

Performance Evaluation by Evaluating Performance

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This article comes out of research undertaken for the subject Performance Evaluation as part of my Masters degree studies at Charles Sturt University. I found the subject so interesting that I thought others may benefit from some of what I learnt.

A word of caution: please don't be upset if a ratio seems to indicate something that you're not happy with. The ratio results are here purely to make people think about how they could be used in their own situations. I am not trying to say one library is in any way better or worse than any other. All libraries selected as examples were randomly picked from the statistics tables published in the ANZTLA Newsletter, No. 57 and are not meant to suggest anything other than illustrating the usefulness of ratios.

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What is Performance Evaluation?

Performance evaluation is crucial to a library wanting to show senior management the quality of service being provided to clients. It's a bit of a buzz-word at the moment, but what does it really mean?

The aim of any evaluation exercise should be to identify means of improving the performance of the situation being evaluated.¹ Performance evaluation is more than just collecting and presenting statistics to management. What does a page of numbers show about your library's performance in meeting its stated objectives? Statistic gathering, according to Cram, relates what is done rather than what is achieved.² How can

1. Lancaster, FW 1993, 'Purpose of evaluation', *If you want to evaluate your library*, 2nd ed, University of Illinois, Chicago, pp. 8-9

2. Cram, J 1997, 'Practicality: how to acquire it', in *On the Edge: Proceedings of the Seventh Asian Pacific Specials Health and Law Librarians' Conference*, (12-16 October 1997) Australian Library and Information Association and the Australian Law Librarians Group, Perth, pp. 23-32.

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you decipher if your library is performing better than the one down the road, if all you have to compare are numbers? It's more difficult than you think!

'Performance management is an important exercise that is much more than a simple statistical exercise.'³ As Statistician of ANZTLA, I have tried to find ways to make the statistics tables 'interesting' and useful to you, the libraries that contribute. One way I have identified of making this possible is with the use of performance indicators. Performance indicators are essentially two statistics combined to form a ratio. This enables comparison between seemingly incomparable organizations; i.e.: the little college and the multi-site, large university can be compared by using ratios. The results may not be definitive, but they can certainly make the job of comparison a lot easier, and provide you with some ammunition to use when dealing with management for resource allocation. 'Statistics alone cannot produce all the information needed.'⁴

Let's look at some examples using the recently published statistics from 2004.

By simply looking at the statistics tables, it is very difficult to see which libraries have an effective ratio of loans to borrowers; that is, how useful the collection appears to be to its users. Remember, this doesn't take into account the fact that there may be non-circulating items in a reserve collection being highly used, or that people use materials in the library without borrowing them, but it can give an indication as to how well your users use your library.

Let's look at total loans compared to registered borrowers in 2004 for a few libraries.

Library	Loans	Borrowers	Ratio
Adelaide College of Divinity (SA)	14,730	500	29.46
Alliance College of Australia (ACT)	614	129	4.75
Bible College of New Zealand (NZ)	9,266	661	14.02
Garden City College of Ministries (QLD)	2,361	368	6.42
Presbyterian Theological Centre	4,672	130	35.93
Trinity College (VIC)	10,607	2045	5.18
Worldview Centre for Intercultural Studies (TAS)	9,499	174	54.59

This illustrates that although Trinity College has the largest number of registered borrowers, it averages only 5.18 loans per borrower. Trinity is part of Melbourne University so its registered borrowers have more than one library to get their loans from. This may account for the lower number. The Worldview Centre for Intercultural Studies averages 54.59 loans per registered borrower, possibly indicating that the borrowers value their library very much and use it extensively, or that they have nowhere else to go.

These figures are not to illustrate anything other than the usefulness of comparing library indicators in the form of ratios. There are other factors which must be taken into consideration when comparing libraries. Are your goals and objectives the same? Are you trying to do the same things? Are your collection sizes similar? What factors influence the ratio results?

3. Linley, R & Usherwood, B 1998, *New measures for the new library: a social audit of public libraries*, British Library Board, United Kingdom.

4. Department of Education and Science, cited in Goodall, DL 1988, 'Performance measurement: a historical perspective.' *Journal of Librarianship*, vol. 20, no. 2, pp. 128-144.

Now, let's take some similarly sized libraries (15,000-20,000 volumes in collection) and see how they fare.

Library	Collection	Loans	Borrowers	Ratio
Burleigh College (SA)	19,000	3,026	198	15.28
Phlair International College (NZ)	16,970	3,185	790	4.03
Queensland Baptist College of Ministries (QLD)	19,070	6,864	200	34.32
Catholic Education Office (SA)	16,301	12,676	4,874	2.60
St. John's College (NSW)	16,400	2,471	40	61.77

These ratio results indicate that the second smallest collection (St. John's College) is very heavily used by its registered borrowers and could be used to illustrate that their purchasing policy is 'right on the money' in selecting items that will be of most use to its constituents. That's not to say that the SA Catholic Education Office or Phlair International College have less useful collections, but rather may indicate that users prefer not to borrow items but to use them in the Library itself, or have other places to get their resources from as well.

There are many reasons why results work out the way they do and it's a good opportunity for you to work out where your library stands by analyzing what those reasons are for your particular situation.

What about purchasing power? Some libraries seem to have a never ending resource of funds (not many, I know!) while others are forever cost-cutting. Do statistics show you are purchasing comparable amounts of materials to other libraries?

Library	Monograph Budget	Monographs Added	Ratio
Joint Theological Library (VIC)	\$152,900	2,565	\$59.61
Australian Lutheran College (SA)	\$41,500	938	\$44.24
Catholic Theological College (VIC)	\$40,900	953	\$42.91
Carmelite Friars (VIC)	\$30,000	925	\$32.43
Ridley College (VIC)	\$37,494	1,371	\$27.34
Harvest Bible College (VIC)	\$15,000	4,062	\$3.69

No single library (from the statistics respondents) has a monograph budget close to that of the Joint Theological Library but see how it compares to smaller budgeted libraries. It actually spends more per monograph added than the other selected libraries. This may be due to the types of publications it purchases or where they originate from (overseas materials can be very expensive).

These ratios may indicate several things, none of which are being attributed to any library in particular:

- a library may be getting great value with their supplier in getting books at a lower average price;

- a library may be getting many donations that don't actually come out of the monograph budget, but are still included in the monographs added;
- a library may make a particularly expensive purchase of a special item that would not be a regular occurrence, thereby increasing the average price paid per monograph added.

In the example above using my own library, Harvest Bible College, it's not that I am a real bargain hunter for new resources, but I added a lot of donated resources during that year, thereby lowering the average cost per item to just \$3.69. The real purchasing results, I suspect, would be much closer to the higher end of the ratio results in the above table.

The above table also shows that the Australian Lutheran College and the Catholic Theological College are quite close in the average amounts they spend on monographs added into their collections which are of similar sizes (ALC 86,475; CTC 90,000). However, using the ratio between registered borrowers and loans for the year, (ALC 7.56; CTC 42.16) it can be seen that the borrowers at CTC seem to use their collection much more heavily. What does this mean? Not a lot if ALC has heavy in-library use of its materials, or maybe CTC doesn't have the space for users to utilize materials in the library. I don't know, but there are many reasons that need to be analyzed before the ratios can provide informative data and that's what you need to look at before making definitive statements in comparing your library to another.

Organisational Goals

It is critical that what is evaluated relates to your library and your organization. 'Numbers alone are no assurance of excellence'⁵ and libraries should be demonstrating to management that they are achieving their stated goals and objectives in an appropriate manner.⁶ The statistics you choose to collect for your library 'should be designed to meet the explicit needs of management, in the areas of planning, development, budget and public relations.'⁷

If one of your library goals is to provide resources for the student body to assist with their study, then a loans-borrower ratio may be of use. On the other hand, if your goal is to collect all materials published on a particular topic regardless of their subsequent usage, then that particular ratio wouldn't be of much use. An average cost of items added may better illustrate to management that you are achieving your stated goal.

I have found using ratios to be very helpful in demonstrating effectively to management how much of a 'good job' I am doing and how much support I need to be able to further it even more. I hope these will help you too!

There are many other performance management techniques, products, and resources and this is a very brief article outlining just one of them. As for the ANZTLA statistics from 2005, I plan to incorporate ratios into the results tables for you to use as you see appropriate.

5. Coughlin, CM & Gertzog, A 1997, 'Evaluation', in *Lyle's administration of the college library: 1997 text edition*, Scarecrow Press, Lanham, MD, pp 151-159.

6. Marnane, B 2005, 'Customer satisfaction in 21st century libraries', paper presented at the ANZTLA Conference, Sydney, NSW, 8 July.

7. Allen, G 1990, 'What's right or wrong with library statistics?', *National Think think tank on library statistics: papers presented at a meeting held 29 September 1990, Perth, Western Australia*, LISWA Research Series, no. 1, Australian Library and Information Association, Western Australian Branch Council, Perth, pp. 37-40.