21st Century Learning Partnerships: Using Community Data for Management Decisions

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Abstract

Current Issues in Management: Project Planning with Community Data is a new course that demonstrates innovation within LIS education due to the pedagogy that integrates students into the realities of library service. This MLS course is designed to provide the opportunity for students to create public library programming and services that support 21st century skills while meeting the unique needs for a specific community. The individual student projects are based on the actual community needs assessment data of the newly branded Anythink Libraries of Rangeview Library District. The data was provided by the course textbook (2010), Assessing Information Needs: managing transformative Library Services, by Drs. Robert Grover, Roger Greer, and John Agada. During the course students were tested to data assessment methodologies within library services as it is happening. Then they made management decisions from the data and created programming and service projects. The projects were then presented during class to leaders in the field. The feedback students received focused on creating a new plan or programming with additional recommendations for local, state and national resources for possible partnerships. Ultimately, this learning opportunity provided an example of a teaching innovation. This innovation moved student learning beyond the traditional class assignment by providing students the opportunity to collaborate with a learning organization in support of everyday library management.

What Learning Occurred?

• I learned that the Community Needs Assessment is incredibly valuable in allowing us to see the faces of the patrons, even when we don’t live in the community or really know the people in the libraries.
• “Before our presentations, I worried that some of us may have some program or service idea so silly of me. Of course, we all brought our own spin to the data and our management decisions created wonderful presentations that are unique to our individual personalities.”
• “I learned the importance of using community data to identify priorities and community trends.”
• “Learning about agencies and groups is the perfect lead in to forming partnerships to deliver service.”
• “I used that data to select the collection and to plan programs does work.”
• “Many of these communities are very poor and in great need. Instead of approaching it from an ‘isn’t it terrible’ frame of mind and being overwhelmed by the need, the approach gave us a wealth of opportunity to take steps toward enhancing the communities through the Library.”
• “I appreciated the variation of programs, ranging from ones that could be implemented on a shoestring budget, to those that were financially more demanding, and those that were a single event, vs. those that are long-term.”
• “I was fascinated to see that each presentation was unique, full of wonderful ideas, and offering information about different agencies to partner with.”
• “Thank you for inventively putting this together. It took the purely academic focus out of what we are doing and made the work more applicable and useful. I came away with so much that I can use at our library from every single presentation.”
• “While the assignment’s focus was Anythink, I like that the content was applicable, usable, and valuable to all libraries.”
• “I cannot believe how much I learned from our day together! I felt my head having to crack open a little further in order to fit all of the creative ideas that were in each presentation. Some of those ideas could have been applied to my own presentation; some will be applied in the future.”
• “I learned how important it is to really know your patrons, as well as those who are not yet your patrons, I’ve learned that doing so takes hard work—getting out there and talking with people, doing the research, understanding the present demographics as well as demographic trends, and having an open mind.”
• “Thanks to Kelly for pulling off such an amazing experience for us all!”
• “It was especially great to have professional perspectives from Anythink Libraries and the Colorado State Library. I didn’t realize their impact on the day until they suggested resources, ideas, and agencies for consideration. WOW!”
• “I also felt this was sort of the pinnacle of the education I had received the past two years. It all came together.”
• “I have learned that using the community analysis principles as a model for how we approach our jobs as information professionals will ensure we are serving our constituents in meaningful ways while staying relevant.”

Course Outcomes

• Enhanced their learning beyond the traditional class assignment by providing students the opportunity to collaborate with a learning organization in support of everyday library management.

21st Century Skills

The Institute of Museum and Library Services initiative encourages each library to:

1. Evaluate how its current mission aligns with the goal of helping the institution and community respond to the challenges of the 21st century.
2. Assess where the institution sits today on the continuum of supporting the development of its audiences’ 21st century skills;
3. Become increasingly embedded in the community in order to create learning partnerships that address 21st century audience needs; and
4. Design new programs and strategies to help individuals meet the new and more demanding challenges of 21st century life.

“It is our hope that the conversations sparked by this report and tool will invigorate meaningful collaborations among cultural institutions and other stakeholders to help every community embrace its 21st century challenges with enthusiasm and confidence.”

http://www.ims.gov/about/21c3skills.shtml

Syllabus

L180:56 Current Issues in Management and Information Agencies: Project Planning with Community Data

Course Description

Making informed management decisions based on the application of the data from a previously compiled community needs assessment. Students learn about the process of planning for implementation of an information service or program and the need for evaluation of outcomes from the implementation.

Course Learning Objectives

At the conclusion of this course, learners will be able to:
• Apply data to the spectrum of management decision making in information agencies.
• Identify a department to assess for impact and effectiveness from a Community Needs Assessment (C.N.A.)
• Build a plan for a service or program that includes realistic implementation and evaluation while supporting the C.N.A. data.

Course Outcomes

Accurate and continuous community analysis and assessment play a key role in enabling libraries (of all kinds) to be responsive, through both services and collections, to their unique community and assists library leaders to make wise, evidence-based decisions for their libraries. This course is designed to assist students with developing a plan for implementation of a new service or program modeled as a result of a previous Community Needs Assessment. This course will build on the knowledge that you have gained in L1810 Research Methods and L1901 Community Needs Assessment.

The major points that will guide our explorations:
• Needs assessment and analysis is the most important management task for an information professional involved in the library and information services.
• Once the analysis is complete, it is then valuable for an information professional to continue to work through the Diagnostic Cycle: To make recommendations based on the data, plan for implementations, and then evaluations, All of which leads to creating transformative library services and programs.

With these in mind, the underlying assumptions include:
• Libraries are learning communities.
• The librarian’s role is one of change agent.
• Libraries exist to assist patrons/clients with their information needs.
• The Diagnostic Cycle of professional services underlies the role of change agent.

Required Textbook


Learning Activities

Readings and Participation 40%

• Class participation and assignments.
• Reading assignments and discussions regarding 2 manager video interviews and 1 podcast. Plus, a personal learning reflection.

Programming and/or Services Presentation 60%

Each student conducted a 25-minute presentation during the Saturday class. For this assignment students worked individually to develop a plan that follows the Diagnostic Cycle (Grover, 2011, p. 42). Students demonstrated professional ingenuity from creating transformative library services and/or programs. The students created presentations that included the following components:
• Community Needs Assessment data briefly identified as Analysis
• Goals and recommendations to community leaders - A list of ideas for services and/or programs that could be pursued based on the C.N.A. data.
• Plan for implementation - one service or program idea explored with a plan of action for implementation.
• Briefly discuss how the evaluation would take place and what could be learned from the results.

Student Programming Topics

• Homeschoolers Lunch at the Library
• Dia de los Ninos Celebration
• A Family Affair
Families gather, meet, unwind with refreshments, do homework, socialize during happy hour at the library, and age specific programming (one program for parents and one for child & one for teens), 3:30-6pm.
• Family Literacy Night at the Library
Activities supporting Literacy & Learning for the entire family.
• Play Place Partnerships
Connecting care givers and the early literacy ages with physical interactions.
• Variety for Older Adults
Community needs and serving the lifelong learner
• Marketing Spanish as a Service - For communication and a welcoming environment.
• Local History and Cultural Connections
• Adult ESL Adult Literacy Proposal
• Community Art Show
Visual arts education series with activities, a show, and auction.

What Next?

In the future I would like to repeat the course. I would restructure the class into a 3 credit hour seminar course with 12-16 students. It would be exciting for the course to begin with conducting a Community Needs Assessment, then move into the identification of a population and then the creative management of programming and services all based off the initial community data. This would take the students through the entire process and provide a service to a different library district community.

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