstate.edu/
Center for Research Libraries	http://www.crl.edu
Global Resource Network	
Chesapeake Information and Research Library Alliance (CIRLA)	http://www.cirla.org/default.htm
Colorado Alliance of Research Libraries (CARL)	http://www.coalliance.org/
Committee on Institutional Cooperation (CIC) Center for Library Initiatives	http://www.cic.net/Home/Projects/Library/Home.aspx

Assessing the Value of Academic Library Consortia

Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries in Illinois (CARLI)	http://www.carli.illinois.edu/
Council of Connecticut Academic Library Directors	http://faculty.quinnipiac.edu/ccald/ccald.html
Council of University of Wisconsin Libraries	http://uwlib.uwsa.edu/
Federation of Kentucky Academic Libraries	http://fokal.pbwiki.com/
Florida Center for Library Automation (FCLA)	http://fclaweb.fcla.edu/
<u>Georgia Library Learning Online (GALILEO)</u>	http://www.galileo.usg.edu/welcome/
Greater Western Library Alliance (GWLA)	http://www.gwla.org
LYRISIS	http://www.lyrasis.org/
Missouri Education and Research Libraries Information Network (MERLIN)	http://merlin.missouri.edu/about
Minitex	http://www.minitex.umn.edu/
MOBIUS (Missouri)	http://mobiusconsortium.org/
Network of Alabama Academic Libraries (NAAL)	http://www.ache.alabama.gov/NAAL
New York State Higher Education Initiative	http://www.nyshei.org/
NorthEast Research Libraries Consortium (NERL)	http://www.library.yale.edu/NERLpublic/
Ohio Library and Information Network (OhioLINK)	http://www.ohiolink.edu
Orbis Cascade Alliance	http://www.orbiscascade.org
Partnership Among South Carolina Academic Libraries (PASCAL)	http://pascalsc.org/
Pennsylvania Academic Library Consortium, Inc.	http://www.palci.org/
Private Academic Library Network of Indiana	http://www.palni.edu
Southeastern Wisconsin Information Technology Exchange (SWITCH)	http://caspian.switchinc.org/
State-Assisted Academic Council of Kentucky	http://www.saalck.org/
Statewide California Electronic Library Consortium (SCELC)	http://scelc.org/
SUNY <i>Connect</i>	http://www.sunyconnect.suny.edu/default.htm

Assessing the Value of Academic Library Consortia

Triangle Research Libraries Network	http://www.trln.org/
University of North Carolina Library Advisory Council (ULAC)	http://www.northcarolina.edu/academics/ulac/index.htm
University of Texas System Digital Library	http://www.lib.utsystem.edu
University System of Maryland and Affiliated Institutions	http://usmai.umd.edu/
Utah Academic Library Consortium	http://www.ualc.net/
Virtual Academic Library Environment of NJ (VALE)	http://www.valenj.org/
Virtual Library of Virginia (VIVA)	http://www.vivalib.org/
Washington Research Library Consortium	http://www.wrlc.org