

Community Users in Academic Libraries: Data-Mining for Fund-Raising

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Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to report the third phase of a study on the impact of one North American academic library's extending library privileges *gratis* to community users. The paper reports results of an appeals letter sent to community users at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR) USA. The letter was sent to solicit donations and to study the correlation between community users' receiving library privileges and donating. Although community users said that they value the services the Library extended to them and were more likely to donate money (Dole and Hill, 2012), few did donate as a result of the appeals letter. This paper reports on the responses of community users at one North American academic library and may or may not provide guidance for other libraries contemplating approaching community users for donations. The results of this study may or may not be generalizable to all academic libraries.

Keywords – Academic libraries, community borrowers, external users, fund-raising, value of library and information services.

1. Introduction

The University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR) is a public, metropolitan university committed to outreach and community engagement. The University and the Ottenheimer Library play a leadership role in the community and improving the development of Little Rock, Central Arkansas and the University District (i.e., the neighborhoods surrounding the university). In support of the University's outreach efforts, the Library began extending free library privileges to unaffiliated members of the community in 2007. Privileges include Internet access, the ability to borrow circulating materials and to use resources of all types (electronic resources, reference works and other non-circulating materials) within the library.

An earlier study (Dole and Hill, 2011) used records from the integrated library system and the print management system to identify community users and the impact of discontinuing fees for access to collections and services. The study found that eliminating fees and liberalizing circulation policies significantly increased the number of community borrowers. A follow-up study (Dole and Hill, 2012) examined community users' needs and opinions. Users overwhelmingly indicated that they valued the services that the Library extended to them. Many users stated that as a result of receiving library services they were more likely to attend the University and/or support legislation to aid higher education. Some even said that they were more likely to donate money to the Library or University.

This paper examines whether community users are indeed more likely to donate as a result of receiving library privileges. The authors queried the Library's integrated library system and retrieved the names and addresses of Arkansas-based community users who had borrowed materials from the Library during the past four years. They sent letters soliciting donations to 825 community users and recorded the donations received via the campus Development Office to determine the success of the fund-raising campaign.

2. Community Users

Community users may be defined as "individuals who have no affiliation with the institution as students, faculty, alumni or members of the governing board and individuals affiliated with an institution through a consortium agreement for reciprocal borrowing" (Russell, 1992) or simply "just about anyone who is *not* affiliated with the college or university as students, staff and faculty" (Wilson, 2005).

A literature review (Dole and Hill, 2011) reveals general discussion about the need or lack of need for academic libraries to extend services and expend resources for unaffiliated community users. In a number of studies, researchers surveyed librarians about their perceptions of the pros and cons of extending privileges. A recent survey of library deans/directors from libraries at Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities (CUMU) member institutions demonstrated that library privileges were commonly extended to community users at little or no charge (Dole and Hill, 2013).

3. UALR and Community Users

The University of Arkansas at Little Rock is a Carnegie DRU (doctoral research university). Established in 1927 as a junior college, the University became a four-year institution, Little Rock University, in 1957 and a member of the University of Arkansas System in 1969. The University currently enrolls over 13,000 students and offers a wide range of undergraduate, graduate and professional programs through the level of doctorate in humanities, social sciences, sciences, business, education and professional studies.

As a public, metropolitan university, UALR serves a diverse, non-traditional student population. Fifty-six percent of students are 25 years or older; 47 percent attend part-time and 92 percent are commuters. Approximately 70 percent of the students are transfer students, having attended one or more other institution before enrolling at the University. The Ottenheimer Library serves the UALR campus with a full-time staff of 31, a collection of approximately 512,000 volumes, 49,000 serials and an overall operating budget is nearly \$4.8 million.

4. Previous UALR Studies

A preliminary study (Dole and Hill, 2011) examined user records from the integrated library system and the computer logon/print management system to identify community users and the results of the Library's discontinuing fees for access to library collections and services. The study found that discontinuing fees and liberalizing circulation policies significantly increased the number of community borrowers. The study identified two distinct groups of community users: "borrowers" who check out materials from the collection and "computer users" who use library computers to access databases, e-mail and the Internet. There was very little overlap between the two groups, as 84 percent of computer users were not borrowers and 85 percent of borrowers did not hold community computer user accounts.

A second study (Dole and Hill, 2012) reported the results of a 2010 Web-based survey of community users. It provided basic demographic information about the users and solicited their opinions on the utility and value of the library services extended to them. The survey responses revealed that a large number of community users at UALR had some connection to the University, either being a former student or a relative to a student, faculty or staff member. All respondents considered the Library valuable to the Little Rock community; 73 percent considered it to be extremely valuable. Respondents indicated positive feelings as a result of their experience using the Library. Seventy percent indicated that, as a result of their experience, they would encourage others to use the Library; 46 percent indicated that they would support legislation to aid higher education and 38 percent said that they would attend or encourage others to attend UALR. Nineteen percent said that they would be more likely to donate money to the Library or University. (See figure 1).

While library services are generally not offered to community users as a means of fund-raising, the possibility of donations arising from this provision service has been reported. When library deans/directors of urban libraries were surveyed in 2011, 32.5 percent indicated that they believed that community users were "more likely to donate money" as a result of the services that the libraries offered to the users (Dole and Hill, 2013). (See figure 2).

Figure 1. Survey Opinions of UALR Community Users, 2010

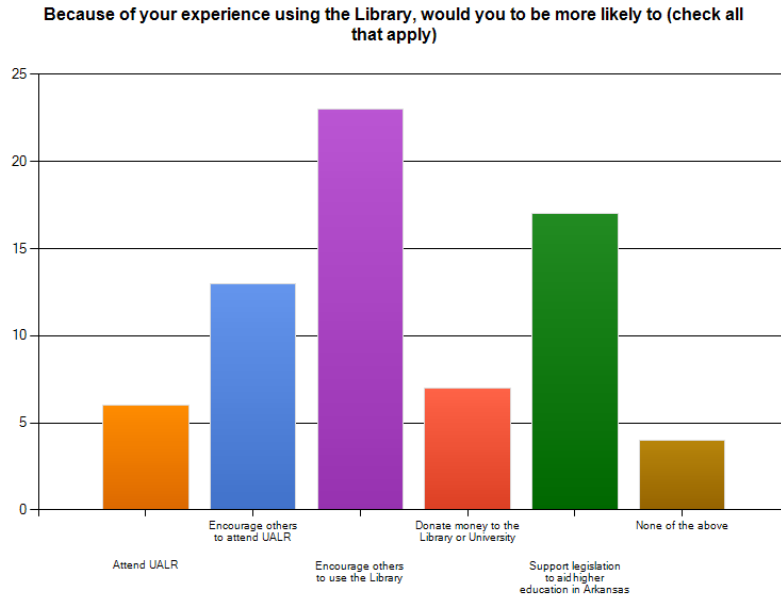
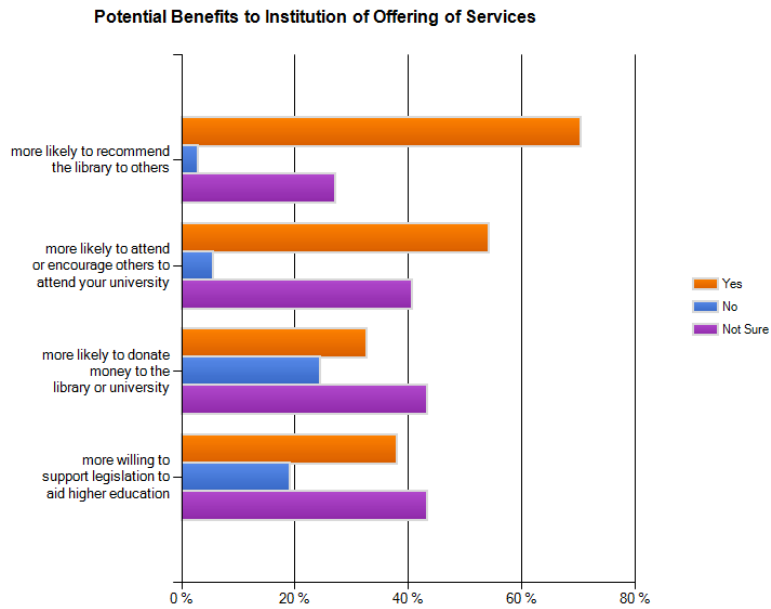


Figure 2. Survey Opinions of CUMU Library Deans/Directors, 2011



5. This Study: Community Borrowers as Donors

Although respondents to the 2010 UALR survey indicated some willingness to donate money, there was no indication of their doing so. A previous examination of the Library's donor list found no correlation between library donors and community users (Dole and Hill, 2011). Until 2012 the Library had not made a targeted effort to solicit donations from community users specifically.

In fall 2011 the authors decided to test the assumption that community borrowers would donate. At the outset of the study, the authors assumed that community users, especially computer users, might not have a great deal of discretionary income. Anecdotal evidence suggested that at least some computer users regularly came to the Library to access the Internet because they did not have the income to purchase Internet access at home. Consequently, the fund-raising campaign was directed toward borrowers rather than computer users.

The authors compiled a list of community borrowers who had checked out materials during the previous four years. The list was narrowed to those users who had a mailing address indicating a current Arkansas place of residence. Duplicate address entries were eliminated to avoid more than one member of any household receiving a solicitation.

In December 2011, the authors shared the list with the University's Development Office to eliminate duplication with other appeals campaigns and to receive permission to launch the appeal. With the assistance of a member of the Library's Development Board, they drafted an appeals letter to community borrowers and in February 2012 sent letters with self-addressed, postage-free envelopes to 825 community borrowers.

Of the letters mailed, 15 percent (124) letters were returned because the address was no longer valid and there was no forwarding address. Of the 701 letters delivered, only three generated donations, totaling \$145.00. Consequently, the appeals letter campaign was unsuccessful as it failed to generate enough revenue to offset the costs of the mailing.

6. Conclusions

This paper followed up earlier studies that identified types and numbers of community users of UALR's Ottenheimer Library and solicited their opinions on the utility and value of the library services extended to them (Dole and Hill 2011, 2012). Community users at UALR generally have some connection to the University. They perceive the services provided to them as valuable and appear to have experienced an increase in good will toward the University and the Library as a result. While extending privileges to community borrowers appears

to build social capital, our experience at UALR indicates that it does not generate financial donations in the short term.

Successful fund-raising depends on accurately identifying potential donors. One positive at UALR is that many of the Library's community users have some connection to the University in addition to being library users. Little is known about the demographics of community users. A previous study indicated that the typical UALR community borrower is a female in her mid-30s. Additional socio-economic information is less certain. In general, the income of citizens served by UALR is relatively modest. The neighborhoods surrounding the campus are generally lower-income. The median family income in Arkansas is approximately \$37,000 and the median family income of incoming UALR students is less than \$50,000. As such, the clientele served by Ottenheimer Library may not have the discretionary income to be likely donors.

This study reports the results of a fund-raising campaign from one U.S. urban academic library. The results of the campaign may or may not be generalizable to all academic libraries. Academic libraries that serve higher income community users may find greater success in conducting fund-raising campaigns directed toward this clientele.

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