Let the Data Talk

MAES Program Summary, ALA Annual, Anaheim 2012

Kathryn Crowe

The Using Data for Measurement and Evaluation Committee of LLAMA MAES sponsored a well-received program on June 24, 2012 at ALA Anaheim, "Let the Data Talk: Communicating Assessment Results to Stakeholders." The program drew 225 people. In spite of a bit of drama caused by a fire alarm evacuation of the Anaheim Convention Center right after the keynote about two-thirds of the attendees returned for the remainder of the session!

All of us are called upon to work with our stakeholders whether it's a university provost, a city, county or state government, taxpayers, or our customers. In time of shrinking budgets it's vital that we collect relevant data so that we can effectively show these stakeholders the impact of the vital services and resources we provide.

Data visualization is a tool used in many sectors to communicate information clearly and effectively through graphical means. Because our committee is about *using* data, we developed a program to help librarians become familiar with data visualization tools.

Cory Lown, Digital Technologies Development Librarian from from North Carolina State University, set the stage by providing context for the topic in his keynote address. Cory began with a bit of history of data visualization with illustrations of the Cartesian coordinate system (1637), the first know bar graph (1786), and early 20th Century subway maps. He continued with information on visual perception and attributes to consider when displaying data such as form, color and spatial position. For example, tables are useful for comparing individual values and when precise values are required, while graphs are best when there is a large amount of data. Lines are useful when expressing change over a period of time, and bars are great for showing the rank of things. Cory recommended using 2D sparingly – including pie charts! He suggested several useful tools including Excel, Google Refine, Google Docs and Google Charts. And like any good librarian he recommended several books - *Show Me the Numbers: Designing Tables and Graphs to Enlighten* by Stephen Few, *Perception in Visualization* http://www.csc.ncsu.edu/faculty/healey/PP/ by Christopher Healey and *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information* by Edward Tufte.

Following Cory's keynote we had a panel of five librarians with brief presentations on how they applied data visualization in their library or library system. Klara Maidenberg from the Ontario Council of University Libraries discussed how she used data to show participation in a multi-campus chat service. The data demonstrated value, motivated stakeholders and advocated for additional resources and partners. She used an infographic to present the data. Robert Dugan

from the University of West Florida utilized Counting Opinions to assess customer satisfaction and importance of library services. Dugan used quadrants to present the data to his Provost and Dean's Council who could visualize the services that users value and where improvement was needed. Estelle Pope from Coconino Community College in Arizona employed Prezi to tell the story of a library's closing to the district governing board. The presentation visually told the story of the closing and successful partnership with a university library. Jamie Hollier from the Colorado State Library used infographics as a tool to show how a new computer center was evaluated. The infographic communicated to stakeholders that they had made a good investment. Rachel Besara from Florida State University discussed how uses the Roambi business application to provide interactive data as opposed to static reports.

Fifty-six attendees completed evaluations. Most (31) heard about the program through the conference program. The majority of respondents (42) were university librarians. 95% rated the program format on the "very appropriate" end of the scale and 92% of the responses rated the Overall Quality of the Program at the 'Excellent' end of the scale. 87% of the responses were on the 'Strongly agree' end of the scale for the question "the program provided applicable strategies." We are hoping to develop some products of value to LLAMA members from this presentation.

The presentations are available on ALA Connect.

Kathryn Crowe (Kathy_Crowe@uncg.edu) is Associate Dean for Public Services at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro Libraries. Crowe is the past-chair of MAES' Using Data for Measurement and Evaluation Committee.