ACADEMIC LIBRARY CASE STUDY

Evidence-Based Management
WEST CHESTER UNIVERSITY
WEST CHESTER, PA

Interview conducted with Richard Swain, Director of Library Services

West Chester University (WCU) of Pennsylvania is a public university located about 25 miles west of Philadelphia. It is one of the 14 state universities of the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education, serving approximately 15,000 students.

The Challenge: Managing data to demonstrate library personnel needs

According to Richard Swain, Director of Library Services, the library was facing several challenges in terms of data collection and management. Collecting the statistics required for NCES and ACRL reports was cumbersome and time-consuming. In addition, WCU faced a unique problem specific to gate count reporting, an important measure for demonstrating growth in library usage.

"We have two physical libraries and two entrances to the main library," Swain says. "We need to report gate count on a month-by-month basis to show the trend in library use. We have an electric eye to count people, but it was keeping a cumulative total. To get the month-by-month data a staff member needed to record the counts at the end of each month and manually calculate them from the cumulative number. We wanted software that could calculate our gate count monthly and then total that for the year."

The LibPAS Solution:
Evidentiary support for increasing personnel

Counting Opinions worked with WCU to develop within LibPAS a workflow and processing solution to the gate count challenge. Before LibPAS, the library's cumulative gate counter provided only a continuous count and did not distinguish counts for specific intervals. With LibPAS, the system automatically calculates the difference of the last count minus the previous count to determine the number of visits within the period between readings. This gives WCU the monthly gate count statistics they need, eliminating the time-consuming task of capturing statistics each month manually. "The month-by-month gate count numbers are important for us to demonstrate the growth of library usage," says Swain. "These numbers are what help us make the case for additional staff."

Swain also describes the value LibPAS delivers in allowing WCU to benchmark against peer institutions. He says that using LibPAS they determined the library was close to the top in their group in terms of purchasing but last in FTE per student. As a result of this analysis, the library was able to make a strong case for the need to hire an additional librarian.

Swain points to the following benefits of using LibPAS:

- **Easy access to data to produce reports of strategic value.** LibPAS provided evidence in a successful effort to increase the number of library staff, and Swain anticipates using reports to continue to demonstrate staffing needs. He also has used the reports to show why the library needs to be open more hours.

- **Eliminates use of cumbersome spreadsheets.** LibPAS allows staff to enter data on their own that Swain can access to produce reports. Prior to LibPAS he needed to pull information out of complicated spreadsheets. To extract the data needed for the ACRL and NCES surveys took a staff member almost 40 hours.

- **Makes the case for the value the library is delivering.** With LibPAS the library is able to easily show the growth in number of people using the library and its services. They can quantify number of instruction classes and number of students taught as well as the use of the collection and increased demand for ILL.

- **Provides the data to show what the library needs.** Swain says that prior to LibPAS producing reports "was horrendous." In the past, he says, the library has gotten good support for the operations budget but not for the personnel budget. LibPAS makes it much easier for the library to respond to questions about use of funds and justify what's needed, including additional staff.

- **Improved efficiency.** With LibPAS, staff enter their own data in a secure environment. The data is easily transferred to ACRL for the annual survey, eliminating potential errors that arise with re-keying. WCU has used LibPAS to help streamline the data collected for cataloging and ILL so that it's easier to track trends. Requests from university administra-

tion that used to take resources and time now can be responded to quickly and with the confidence of data accuracy. "LibPAS is an excellent tool to support planning and budgetary decisions. It gives me the evidence that when I say something I can show it's true," Swain says.

Swain sees the next major challenge as measuring learning outcomes, not just inputs. The library is adding an E-learning and Outreach Librarian who will be tasked with figuring out how to use LibPAS to measure outcomes, i.e., what students should know when they finish library instruction. "We need a few key measures that show we're making a difference," says Swain. For example, he says, do students understand the difference between a scholarly resource and other resources? Can they look at a citation and see what it is? These are the types of outcomes he hopes to be able to measure using LibPAS.

Looking toward the future, Swain sees additional ways to use LibPAS. He says at this point staff still collect the same statistics they did prior to LibPAS. Going forward he would like to use the system to rationalize the statistics people are collecting and streamline the data collection. Satellite locations and distance education are also driving the need for new statistics. "LibPAS will show what we're doing and help us make the case for what we ought to be doing," he says.

About Counting Opinions

Facing constant competitive challenges, libraries and library organizations need better tools to understand and manage performance metrics and customer needs in order to compete more effectively for scarce resources. Since 2004, Counting Opinions has been providing libraries and library organizations with cost-effective evidence-based management solutions for their performance and customer satisfaction data. And as well, solutions for custom surveys, open-ended customer feedback, trends, benchmarking, outcomes and peer comparisons are also available. For more information,
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Note: Interview conducted and case study prepared by JAM Marketing LLC

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Please cite this article as: West Chester University
Interview conducted with Richard Swain, Director of Library Services