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Professional Ethics and Learning Analytics: A Reflection on a Cross-Departmental Assessment Project

Abstract

Librarianship as a profession has long been concerned with privacy and user data. As academic libraries move toward embracing learning analytics, questions arise around the ethical use of said data, particularly when it involves students. This paper will explore the role of the library in an institutional learning analytics project. In 2016, the Library at Pace University was approached by the assessment office within the Dyson School of Arts & Sciences and asked to help create a quantitative assessment tool around student learning of information literacy. Using this experience as a starting point, I will explore how librarians can bring ethical and professional issues of the collection of student data to the forefront when working with departmental and campus administration on learning analytics projects, despite the power imbalance that is generally present in an administration-librarian collaboration.

Keywords

Academic libraries, learning analytics, assessment, student data

Author Biography

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Introduction

User data and privacy has long been an issue in librarianship. As academic libraries move toward embracing learning analytics, questions arise around the ethical use of said data, especially student data. Much of the existing literature explores the application of learning analytics to library-specific user data (e.g., patron records of checkouts, interlibrary loan, or database use) and privacy, often in support of retention studies.

This paper will explore the role of the library in an assessment project that harnessed the institution's access to large amounts of student data in an attempt to combine information literacy assessment and learning analytics. This is a reflection on the experience of one person involved in a cross-departmental project, meant to bring forward issues around library professional ethics and the emerging area of learning analytics. It is not an exhaustive study, but rather an exploration of departmental relationships, institutional power, the challenge of balancing competing interests, and how the library might serve as a voice for students within the institutional hierarchy.

Library literature often supports embracing learning analytics as a quantitative measure of the library's usefulness. Libraries are encouraged to enthusiastically embrace the data collection practices of the larger institution, and to support and become integrated into that process. While there is value to be gained from working with institutional partners on such projects, and quantitative assessments can provide useful and important information for libraries, there are other considerations to take into account before libraries adopt learning analytics wholesale as a positive practice.

As practitioners in a profession with a long-standing concern with data and privacy, librarians must be aware of how projects that require the use of student demographic data often fail to sufficiently protect the privacy of user data. In an atmosphere where learning analytics are touted as the inevitable future, libraries can and should be a voice arguing for restraint, for student privacy, consent, and the right of students to know what is being done with their data.

Using the experience of developing and implementing a quantitative assessment in the library coupled with the collection of student demographic data from university-wide systems, this paper explores some of the following questions:

- How can librarians ethically engage in learning analytics projects?
- How can librarians balance professional ethics with competing obligations to the university administration and students?
- How can librarians bring ethical and professional issues around data collection to the forefront when working with departmental and campus administration, despite the power imbalance that is often present in a faculty- or administration-librarian collaboration?

Learning Analytics

Learning analytics is commonly defined as the “measurement, collection, analysis and reporting of data about learners and their contexts, for purposes of understanding and optimizing learning and the environments in which it occurs” (Long & Siemens, 2011). Rubel and Jones (2016) distill several definitions of learning analytics to “the collection, analysis, and use of large amounts of student data and information to...improve learning outcomes and to increase institutional efficiency and effectiveness” (p. 144). The data collected comes from a variety of systems students use at higher educational institutions (HEIs) including but not limited to applications systems, learning management systems (LMSs), student information systems (SISs), integrated library systems (ILSs), and single sign-on systems (SSOSs).

In a moment that prioritizes quantitative data, it is easy to understand why academic libraries are encouraged to embrace learning analytics. Trends in higher education that “push for data-driven assessment” (Prindle & Loos, 2017, p. 30) mean that academic libraries use quantitative data to help articulate their value. Learning analytics can help libraries demonstrate their contribution to institutional learning outcomes and student success and retention. They can also be used to help make the case for continued investment in campus libraries in a time of austerity. There are a number of influential articles and studies that enthusiastically encourage library participation in institutional learning analytics collection, including the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) 2010 *The Value of Academic Libraries: A Comprehensive Research Review and Report*. Now ten years old, this report was focused heavily on the ways in which academic libraries could use student data and learning analytics to prove their value within their institutions. Published by the major professional association for academic libraries, this report leaned heavily into the adoption of learning analytics without adequately addressing “the ways in which learning analytics potentially conflicts with transcendent values found in education and librarianship, such as lifelong learning, democracy, privacy, and the rights and responsibilities of citizenship” (Oliphant & Brundin, 2019, pp. 19–20).

Oakleaf, the author of the ACRL report, has followed up with multiple articles that promote library involvement in institutional learning analytics programs with only passing mentions of potential ethical issues. Oakleaf’s 2016 article acknowledges and then summarily dismisses librarian ethical concerns

with a single sentence: Oakleaf acknowledges that “most librarians list data privacy and security as top challenges confronting any systematic use of student data in higher education,” but concludes that “librarian concerns about these areas notwithstanding, data privacy and security are not typically the most difficult obstacles that learning analytics projects need to surmount” (Oakleaf, 2016, p. 473). This is the extent of the engagement with issues of privacy, let alone professional ethics. More recently, Oakleaf writes that “the inclusion of library data in institutional learning analytics systems requires a significant shift in professional library practice and a reconciliation between long held ethical positions and new imperatives to support student learning and success” (2018, p. 20), but she does not go on to address how to attempt such a reconciliation. Similarly, Hinchliffe says libraries must negotiate “the boundaries between the value we’re trying to create as libraries and the values that we have on privacy” (Hinchliffe & Asher, 2015), then goes on to frame the wholesale collection of data in a positive light, arguing that libraries “have an ethical obligation to put the data we collect to use in the highest level of service” to users (Hinchliffe & Asher, 2015).

This glossing or dismissing of the ethical issues is not consistent throughout library research literature, and other authors have done more to engage with the intersection of academic libraries, learning analytics, and ethics. Indeed, Hinchliffe, ACRL president at the time *The Value of Academic Libraries* was published, recognizes that the report is not without its critics: “This work has been heavily criticized for its focus on collecting user data and, at times, for facilitating the neoliberal transformation of higher education” (2018). Hinchliffe goes on to offer ways to attempt to reconcile the practice of large-scale user data collection with the library profession’s concern with user privacy.

The ethics of learning analytics is also a primary concern of Jones (2017), Jones and LeClere (2018), Jones and Salo (2018), Rubel and Jones (2016), Asher (2017), and Chowcat et al. (2015). For Asher, the “tension between the ethical imperatives of providing high-quality access and services and protecting the privacy and confidentiality of users is at the core of librarians’ relationship with the analysis of user data” (2017, p. 44). From here, he goes on to lay out reasons why it is important for libraries to bring an ethical perspective, and recommends some data practices for libraries.

Jones and Salo recognize that “it is the responsibility of librarians to advocate for library values and ethical positions by participating in conversations about and design of LA systems at their institutions...” (2018, p. 315) and that librarians embed “their values in LA through actively participating in the conversations, governance structures, and policies that ultimately shape the use of the technology on their respective campuses” (2018, p. 316). While this is excellent advice, it feels quite aspirational, as it assumes that librarians have equal status or power on their campus and can be forceful agents of change. In reality, lack of access to governance structures or policy making committees is not always possible for lower-level librarians or those who lack faculty status.

For all of these authors, questions around learning analytics and ethics focus on library-gathered data (checkout records, location swipes, database usage, article downloads, interlibrary loan, etc.) and user privacy. This is a logical area to consider; particularly when studying retention or library impact on student learning, the interest is in the data that shows where students interact with the library. It is also where most librarians have access to data.

A broad range of disciplines address learning analytics and ethics in the academy more broadly. Statistics, computer science, and educational technology all have stakes in exploring the ethical implications of large-scale data collection and use. Some of the most useful work that should inform librarians’ ways of thinking center on student vulnerability (Prinsloo & Slade, 2016, 2017), ethical

oversight of student data (Prinsloo & Slade, 2016; West, Huijser, & Heath, 2016; Willis, Campbell, & Pistilli, 2013), and human subjects, ethics, and big data (Metcalf & Crawford, 2016).

Library Ethics and Professional Values

The American Library Association (ALA) has a code of professional ethics that most librarians in the United States are familiar with. The code was adopted in 1939 and has been updated multiple times since, most recently in 2008. The code is meant to be broad guidelines, with no strict recommendations [or policies] governing specific actions. As such, it is up to individual librarians to interpret and apply the code in their work.

Regarding library users and privacy, the most clearly relevant item from the code is number three: “We protect each library user’s right to privacy and confidentiality with respect to information sought or received and resources consulted, borrowed, acquired or transmitted” (American Library Association, 2017). This concerns itself primarily with library-generated data such as checkout logs or browser histories, not with external data linked to library projects in some way. There is no mention of the library worker’s role in this relationship between user and institution, which narrows avenues for interpretation as well. However, because of how broadly this item is written, it is possible to expand its application outward to encompass a wider range of library (or library-adjacent) data.

The other section of the code that is relevant to this discussion is item number six, which reads: “We do not advance private interests at the expense of library users, colleagues, or our employing institutions” (American Library Association, 2017). “Private interests” is taken to mean library vendors or other external players with an interest in user data. Thus, the guideline presents something of a binary: outside interests against the institution, of which the library is a part. It does not address situations that arise within an institution, where there may be competing interests that put the library at odds with other campus departments, with user data in the middle.

Outside of the United States, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) has a code of ethics that also addresses user data. “Librarians and other information workers respect personal privacy, and the protection of personal data, necessarily shared between individuals and institutions” (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, 2016). This is slightly more expansive than the wording of the ALA code. By recognizing all data that goes between individuals and institutions, the IFLA code extends out to cover library-adjacent or campus-collected user data. The language specifically positions the library or information worker in the relationship between user and institution, and so recognizes that the exchange of information does not happen in a vacuum, but is mediated by people who have agency to address possible privacy concerns.

Ferguson et al. note that a common criticism of these codes of ethics is that they tend to be “too general and lacking relevance to the situations facing professionals on a day-to-day basis” (2016, p. 545). However, the generality of the codes does allow for individuals to make decisions within their specific contexts. A more prescient critique is that while these codes are very broad, they are limited to library-generated data. It is not immediately apparent how these broad guidelines apply to campus-gathered student data, if at all. The Digital Library Federation explainer report identifies this problem in noting that the code does not “contain exceptions applicable to use of patron/user or staff data in assessment or research” (A. D. Asher, 2017, p. 3). Regardless of if the professional ethics specifically cover student data collected by the larger institution, the overarching belief in data privacy should extend to it.

A recent report by the Association of Research Libraries surveyed 53 libraries with the goal of “illuminat[ing] current practices, policies, and ethical issues around libraries and learning analytics” (Perry et al., 2018, p. 7). This report finds a wide range of data collection initiatives and privacy policies. The authors report that “45 respondents (90%) indicated that their institution has a privacy policy, only 31 of those have a separate library privacy policy” (2018, p. 4) and “18 libraries (42%) inform students about library learning analytics initiatives. However, 11 of these—nearly three-quarters—indicated that there was no mechanism for students to opt out or that any kind of non-participation option was available” (2018, p. 4). These findings led the authors of the report to recommend as much transparency as possible in learning analytics projects, developing data handling procedures, and training on data privacy best practices for all library staff (2018, p. 6).

Ethical Engagement with Learning Analytics

There are a number of frameworks available for ethically engaging with learning analytics. These issues are being addressed in a variety of fields and have been for several years. Librarianship is only relatively recently starting to engage in this conversation. The Digital Library Federation (A. Asher et al., 2018) provides a reading list of guidance pulled from other disciplines that can be applied to librarianship. Of this list, the Jisc Code of Practice for Learning Analytics (Jisc, 2018) provides a clearly articulated set of guidelines that are tailored for higher education and have a high degree of relevance for academic libraries.

There are many more guidelines beyond what is recommended by the Digital Library Federation. With so many to consider, a sensible starting place is these two complementary approaches: Chowcat et al.’s principles for best practices and West et al.’s stepped decision-making process. While neither of these appear in the Digital Library Federation’s list, these two models offer a way to get at the desired data outcomes while maintaining a level of ethical behavior. These two frameworks were chosen because they complement each other; the principals set out by Chowcat et al. provide guidance on an individual decision-making level, while West et al. speak more toward institutional level decision-making and processes. Taken together, these provide individual librarians or library departments a combined approach that can be used to think through all levels of decision-making when embarking on a learning analytics project.

Chowcat et al. set out four principles for best practices in working with analytics of people’s data. A consideration of the following principles can provide a level of ethical engagement that addresses a multiplicity of concerns:

- Clarity; open definition of purpose, scope and boundaries, even if that is broad and in some respects open-ended
- Comfort and care; consideration for both the interests and the feelings of the data subject, and vigilance with regard to exceptional cases
- Choice and consent; informed individual opportunity to opt-out or opt-in
- Consequence and complaint; recognition that there may be unforeseen consequences, and therefore provision of mechanisms for redress (2015, p. 165).

West et al. argue that “engaging in an ethical decision making process prompts consideration and acknowledgement of our values (which each individual has) and context to identify the ethical principle(s) that are being applied to the decision making process” (2016, p. 906). In order to engage in an ethical decision-making process, they set out a four-step process when faced with ethical issues of

learning analytics: “Explore the issue; apply an institutional lens to the issue; view the alternate actions in light of ethical theoretical approaches; document the decision made” (2016, p. 915).

When these steps in the process include the best practices of Chowcat et al., they create a robust starting point from which to engage with the questions at hand. While not perfect, these two models can shape and guide library involvement in learning analytics projects. With this base, you can then consider what is best for your institution, students, and particular project.

Within the above-mentioned frameworks, one specific question (that gets back to the ALA code of ethics number six) librarians should ask is, what is the relationship between professional ethics, organizational need, and student or user privacy? When does the obligation to the university take precedence over professional ethics or over obligations to students? In order to balance these competing interests, it is important to consider the specific goals of the project in question.

In Ferguson et al.’s study of ethical issues encountered by librarians, they note cases “in which obligation towards the organisation took precedence over a set of professional standards,” where “professional ethics were judged more important than organisational ethos or requirements” (2016, p. 548), and where “obligations to their core customers were in conflict with the organisational interests” (2016, p. 547). In each instance, librarians were forced to consider which particular obligation to prioritize. Specifically, in the instances where patron needs were in conflict with organizational interests, a common theme was that the professional responsibility of the librarian was to do the least amount of harm to the most vulnerable in any given situation.

For academic libraries in particular, students are the most vulnerable constituency when it comes to institutional data. Students may not have an understanding of just how much data is being collected on them, nor are they likely to fully understand the ways it may be used. Robertshaw and Asher set out the many potential harms of the ways large scale data collection can pose to students:

The risks presented by library learning analytics data are likewise myriad, including risks to students’ privacy, confidentiality, autonomy, and intellectual property, as well as the potential for creating self-censorship and limitations on academic freedom. Datasets created for learning analytics activities are particularly vulnerable to re-identification, even after de-identification and anonymization techniques have been utilized. This vulnerability potentially exposes these datasets’ constituent individuals and populations to unintended disclosures and insufficiently considered reuse or misuse by unexpected actors, including commercial, governmental, or law enforcement interests, such as for investigatory requests and subpoenas. In most cases, minority groups that are already more economically underprivileged, socially marginalized or discriminated against, and surveilled, are at greater risk of unintended identification due to their smaller numbers and subsequent greater visibility in systematically collected datasets, a situation that also brings into question the justice of creating these data (2019, p 79-80).

After becoming familiar with the larger discussions around learning analytics, and the ethical ways to implement such projects, the next step is to consider the departments or people the library is likely to partner with on such an initiative. What other departments are involved, and to what extent? Assess the power dynamic and the working relationship with campus partners. It is possible that good relationships on an individual level overcome larger institutional hierarchies. If the library or individuals within the library have political capital to spend on ensuring the ethical use of student data, then that capital should be spent. It is also important to set a minimum goal or expectation that would satisfy professional ethical commitments.

A positive way to frame it is as looking out for students. Students consent to the information gathered on them by the institution, but likely do not conceive of or understand the ways that this data gets used. A low-stakes way to address this is to ask that a robust explanation of what data is being used and why goes out to students when a learning analytics project is happening.

As with most things, being able to have a conversation about this is predicated on good working relationships. Even with the potential power imbalance between administration, faculty, and librarians, respectfully pointing to librarian codes of ethics and concerns over student privacy can provide an entry point to the conversation. This also provides some cover to the individual librarians who are afraid that speaking up might damage working relationships with other administrative departments, which are sometimes fragile. By pointing to ethical codes developed by the ALA and IFLA, the individual librarian shifts the pressure from themselves as an individual to librarianship as a profession.

Ultimately, it is best to assume all parties involved in making decisions around learning analytics and user data are acting in good faith. Ideally, there are already institution-wide conversations happening around these issues, and if not then it is incumbent upon librarians to start those conversations. Even if the course of action or outcomes do not change, it is important to voice concerns over potential problems, keeping in mind the limits of library institutional or individual power. It is important for libraries to raise concerns about student data and privacy in part to stand up for the explicit principles around privacy that the profession espouses, but also because these conversations can be used as a starting point to create meaningful change in institutional use of student data.

Institutional Profile

Pace University was founded in 1906 as a vocational accounting training school. After the transition to business college in 1947 and then to university status in 1973, Pace continued to expand and evolve its educational offerings. Today Pace enrolls just over 13,300 students in 6 colleges across two campuses. There are 9,000 undergraduates with 6,400 on the New York City (NYC) campus and 2,600 on the Pleasantville (PLV) campus (Pace University n.d.). Dyson College of the Arts and Sciences is the largest college within the university, with 42% of undergraduates (Dyson College of Arts and Sciences n.d.). The student body is not particularly racially diverse, as seen in the following breakdown of undergraduate data: White – 48%, Hispanic – 16%, Black/African American – 10%, International – 9%, Asian – 7%, Multi-Racial – 5%, Unknown – 4%, American Indian/Alaskan Native - less than 1%, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander - less than 1% (Pace University n.d.).

The Pace University Library is comprised of the Henry Birnbaum Library on the NYC campus and the Edward & Doris Mortola Library on the PLV campus. These two libraries share resources and staff. The Law Library is a separate entity in both staff and budget. At the time of this study, there were 12 full-time and two part-time librarians at Birnbaum and 10 full-time and eight part-time librarians at Mortola. All librarians at Pace are classified as staff.

The Instructional Services (IS) team has three librarians on each campus. The IS librarians on the NYC campus teach approximately 250 classes during the academic year and the IS librarians on the PLV campus teach approximately 180 classes during the academic year. This is consistent with the number of students on each campus and the volume of courses offered. The library does not offer a for-credit course; all library instruction is done in a one- or two-shot session.

Librarians as Staff

When classified as administrative staff, librarians occupy a liminal space in the academic structure. This is particularly true for instructional librarians whose primary job duty is to teach classes, yet are afforded neither the status nor benefits of teaching faculty. Staff librarians are not full partners to either faculty or administration; there is also a divide between staff librarians and other roles classified as staff, notably paraprofessionals within the library.

As staff, librarians have less agency and power when working with both faculty and administration. Even if individual faculty or administration members respect librarians and the work of the library, there is still a power imbalance that makes it hard to challenge or push back in a meaningful way. Individual, personal relationships between staff librarians and faculty are important, but these are not a replacement for institutional power. As part of institutional governance, staff librarians have representation on the staff council but not within faculty governance structures, where discussions around data collection and learning analytics are more likely to happen. While librarians may be asked to come and present or consult at times, the lack of a standing avenue for input on faculty governance consistently leaves staff librarians out of important conversations.

The library is often considered less important than academic departments and other administrative offices. This leads to hesitation among library staff to push back against institutional priorities, even where they may contravene library professional ethics or best practices.

The Information Literacy Assessment Project

In the fall of 2016, the head of the IS team and I were approached by two members (one faculty member and one administrator) of the assessment office within the Dyson School of Arts & Sciences. We were asked to help create a quantitative tool to assess students' information literacy skills. The reason for this assessment was multi-fold. Pace was in the midst of a writing a self-study for the Middle States Commission on Higher Education in support of continuance of accreditation, an effort that required assessment activities from most departments. One of the 12 learning outcomes of the Dyson Core Curriculum is "Information Literacy and Research" (Dyson College of Arts and Sciences, n.d.-b). While many faculty indicate that they teach information literacy in their classes, the library seemed a better place to assess this learning outcome, as there is a more defined intervention there, in the form of library instruction.

The Library had planned to do a similar assessment project on its own and was willing to partner with Dyson. Our goal was to better understand what and how students were learning during one-shot information literacy sessions, with an eye toward changing instruction to better suit student needs. We were focused on what is known as "closing the loop," taking assessment data and using it to change and improve library instruction on both a departmental level and an individual librarian level.

By partnering with the Dyson Assessment Office, the Library could avail ourselves of their knowledge and expertise to create a useful assessment tool that would provide us with meaningful data. This was seen as the primary benefit for the Library, since library staff had experience creating surveys, but we lacked the assessment office's facility with statistical models and results analysis. Further, by partnering with a fairly high level and influential administrators, the partnership would enable the Library to raise its institutional profile.

Once this partnership was established, I was tasked with developing an assessment tool based on our departmental learning outcomes, the goals the IS team set for what we teach students during library instruction. The assessment tool that we developed was a detailed, 26-question, multiple-choice survey, each mapped to one of six learning outcomes. The questions were primarily written by IS librarians and were honed and edited with our colleagues in the Dyson Assessment Office.

While the partnership with Dyson Assessment Office was, in some ways, beneficial for the Library, it also changed the scope and nature of the assessment. The Library was interested in the data from the assessment itself, while the Dyson Assessment Office wanted to correlate the assessment results with student demographic data pulled from larger university systems. Had the IS team done this assessment on its own, it would have been completely anonymous and detached from any student data, since the goal was to assess Library interventions and to improve instruction.

The Dyson Assessment Office was interested in correlating the assessment results with other student data, including but not limited to number of credits taken, specific courses taken, year in school, GPA, age, gender, major, minor, and full-time/part-time status. Beyond this, there was a discussion of whether or not to include high school GPA and SAT or ACT scores. In order to correlate this data with the assessment outcomes, there needed to be a way to track which students took the assessment. In order to do this, the assessment was distributed via student email using course rosters to link student university ID numbers with their answers.

The Dyson Assessment Office's reasons for wanting to correlate assessment results with student data were in line with the ways learning analytics are typically used. The office's primary goal was to gain a better understanding of what students typically come in with or learn in their coursework broadly. Looking at previous courses taken (in particular Core Curriculum and writing intensive courses) and attempting to identify any correlation with the outcomes of the assessment would allow Dyson to suggest ways to "nudge" students in their course selection, or to offer suggestions for broader curriculum changes.

While these reason for wanting to correlate all this data had potential benefits to Dyson and also Pace University, they were not especially relevant or beneficial for the Library. The use of individually identifying student data also contravenes library professional ethics that emphasize patron privacy. Despite being part of the same university, individual departments have different priorities and different ideas about what will best benefit the institution as a whole.

Discussion

This section will explore how considering ethical concerns around student privacy and learning analytics could have played out at Pace. I want to start by strongly asserting that the Dyson Assessment Office was acting in good faith; their object was to evaluate the data in order to better understand their students and their curriculum and to make curricular-level changes to support information literacy, writing, and critical thinking.

My failure to address some of the ethical concerns stems from two areas: my lack of information around these issues when we started the project, and my position in the university. As the project progressed, I read more and thought harder about how issues around data collection and user privacy would come into play with this project. As a staff librarian, brand new to the institution, working with a faculty member, an administrator, and the head of the IS team (and my immediate supervisor), I had the least amount of power. I was the project lead in the Library and responsible for creating the assessment

tool and managing the deployment of the tool in library instruction sessions by six librarians as well as for the control group. However, I did not feel that I had sufficient standing to raise the issues once I become cognizant of them because of my position in the university

Since Dyson's intention going into the process was always to correlate student data with assessment outcomes, I would not have been able to get the assessment office to agree to a fully anonymous survey. To do so would have been counter to their organizational needs, and not conducive to fostering collegiality. However, I could have advocated for a more robust disclosure statement in the introductory emails. When the students received the email containing the link to the assessment there was not much detail about how the outcomes would be used, or that it would be linked to university-held student demographic data. The email simply said, "We invite you to participate in our Information Literacy Survey. This survey will help us better understand the library research and information literacy skills you have gained through your English Composition courses. Your participation and answers are confidential. Nothing will be shared with your professors. We will report results in the aggregate" (Dyson College of Arts and Sciences, 2017). The message is focused on only the Library's role in the assessment, eliding the larger-scale data analysis project it would be folded into.

Another facet of our collection process compounded this lack of transparency. In our first semester of administering the assessment, it was sent via email to students days after library instruction sessions were completed. We did reach out to professors to ask them to remind the students to complete it, but (unsurprisingly) this resulted in very low response rates. To overcome the time delay and increase our response rate, we moved to doing the assessment in-class. The emails were timed to go out during the library instruction session, and the librarian would facilitate the assessment at the end of the class.

This method is not without its own problems. Students tend to be fairly compliant in classroom situations, especially with both their instructor and the librarian in the room, and when facilitated in this way, the majority of them took the assessment without questioning it. This was compounded by the introductions librarians gave in-class that were similar to the email, positioning the assessment as a tool to help the library and to help make instruction and other services better for students. Our response rate increased significantly when we moved to this method. Although not every person who started it finished, there was not an easy or obvious way to opt out, to register complaints, or to ask questions about it.

Prinsloo and Slade identify the ways that learning analytics data combined with markers of "age, gender, race, and/or disability, may inadvertently amplify" (2016, p. 161) the vulnerability of certain students. The demographic data requested by the assessment office included age and gender. I could have advocated for the exclusion of this data, since the aims of the study—how student course history affected their understanding of information literacy—did not benefit from that demographic data. Keeping the university data education-specific (major, courses taken, GPA, etc.) would have helped to ensure no incidental amplification of student vulnerability.

Over the course of several semesters working with the assessment office, I developed a good working relationship with them, built on mutual respect. In hindsight I believe that either myself or the head of the IS team could have successfully advocated for more transparency about the ways in which university-held student data would be used. Without access to structural power (as in faculty governance), the weight of the type of advocacy articulated by Jones and Salo comes down to personal relationships or departmental influence. In this case, neither was robust enough.

Ultimately, had I brought up some of the ethical issues, it would not have been my intention to change the way the assessment was collected, since Dyson's goal was always to correlate outcomes with student data. However, I could have framed the conversation as centering students' right to know what was being done with their data. For Rubel and Jones, "learning analytics is often justified on the grounds that it will lead to better consequences, namely, better learning outcomes. However, determining whether such consequences do indeed justify collecting and analyzing large amounts of student information requires a careful accounting of...those consequences" (2016, p. 144).

At the time of writing, two semesters worth of responses to the assessment tool have been analyzed in conjunction with the student demographic data pulled from the larger Pace University systems. The results of this demonstrated that there were no relationships between how much of the Core Curriculum a student had completed and how well they did on the assessment. This is consistent with the findings of Robertshaw and Asher, whose meta-analysis of library learning analytics studies suggest that because there are too many factors that "affect grade, retention, and attainment outcomes, library use or instruction is unlikely to be able to statistically demonstrate a meaningful real-world impact on these outcomes" (2019, p. 93-94).

The lack of correlation between courses taken and assessment results means that the assessment office did not pursue further exploration of the student demographic data collected. And so, in the end, there was in fact no need for such a large-scale collection of student demographic data, it was needlessly pulled from university systems. The consequences in this case do not appear to have justified the collection and analysis of student demographic data. For the Dyson Assessment Office, hoping to map student course history with information literacy outcomes, the results suggest this particular assessment was not the right tool.

The Library, however, was able to use the responses to the assessment to examine our own pedagogy, and attempt to close the loop by creating new lesson plans and activities that address gaps in students' knowledge revealed by the assessment. Although our department benefited from the wealth of knowledge the assessment office brought to the project in terms of survey design and function, I suspect that, ultimately, the Library would have been able to create an assessment on our own that would have served the same purpose of examining our teaching practices and working to close the loop without needlessly collecting student demographic data.

Conclusion

While I believe the assessment office was working in good faith and that any findings would be reported in the aggregate, as the process went on and I better understood just how much student data they intended to pull from the university systems, I felt increasingly uncomfortable. I wish I had thought more deeply about the scope of the project and had taken the time to question the process, explore potential consequences, and advocate more strongly for the students who did not have a voice in the discussion. Even having a conversation in which the potential consequences were considered would have been a step in the right direction.

The findings of this paper are limited; this is not a large-scale study but rather a reflection on a single project at one institution. This is an attempt to further the discussion among librarians about the ways that wanting to help and the need to prove the library's value or usefulness can lead us into murky ethical territory, particularly when institutional hierarchies and power structures are in play. I do not think the experience of the Library in this case is singular, and my hope is that if faced with a similar

situation, others will use my experience as instructive and be able to advocate on behalf of students, and encourage dialogue on the ethical use of student data with others in their institutions.

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