Evaluation of Information Services in the Library: Areas identified by Graduate Students

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Abstract: Evaluation is the systematic assessment of the operation and/or the outcomes of a program or policy, compared to a set of explicit or implicit standards, as a means of contributing to the improvement of the program or policy (Weiss, 1998). Neal (2006), in the context of academic libraries, says that "decisions are routinely not supported by the evidence of well-designed investigations" and that "research in the field is poorly communicated, understood and applied" (quoted by Peter Hernon, in the forward to Matthews, 2007). In addition, more and more libraries are either closing down or being forced to cut down on services due to recession (Powell, 2009; Applegate, 2009). Thus, identification of different areas of library services for systematic evaluation becomes extremely imperative in the current economic scenario. In an assignment to graduate students in a Master of Science in Library and Information Science program (with most students currently working in library or archive settings), the students were asked to describe an evaluation research scenario and a problem statement based on the scenario. An important criterion for grading was the significance of the scenario proposed.   Using the areas of library (and archive) evaluation identified by the students as a case study, this study seeks to propose research questions and current areas of interest in the evaluation of library services. The study should shed light on the evaluation areas of importance in the current economic scenario and also help drive future research in this area.

Keywords: evaluation of library services, evaluation research scenario, graduate students, assignment, research questions, problem statement

1. Introduction

Evaluation is the systematic assessment of the operation and/or the outcomes of a program or policy, compared to a set of explicit or implicit standards, as a means of contributing to the improvement of the program or policy (Weiss, 1998).

Neal (2006), in the context of academic libraries, says that "decisions are routinely not supported by the evidence of well-designed investigations" and that "research in the field is poorly communicated, understood and applied" (quoted by Peter Hernon, in the forward to Matthews, 2007). In addition, more and more libraries are either closing down or being forced to cut down on services due to recession (Powell, 2009; Applegate, 2009). Thus, identification of different areas of library services for systematic evaluation becomes extremely imperative in the current economic scenario.

This study lists 28 problem statements adapted from an assignment submitted by students in a graduate class. These also serve as 28 examples on how to effectively write problem statements for any research study.

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evaluation areas of importance in the current economic scenario and also help drive future research in this area. The 28 examples of problem statements would be useful to researchers preparing to write studies, librarians, as well as graduate LIS students learning to write problem statements for an evaluation research study.

2. Methodology

In an assignment in Fall 2009 to 28 graduate students in a Master of Science in Library and Information Science program (with most students currently working in library or archive settings), the students were asked to explore and describe an evaluation research scenario in the Library and Information Science field for a specific research topic; and to write a problem statement derived from the research scenario. An important criterion for grading was the significance of the scenario proposed[1]. The students were given 2 weeks to complete the assignment (distributed during Week 2 in a 12 week semester; due on Week 4).

In the scenario, the students were tasked to include the following in their narrative: 1) the specific library, archives or museum *setting* (either hypothetical setting or modeled on a real one) where the evaluation study is conducted (e.g. medium-sized academic library, large public library, small music library, university archives, historical society, etc.); 2) the *evaluand* (any product, service or policy which is to be evaluated) of the evaluation study, which could be any component of information services, such as a newly launched information system or a specialized information service; 3) the position/role of the student in the organization/setting as the *evaluator* in the study; 4) *stakeholders* concerned with the evaluation results; 5) *participants*, if any, in the evaluation study; 6) specific range of *data* that the student (as the evaluator) planned to collect for the study; and finally, 7) the likely impact and *significance* of the evaluation study.

Based on their scenario, the students were also required to come up with a problem statement. Hernon and Schwartz (2007) mention 4 components of any problem statement in the social sciences (which would apply to library and information science) as stressed by Dr. David Clark: 1) lead-in; 2) declaration of originality (e.g., mentioning a knowledge void, which would be supported by the literature review); 3) indication of the central focus of the study; and 4) explanation of study significance or the benefits to be derived from an investigation of the problem.

For the purposes of this paper, each 2-4 page assignment was adapted into a problem statement format recommended by Hernon and Schwartz (2007).

3. Findings and Discussion

Given below are 28 problem statements based on the scenarios that the students came up with. Keywords in the setting and evaluand for each problem statement have been highlighted in **bold**. These help shed light on the current areas of research interest as identified by graduate students, most of who work in library or archive settings. Read each case from left to right. Column 3 on what each study does provides examples of research questions in the library and archive settings.

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[1] The assignment was adapted from one used by Associate Professor Rong Tang in her class.

	Lead-in (setting)	Knowledge gap	What this study will do? (evaluand)	Significance
1	The database in the **Suffolk County Historical Documents Library** is managed by both professional and part-time staff.	However, no study has compared the accuracy of databases set up by part-time staff to the accuracy of those set up by professionals.	This study will compare the **efficiency and accuracy of database set up by part time staff to those by their professional peers**.	This will help libraries make better informed, cost-productive decisions when assigning database creation/management tasks to staff.
2	As the digital age is now upon us, many researchers enjoy being able to search archival finding aids online and browsing digital collections from the comfort of their own home.	However, many **archives** often have lone arrangers or a small staff and it is often difficult to find time for digitization projects.	This study will investigate **whether providing online finding aids** and **partially digitizing collections will** help **draw** in **more researcher**s.	The study will help archives decide whether or not to digitize collections and post finding aids online, and which collections they should digitize because of the cost and time involved in the process
3	**Project SAVE Armenian Photograph Archives** in Watertown, MA has over 30,000 images in its collection and is the premier archive of Armenian photos.	However, no study has been performed to determine the needs of image-seeking users of the archives.	This study will evaluate the **user needs with regards to digitization of collection**, to determine if digitization is necessary and to what extent.	The knowledge gained from such a study would aid in procuring the funds necessary to digitize the large collection so that the information within the archive could reach a larger audience.
4	The **local history room of the Somerville Public Library** is a **collection** that has grown organically over the years.	However, local history collections have constituted very little of the discussion of archival practices, although many local libraries in New England maintain a collection.	This study will help evaluate **if the local history collection is meeting the needs of the patron**, and help determine what patrons need from history resources in the public library setting.	This will help libraries better position their legacy collection, or create a new collection for educational purposes.
5	The **Farr Regional Library,** the main branch of the High Plains Library District, has	However, it is not clear how effective the program has been in providing	Before the library board decides to implement self-checkout systems on its	The evaluation will help determine patrons' level of satisfaction with the system, potentially save the library

	implemented a **self-checkout program**.	patrons with faster service, giving more control over their library experience and in allowing circulation staff to spend more time on other tasks.	other branches, this study will evaluate the **effectiveness of the system** at the Farr Regional Library.	money over time, and provide for better overall customer service for library patrons.
6	A new service is being offered by the medical school reference librarians to encourage use of their expert abilities and the library, whereby the **reference librarians set up a portable station in the cafeteria** during peak dining hours.	Since this is a relatively new service, it is unknown if the users are actually finding this portable reference service useful and if anything could be done to make it better.	This study will investigate **if users find this new service useful**, and if they are willing to return or are returning.	More information on the efficacy of this service should help the library better serve the needs of and be a useful part of the medical school community.
7	A new digital circulation system has just been implemented in a **small library for a private educational institute** in Boston, MA that was used to a rolodex of old book inserts ranging in dates from ten years ago to the present.	However, it is not clear how the new system will impact patrons used to an older system.	This study will evaluate **whether the process of implementing the digital circulation system adequately takes into account the concerns of users** who are used to the older system.	The evaluation will help shed light on aspects of the new system which patrons find frustrating and those they find useful, and allow the library staff to adjust operations based on those issues.
8	A **new lecture series at the Boston Public Library** offers free admission to all Bostonians, caters to people from a wide variety of academic programs and schools in a city with many universities.	However, it is not apparent how useful do scholars of different sorts find these series – academic researchers, librarians and curious Bostonians in search of an afternoon of enlightenment.	This study will evaluate the **effect** of the new literary lecture series at the library **on all those who benefit scholastically** from the resources of the Boston Public Library.	An evaluation of this particular lecture series could shed light not only on its effectiveness for the Boston Public Library, but on the way literature lecture series affect urban and/or academic communities in general.
9	**Marketing** serves a valuable role in	Yet, no study has been	The library will conduct a	Through the study, the library can

	promoting library services to known and unknown users.	commissioned by the Cambridge Public Library to observe **how patrons of the Central Square branch found out about the services** offered here.	study of new patrons registering for library cards focusing on their method of acquaintance with the library.	determine how effective its current marketing is and what can it do to improve.
10	**Overdrive Media** currently supplies online downloadable media (audio and e-books) for more than 8,500 libraries across the U.S.	While much research has been devoted to the study of user characteristics and the use of e-book and e-journals in a research setting, audio books have not been studied all that much.	This study will evaluate the **selection criteria for audio books** in a shared virtual branch called CW/Mars.	Understanding the use and demand for this type of service and the effect it has in the library marketplace is essential to establishing a development plan for online downloadable media collection that will be sustainable and effectively meets patron needs.
11	A **university archives** with a medium-sized repository has just implemented a new website.	However, it is not clear if the website is effective in helping visitors decide what they want before they come to the physical building.	This study will evaluate the **effectiveness of the website** in disseminating information about the materials stored in the archives.	The evaluation will help the stakeholders ascertain if the website is effective in meeting user needs and what, if any, changes are required.
12	The **State Library of Massachusetts** is an important resource for state employees.	However, there is no data suggesting that there is currently a working marketing plan.	This study will evaluate the **marketing practices of the library and** determine **its efficacy**.	The study will help the library understand the efficacy of its marketing practices and to modify the practices to increase the number of patrons.
13	**Facility design** is a high priority for librarians who want to effectively attract users to their space.	Yet, no assessment has been made to address the lack of successful facility design in regard to teen space at the **Honan-Allston Library**.	This study will evaluate **the young adult's facility** to ascertain whether the space is **effective** in encouraging positive teen experiences in the library.	Such a study will result in the redevelopment of a space that is inviting and meets the needs of young adults, leading to higher young adult library patronage in the Allston community.
14	Any training	Despite the	This study will	The study will allow

	provided to implement a **disaster recovery plan in a university archive** must focus not just on the preservation of the collection, but also on the way staff should handle their individual responsibilities.	importance placed on the competency of staff members during a disaster, very little data is available on how feedback from staff about their training can assist in effectively executing the disaster plan.	determine **how comfortable and confident staff feels when performing their role within the disaster plan**.	the institution to modify and perfect their plans so that the staff feel involved in the process, and may lead to an increased likelihood of successfully preserving the collection in the unfortunate event of a disaster.
15	The **Thomas Crane Public Library's music CD collection** constitutes a significant portion of the library budget, and the items that comprise it are consistently sought after.	Yet, no studies have been performed measuring the collection's usability or physical accessibility, and patrons and staff have called these aspects of the CD collection into question.	An evaluation using a questionnaire will gather data on the **collection's usability and physical accessibility**.	The study will benefit the patrons by making a more accessible music collection. The library staff will likely get fewer questions about the collection and be more comfortable explaining the simpler classification scheme and physical layout.
16	**Collins, the smallest branch of the Cambridge Public Library** is **adding several computer terminals** to help make it more child-friendly.	However, in order to justify the computer purchases to the stakeholders, it is necessary to evaluate how much use the services receive, and whether patrons are actually valuing the services being offered.	This study will help determine **how much use the computers receive**, and **whether their placement** in the children's area **results in greater use of the online catalog**, which has previously received very little use.	If the evaluation shows increased computer use and overall increase in online catalog use, the library will be able to claim that the service fulfills patron need and possibly recommend further computer services for youth patrons. A negative outcome will demonstrate that the computers might be better served elsewhere.
17	A grant-funded feasibility study suggested **modifying and expanding the Bancroft Memorial Library**, a small public library with a rich history and exquisite	Unfortunately, residents did not want to change the historic library leading to continued challenges in effective utilization of the limited	The library staff and trustees would like to see **if relocating the large print collection will increase circulation and alter patron**	Getting patron perceptions before and after the collection is moved will help determine if patrons have a safe and convenient access to browsing and selecting books, and may also prepare them to consider

	architecture, that is **suffering with outdated and insufficient building features**.	space in which to store/display materials for patrons.	**attitudes** toward building improvements in the library.	modifications to the building recommended by the feasibility study.
18	**Online book-marking tools such as 'Delicious'** make finding hard-to-remember websites with obscure domain names and relevant information easier.	Yet, no study has sought to discover if these can be successfully used by young children from Kindergarten to Second grade, some non-readers, to navigate the often dangerous world of the Internet.	This study will record the **frequency of young student use of 'Delicious'**, the **time it takes them to find the required website**, and whether they would use it for personal use.	The study would be useful to elementary schoolteachers and librarians who use the Internet as a vital teaching tool and information source but lack the time and ability to type in domain names for each child's computer.
19	Since the release of the first **Amazon Kindle** in November 2007, interest in e-book readers such as Kindle or **Sony e-reader** has quickly increased.	To date, there is little information available about the issues faced by libraries choosing to lend e-readers to patrons.	This study will gather **patron input to determine current and future e-reader circulation procedures** and ways in which the service could be improved.	The study could serve as a road map of sorts for libraries wishing to purchase e-readers and to implement this type of service.
20	The **Portsmouth Public Library provides access to 166 licensed electronic databases**, a service offered at substantial cost.	However, the extent to which library patrons avail themselves of this resource is unknown.	The study will help determine **if the databases are those that the patrons want** or if the library should subscribe to others.	The results of this study will help the Portsmouth Public Library allocate its limited funds in a manner consistent with the needs of its patrons.
21	The **Waltham Public Library's archives** contain personal historical information like high school yearbooks, marriage notices, and other materials of local and personal importance.	Unfortunately, as most of the information from the archives is not catalogued or bar-coded, there is no consistent way to track the value of the archives.	This evaluation will determine the **satisfaction of archival users, and the frequency** with which they **avail** themselves of the **services offered by the archivist**.	Results of the evaluation will be used by the library to strengthen outreach programming, reconsider staffing and hours, and include information in annual budget reports– an important issue for the library as it has faced a $75,000 budget cut.
22	The **Luther W.**	There isn't an	This	Insight gained from

	Brady Art Gallery is the professional showcase for art at George Washington University, Washington D.C.	information system for the gallery that would organize the various holdings in the Permanent Collection, and would also make them accessible to those unfamiliar with cataloging rules.	evaluation seeks to **determine the language preferred by patrons to describe the artworks** – cataloging methods such as AACR2 or MARC, or a proprietary language of descriptions for the repository.	this study would assist Art Librarians in describing art in a way that is accessible and helpful to patrons from all backgrounds.
23	The **"One Card...Endless Possibilities!" program encourages** Manchester City **Library patrons to visit local businesses in the city to obtain discount**s/freebies by showing their library card.	Since the inception of the program 3 years ago, a formal evaluation has never been conducted regarding the **community response or effectiveness of partnering with businesses**.	This study will seek to understand the unique experience of each business and patron through the program.	The results of the study will help determine the connection between library patrons and local businesses, reveal areas where the program is lacking, establish if the program was responsible for new library cardholders, and ultimately decide if the program will continue in the future.
24	**Historical societies** offer a wealth of research material, trained staff eager to assist with queries, and an array of exhibitions and lectures, yet their attendance levels are modest compared to those of libraries, museums and universities.	No study has previously been conducted to **analyze the way in which moderately-sized historical societies approach user programs and outreach**, and their **effectiveness**.	This study will help a historical society similar to the New England Historic Genealogical Society evaluate its user programs and outreach and compare these with those offered by peers.	Insight gained from this study will illustrate whether or not there is a need for the historical society to implement a more aggressive outreach program and offer a larger selection of user programs.
25	A small-to-medium-sized **corporate library of the law firm**, Greeley and Cour has **purchased a new Online Public Access Catalog** (OPAC)	There is much literature about evaluation of launching technology and even OPACs, but not many in small, insular	This study will evaluate the **usability of the new OPAC** with respect to ease of use, intuitiveness, expected	The evaluation will help the library improve the interface and contents of the OPAC. With better access to information, the firm can make better legal representations and

	to replace their ugly and underused 10-year old system.	settings like this one.	future use, attractiveness of interface, and search precision.	the library could become the place where patrons go for top quality legal information.
26	**Small Liberal Art College's library** has **always offered introductory workshops** covering library **resources and** basic **research methods** during the first few weeks of the semester.	However, an increasing number of professors, students and library staff members are questioning the effectiveness of these.	This study will evaluate the **effectiveness of these workshops and the usability of the library website.**	The study will help determine the usefulness of these resources to students in meeting the stated learning outcomes of the college, of which research skills are a major component.
27	**The Night Owl Program is an innovative new method of the Annenberg Library collaborating with professors** of the Pine Manor College, Chestnut Hill, MA and incentivizing students to use the library.	The course integrated approach used by the program is recommended in LIS literature but few studies have been done to compare its effectiveness with other methods.	This study will determine **if a curriculum integrated user instruction method is more effective for first year students** at a small/diverse liberal arts school than the traditional method.	The outcome of this study is crucial in gaining a better understanding of the most effective way to provide user instruction to first year students at Pine Manor College, and helping create information literate students.
28	Libraries' role in helping new college students succeed is often assumed, and certainly one can see many first-year students in libraries, or connecting to their school libraries online in the beginning of their college education.	However, it is not clear if the **reference interview** contribute to the students' first year academic success and eventual information literacy.	This study will evaluate **how students' visits to the reference desk affect those students' first year grades.**	This study will help reference librarians justify their salaries with the library's budget and bring forth their crucial role in helping promote information literacy.

The problem statements above provide different examples of areas of current interest in the library/archives/information settings. As seen in the cases above, many students choose to study the efficacy of services provided (an area of primary concern to a service-oriented field such as Library and Information Science). Many students have mentioned limited budgets/funding and the need to streamline services to best meets patron needs.

4. Implications and Limitations
The examples above would be useful to researchers preparing to write studies, librarians, as well as graduate LIS students trying to look for questions to

evaluate, as well as learning to write problem statements for an evaluation research study.

Limitations of this paper are also to be noted. The scenarios/problem statements could be based on either hypothetical or real-life settings. Also, at the time of doing this assignment, most students were not trained researchers or evaluators, but training to be one (though most of them did work in real-life library/information settings). Due to lack of space, the individual components of the scenarios, such as stakeholders, participants in the study and specific range of data to be collected (as identified by the students) were not included in this paper. While the scenarios above serve as good examples, they hardly touch the surface of the countless possibilities for evaluation that could take place within a library and information setting (see Matthews 2007 for a detailed treatment on the evaluation of various information services in a library).

5. Conclusion and Future Work

This study has highlighted 28 problem statements identified by graduate students in a class assignment. Using these areas of library/archive/information services evaluation identified by the students as a case study, this paper provides examples of current areas of research interest in the evaluation of library services. The paper also builds on Hernon and Schwartz (2007)'s editorial on problem statement by providing various examples on writing problem statements.

Future work will involve expanding upon each case by identifying the participants in each study and the specific range of data to be collected. Scenarios and problem statements identified by future batches of students will also be incorporated. There might also be a need to group scenarios based on specific themes and specific types of questions.

Acknowledgements

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