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The Ingredients For Assessing A Personal Librarian Program For First-Year Students

By: Eric Resnis and **Jennifer Natale**

Abstract
The idea of a Personal Librarian has gained considerable traction, with a notable amount of colleges and universities using Personal Librarians to increase and/or supplement outreach efforts to first-year students. Personal Librarianship aims to foster relationships beyond the point-of-need with a focus on sustained communication between the librarian and students. As the landscape shifts toward the demonstration of value and impact, assessment of a Personal Librarian program seeks to answer several important questions: How do we determine if this program is a valuable use of resources? How do we know if this program is impactful to students? This recipe will help you to assess your program with data you already collect to determine if your efforts are making a difference.

The Ingredients for Assessing a Personal Librarian Program for First-Year Students

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NUTRITION INFORMATION

The idea of a Personal Librarian has gained considerable traction, with a notable amount of colleges and universities using Personal Librarians to increase and/or supplement outreach efforts to first-year students. Personal Librarianship aims to foster relationships beyond the point-of-need with a focus on sustained communication between the librarian and students.

As the landscape shifts toward the demonstration of value and impact, assessment of a Personal Librarian program seeks to answer several important questions: How do we determine if this program is a valuable use of resources? How do we know if this program is impactful to students? This recipe will help you to assess your program with data you already collect to determine if your efforts are making a difference.

COOKING TIME

Assessment of a Personal Librarian program should be completed on an ongoing basis, with analysis and reporting occurring at the end of an academic year. This allows enough time to plan and implement change in the following years of the program. Continually collecting data allows you to eventually look at the impact of the program on students over multiple years.

DIETARY GUIDELINES

Oftentimes, assessment of outreach programs is primarily based on attendance or student perceptions of the program. That information can be helpful, but the questions that can be answered from that data are limited. This recipe describes a data collection procedure that helps determine if a key outcome of a Personal Librarian program is being met: increased library engagement. The outcome is common to many outreach programs, and a similar procedure could be used for assessing those programs as well.

MAIN COOKING TECHNIQUE

This assessment plan is primarily based on user engagement and utilizes data sources that already exist. For each data source (or main ingredient), one usage/checkout is defined as one engagement. Engagement numbers are collected for the academic year. The data is then analyzed to answer the following questions:

- Are students with a Personal Librarian engaging with the library?
- Is the library engagement of Personal Librarian students significantly different from those who do not have a Personal Librarian?
- Do Personal Librarian students show engagement in a particular area?
- Is there a clear relationship between email engagement and library usage?

MAIN INGREDIENTS

The data sources utilized for assessment may include the following:
- ☐ Number of checkouts of library materials
- ☐ Number of study room reservations
- ☐ Number of student reading room entrances
- ☐ Number of computer logins
- ☐ Number of student consultations recorded by Personal Librarians
- ☐ Number of library workshops attended
- ☐ Other data you have that indicates use of library space and services where the student name is collected. Anonymous data will not work for this assessment technique.

Note that for the above methods, collection will depend highly on the systems that your library has in place. Check carefully to see what your data collection systems

are capable of providing to you, and if you need to implement new systems before this procedure can begin.

For this assessment process to work smoothly, it is also suggested that you contact students using email marketing software. The software tracks whether students are opening your email, how many times they open it (if students revisit the email later in the semester), and if students are clicking any links to information you provide in the email. Depending on the number of students you are engaging, many options are available, including fee-based options (Constant Contact), free options with upgrades (MailChimp, Benchmark), and entirely free options (Boomerang).

PREPARATION
Identify your list of students who have a Personal Librarian and a control group of students who do not. Generate a list of the main ingredients that you want to collect. Create a method for collecting data where one doesn't already exist—for example, collecting the names of students who attend workshops or the number of interactions with a Personal Librarian. Determine what program, such as Excel, you will use to collect the data for later analysis.

MAIN COOKING METHOD
1. Determine what data sources you will be utilizing. Ensure that you are able to collect the type of data that you need from the source. Don't make assumptions about the data that is available or how it is presented.
2. Make a plan for collection of the data. Some items might be collected monthly, while others yearly. We suggest that you do not wait until the end of the academic year to collect the data.
3. Create a secure location to house the data. Share with collaborators, if you have them.
4. Determine your sample of students to assess. Depending on the number of students in a Personal Librarian program, assessment of the entire group or a random sample may occur (at least 20 percent suggested). A random sample can be generated in Excel using the "RANDBETWEEN" function. For comparison purposes, we suggest also having a sample of similar students who do not have a Personal Librarian.
5. During the academic year, do periodic check-ins to ensure that your sources are collecting data correctly.
6. At the end of the academic year, compile and analyze your data. Use a spreadsheet that contains the students being assessed in rows, and data from your sources in the columns.
7. Look at the data to make comparisons between students who have a Personal Librarian and those who do not. Areas that may be examined (but not limited to) include:

- Total number of engagements during the academic year
- Average number of engagements during the academic year
- Engagement compared to email open rates (if you use email marketing software)
- In-person engagement versus online engagement

8. Discuss the findings with your group of Personal Librarians and the library staff as a whole. Use the discussion and data to create an action plan for improvement of the program during the next academic year.

ALLERGY WARNINGS
- Please note that this assessment method does require student tracking, and you may need approval from your Institutional Review Board to complete the project.
- To protect the privacy of your students, only capture usage, such as checkouts or computer logins, and not the nature of the usage (specific items checked out or software used).
- Note that, depending on your data collection system, you may need to collect data individually for each student. When compiling your data, pulling together disparate data sets may also take considerable time and effort. Plan ahead and think about this when forming the project.

CHEF'S NOTE

Be inquisitive! Is there a question you have that your data might answer? A high-level view of engagement with the library is important to assess, but you may also want to look at your data to determine if there is a difference on a specific variable between students with a Personal Librarian and those without. For example, if you promoted workshops specifically to Personal Librarian students, were they more likely to attend? Once you have concluded the assessment, share the results with others in your library to discuss and consider changes for future iterations.