Evidence-Based Management in U.S. Academic and pre-NARA Presidential Libraries

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Abstract: Tools to support good decision-making in times of disappearing resources are abundant. Technology has challenged libraries to adapt to a new landscape in providing services to their populations. What tools are being employed by administrators to discover useful data for library administration? Even more important, are the data being developed in the process of evaluation used to support decision-making? Are the same tools and techniques viable for all types of libraries? Although there are established tools and techniques for U.S. academic libraries, there are few for presidential libraries, especially those which are not part of the federal National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) system. In this paper, the management data used by academic and presidential libraries are explored to discover common applications.

1. Introduction

Libraries of all types collect, use and share statistics. Academic libraries began collecting and sharing statistics on users, collections and budgets in the early twentieth century. The Gerould statistics, available at the Association of Research Libraries (ARL), indicate that the first organization of these numbers in 1907-1908 included the number of books in the library, the number added in the previous year, amount of money spent on books, serials and binding, number of assistants and total salaries in the original fourteen reporting libraries. (Molyneux, 1986). Established in 1932 to promote coordination and communication among the largest academic research libraries, ARL has continued collecting library data since that time. Since 2006 ARL has been conducting a major and ongoing rethinking of the types of information that will be helpful for libraries in the digital age. The most recent version of the *ARL*

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Statistics are drawn from 124 active member libraries, including 114 university libraries from the United States and Canada. (ARL, 2017) All but two Carnegie Research 1 (R1) libraries participate in this survey, as do many Carnegie Research 2 (R2) institutions. The *Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education* provides a framework for classifying colleges and universities in the United States. (Carnegie, 2017) The classification includes all accredited, degree-granting colleges and universities in the United States that are represented in the National Center for Education Statistics Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). The Carnegie Classification for doctoral universities (institutions that awarded at least 20 research/scholarship doctorate degrees during the year) includes R1 Doctoral Universities with "highest research activities" and R2 Universities with "higher research activities".

Presidential Libraries represent another type of specialized research libraries. There are currently 13 presidential Libraries administered by the National Archives and Records (NARA) as part of the Federal presidential library system. These document the lives and work of U.S. presidents since Herbert Hoover (1929-1933). In addition to these NARA libraries, there are commemorative sites for 29 presidents, some of which support research libraries for scholars and some with information centers for staff use only. These "pre-NARA" libraries vary in governance, funding, staffing, programming, public engagement, and support of scholarly endeavors. There is no network or association within which these libraries share common values or data-driven planning, and even a listing of agencies associated with the American Presidency is hard to come by.

What types of data are these diverse institutions—U.S. Academic and pre-NARA Presidential Libraries--collecting to provide useful information to help guide the development of their libraries? Building upon a 2016 study of pre-NARA Presidential Libraries (Dole and Robertson, 2016) , the authors of this paper endeavored to survey an equal number of academic libraries in Carnegie R1 and R2 institutions. Libraries that did not contribute to the ARL statistics were targeted to see if there were data categories that had been used in planning. The authors hoped to discover commonalities between library types.
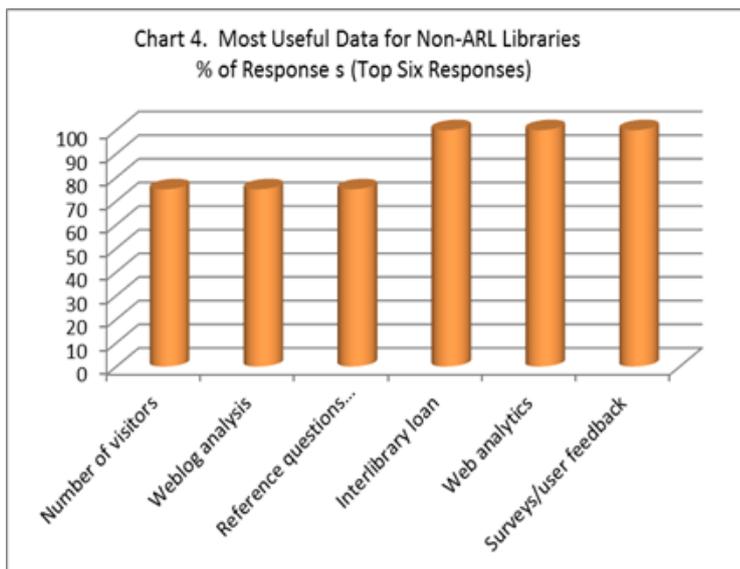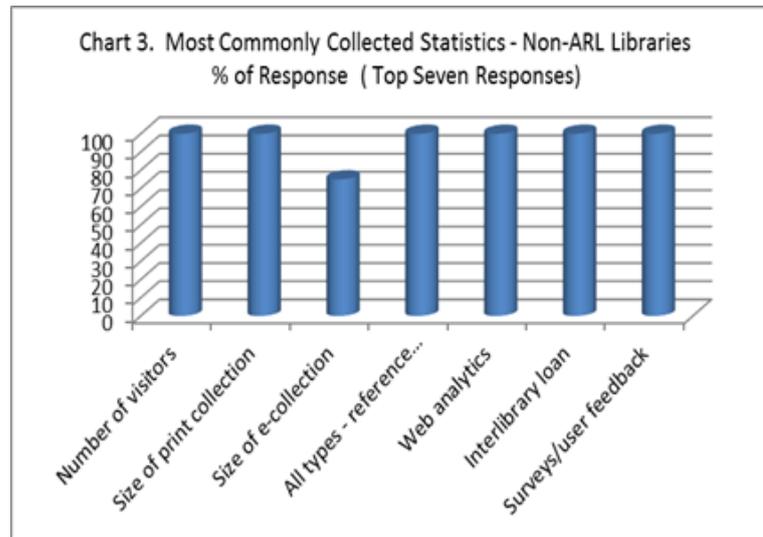
2. Methodology: The Survey
In 2016 Jack Robertson, Director of the Jefferson Library at Monticello, and Wanda Dole, Interim Director of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield Illinois, developed a 10-question survey instrument based on Fritz Veit's 1987 survey of Presidential Libraries (Veit, 1987) . This survey was then sent it to 29 pre-NARA libraries via SurveyMonkey. Twenty-three (79.3%) libraries responded. The high response rate was probably the result of Robertson's phoning, emailing and visiting a number of pre-NARA libraries. The attempt to survey pre-NARA libraries was complicated by the fact that there was no easily accessed list of these institutions. The top five responses for

the data most frequently collected by pre-NARA libraries can be found in Chart 1, with the data pre-NARAs find most useful found in Chart 2.
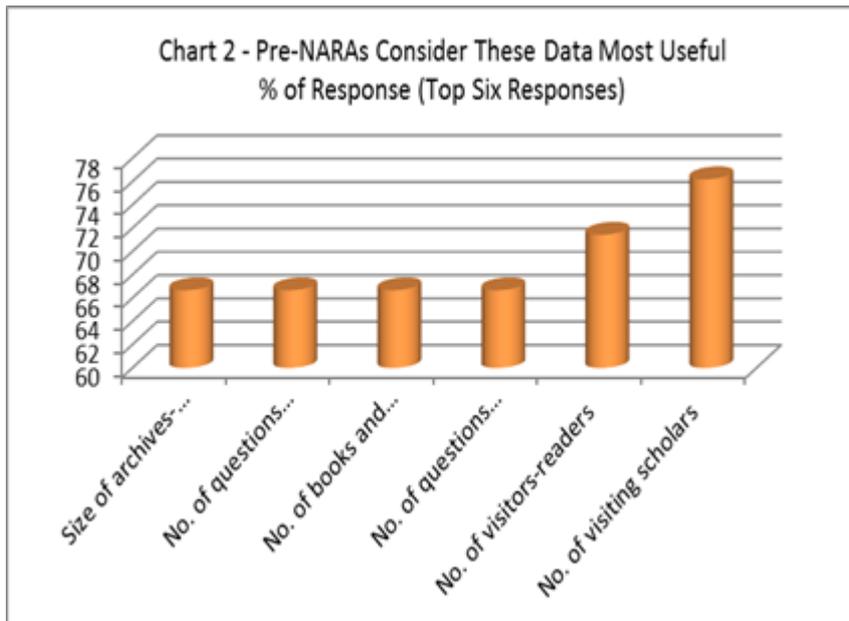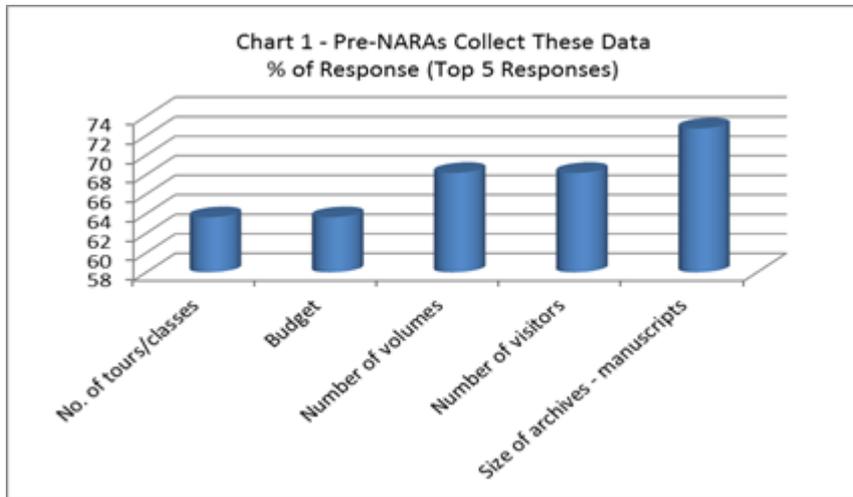
The pre-NARA survey was slightly revised to accommodate both ARL and non-ARL statistics and sent to the non-ARL Carnegie R1 libraries. Since there are

very few of these libraries, the survey was also sent out to an assessment librarian listserv to also capture the information collected and used by non-ARL Carnegie R2 libraries. SurveyMonkey software was again used to collect responses. The top results for the academic library survey responses were grouped and can be found in Charts 3 and 4.

Chart 3. Most Commonly Collected Statistics - Non-ARL Libraries
% of Response (Top Seven Responses)

Chart 4. Most Useful Data for Non-ARL Libraries
% of Response s (Top Six Responses)

3. Discussion

It is certainly not surprising that the academic library factors would to some degree mirror those commonly collected by pre-NARA Presidential Libraries, including size of collection and number of visitors. This data commonly reflects the work and resources of any library. The pre-NARA libraries show a greater emphasis on size of archive and manuscript collections and budget. This probably reflects the requirements of the parent institutions for these libraries. In the earlier study, it was noted that survey respondents were also very interested in using additional information such as number of total staff (including volunteers), size of collection storage, publicity and outreach events and attendees, partner institutions and the use of the library web site, particularly the online catalog. These libraries used data most commonly in providing accountability to the institutional governing board or agency (80.9%). Other responses included the use of data collection to review policies, procedures and workflows, budget-appraisal, to support grant proposals, for strategic planning, budget planning, and marketing.

The additional importance of web analytics, interlibrary lending and borrowing and more formal feedback of users in the academic libraries may be the effect of their audience and, perhaps, the dedication of funding for these measures. Another data point that was commonly mentioned, but did not show up in the top seven of the non-ARL libraries was the collection of statistics on information literacy sessions.

In academic research libraries, evidence-based management was found to be either extremely important (62.5%) or fairly important (37.5%). All of the respondents in this category had changed or improved reference services through the use of metrics collected by the library. The use of metrics had also brought about change in collections (87.5%), instructional services (75%) and administrative services (50%). It should also be noted that several of the institutions responding to this survey indicated that, although they do not participate in the collection of ARL statistics, they do participate in the collection of statistics by the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) and the related National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Academic Libraries Survey that occurs biennially and collects information nationwide in the United States. The data from the latter are extensive and includes demographic and other environmental factors.

4. Practical Applications of Data

Often, the tools used to collect data will determine how the data will be used. It is the general "if all we have is a hammer, everything is a nail" approach to data gathering. The extreme views on data collection in making management decisions are particularly challenging in academic libraries. On one side we hear complaints that data is collected, but never used in decision-making, and on the other side there are complaints that decisions are made strictly on the data collected, but with no actual understanding of the environment within which

they are collected. The growing awareness and application of qualitative methods of inquiry may help to mitigate both of these extremes.

In some institutions, data may be used quite purposefully to downsize and merge the number and types of services that are provided to users. Several units are combined into one based (hopefully) on shared disciplines or approaches to information use. Reference services are consolidated and patron initiated collection practices are implemented. In other cases data are used to improve services and allow savings to be applied elsewhere. A reference unit that is reduced by half may or may not have an adverse effect on users. The use of chat logs in online reference may provide information that will improve the knowledge of the information worker. One of the respondents in our non-ARL library survey indicates they are using data to "right-size" rather than downsize their library in coordination with similar efforts within their institution.

For the pre-NARA Presidential Libraries one of the most important aspects of collecting and comparing data might be the development of a network of these libraries. The fact that they have extremely different funding models from one another, collect different types of statistics, and most importantly, would like to see a broader menu of statistics collected, is a challenge. Cooperation and collaboration between both NARA and pre-NARA libraries will no doubt improve conditions for both types of library.

5. Conclusions

This study attempted to test whether a survey instrument devised for pre-NARA Presidential Libraries could be used to gather information about non-ARL Carnegie R1 and R2 libraries. Further, whether the results, including types of data gather and used, were similar across the two library types. The results show that both types of libraries gathered similar statistics and considered the most useful data to be the following:

- Number of visitors, in-person and through web analytics
- Number of reference questions both in-person and online
- Size of the collection and the related use of interlibrary loan
- Number of tours or classes

The two types of libraries do not consistently collect the same types of statistics, but they do collect the same statistics as other libraries of the same type. For academic libraries, the ACRL statistics and the data gathered by NCES is helpful for those who do are not members of ARL.

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