

Exploring values-based (alt)metrics to enhance library services

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Abstract:

This paper describes the HuMetricsHSS initiative, which calls for a major shift towards a values-based evaluation paradigm in academia and, by extension, academic libraries. HuMetricsHSS proposes that metrics only be used to measure a one's progress towards embodying five core values that initial research suggests are central to all humanities and social science disciplines: Collegiality, Quality, Equity, Openness, and Community.

This paper explores these values and their potential application to academic library services. How might "equity" be embodied in the context of collection management? Should "openness" be a prerequisite for supporting journals? Might new conceptions of "quality" better guide our services offered to faculty and students? Both traditional metrics (i.e., bibliometrics) and altmetrics' applicability for these purposes are explored.

Keywords: bibliometrics, altmetrics, evaluation, library services, values.

1 INTRODUCTION

In recent years, academic libraries have taken an increasing interest in debates over the use of bibliometrics, altmetrics, and productivity metrics to evaluate researchers in professional contexts. Discussions to date have tended to overlook the needs of the humanities and social sciences (HSS), two fields in which research evaluation and professional advancement are based upon different research practices and norms than in the sciences, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM).

Libraries have been integral to research evaluation efforts in American universities, and in many other countries worldwide. 92% of Association of Research Libraries members report offering bibliometrics consultation services to faculty, in addition to creating reports, visualizations, and database access to faculty (Lewis, Carli & Suiter, 2015). Spanish and Swedish libraries also reportedly offer many of these services (Nordfeldt, 2015; González-Fernández-Villavicencio, Domínguez-Aroca, Calderón-Rehecho & Garcia-Hernández, 2015). In Meaningful Metrics: a 21st century librarian's guide to bibliometrics, altmetrics, and research impact, Chin-Roemer and Borchardt explain that libraries are also often the primary purchasers of bibliometrics and altmetrics tools like Scopus and Altmetric Explorer for Institutions (Chin-Roemer & Borchardt, 2015).

However, disciplinary differences in how researchers cite, discuss, and share research in both the peer reviewed literature and online spaces have led to differences in prevalence and coverage for bibliometrics and altmetrics for HSS research (Hellqvist, 2010; Rowlands et al, 2011; Haustein, Costas & Lariviere, 2015). Moreover, most evaluation practices in academia emphasize the evaluation of research-related activities, over and above teaching, professional service, and other important aspects of a scholar's work. In addition, the inappropriate nature of current indicators can incentivize perverse scholarly practices (Wilsdon et al, 2015).

It is reductive to blame the issues described above simply upon the use of research evaluation metrics. In most cases, it is not metrics at fault for the challenges plaguing academia, but instead the misapplication of metrics--namely, the misalignment between the values that disciplines or institutions hold dear and the metrics they use to evaluate their researchers.

2 HUMETRICSHSS: TOWARDS "HUMANE" METRICS FOR THE HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

The HuMetricsHSS project imagines a better use of research evaluation metrics in the humanities and social sciences, and a broadening of evaluation practices to consider and reward service, teaching, mentorship, and myriad other aspects of a scholar's work. Our initial research has found there to be five core values that underpin scholarly pursuits in HSS, which we describe in detail below. By aligning evaluation practices and metrics with these values, we believe that academia can better incentivize and reward their embodiment by individuals, departments, institutions, and libraries alike.

2.1 Proposed values that underpin scholarship in HSS

We posit that five core, positive values drive scholarly life in the humanities and social sciences:

1. Collegiality, which can be described as the professional practices of kindness, generosity, and empathy towards other scholars and oneself;

2. Quality, a value that demonstrates one's originality, willingness to push boundaries, methodological soundness, and the advancement of knowledge both within one's own discipline and amongst other disciplines and the general public, as well;
3. Equity, or the willingness to undertake study with social justice, equitable access to research, and the public good in mind;
4. Openness, which includes a researcher's transparency, candor, and accountability, in addition to the practice of making one's research open access at all stages; and
5. Community, the value of being engaged in one's community of practice and with the public at large, and also leadership.

Each core value is related to a number of subvalues, as seen in Figure 1.

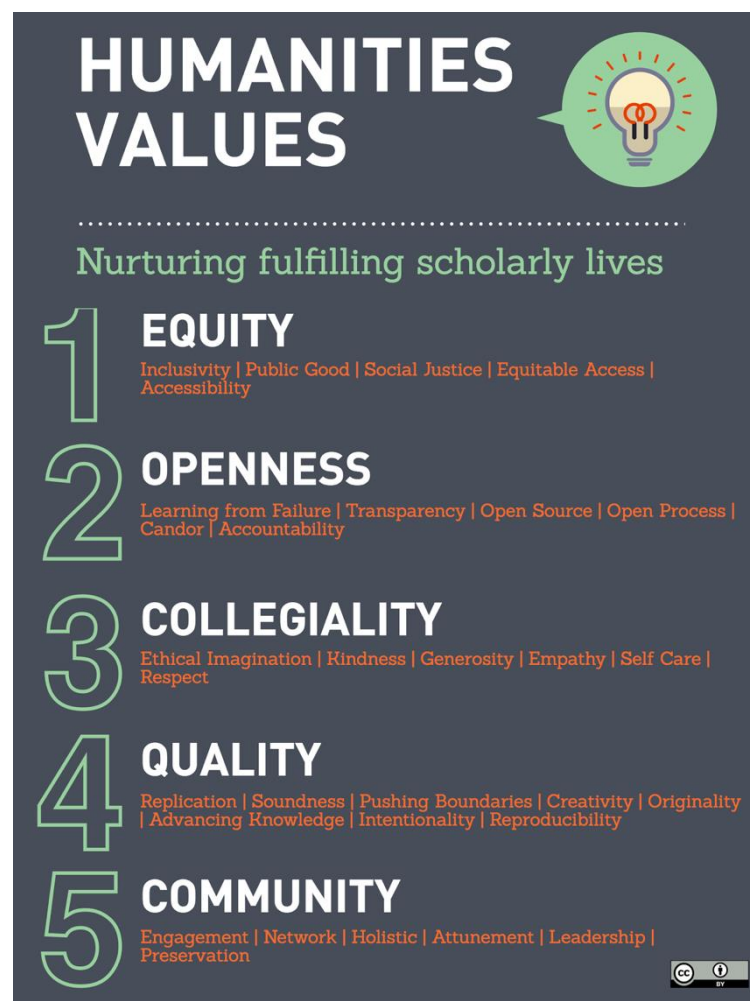


Figure 1. The HuMetricsHSS values and subvalues. CC-BY Nicky Agate

Libraries' services play an obvious part in the support of many of these values. For example, research data services can contribute a great deal to the Replication and Reproducibility of research; Preservation services like those offered by digital libraries are invaluable to protecting the cultural heritage of communities worldwide; and libraries' missions often include statements of support for Equitable Access and Accessibility for all patrons.

The HuMetricsHSS project is certainly not the first to suggest that there is an important link between values the metrics used in research evaluation. However, most existing research on this topic addresses only the values of quality and originality (Ochsner, Hug & Daniel, 2016;

KNAW, 2011; Hug & Ochsner, 2014; Hemlin, 1993; Gogolin, Astrom & Hansen, 2004; Guetzkow, Lamont & Mallard, 2004).

Though academics and policymakers are well-aware of the gap between desired behaviors and evaluation practices, few institutions have changed their approaches to evaluation.

For these reasons, many in the humanities and social sciences, including those in libraries, are skeptical of the use of research evaluation metrics (Ochsner, Hug & Galleron, 2016; Wilsdon et al, 2015).

3 PROMOTING VALUES IN LIBRARY SERVICES

Some basic values are not controversial for libraries: for example, providing a pleasant physical environment, treating patrons with courtesy and enabling them to be self-sufficient, and responding to requests accurately, quickly, professionally, and competently.

Other values, such as some of those described the ALA Core Values in Librarianship (ALA Council, 2004), go well beyond these comparatively simple actions to demand activism, whether in providing equitable access to all materials, defending intellectual freedom, advocating for diverse communities, or engaging in a range of social justice issues.

For example, in the United States, some libraries have attempted to provide services that align with the value of social justice by creating Black Lives Matter displays (Eckert, 2016; Teller, 2016; Garcia, 2016) to inform their patrons of current struggles for civil rights.

Others argue that neutrality is a crucial ethical value (Hart, 2016; Sheldrick, 2017; Cossette, 2009; ALA Public Programs Office, 2016), and indeed the ALA Library Bill of Rights demands neutrality in Article 2: “Libraries should provide materials and information presenting all points of view on current and historical issues” (ALA Council, 1996). Though not everyone agrees that libraries should embrace neutrality as a value (Bivens-Tatum, 2011; Blanke, 1989; Foskett, 1962; Good, 2006/2007; Jensen, 2004/2005; McMenemy, 2007), it is interesting to note that many libraries’ policies on acquisition and intellectual freedom are often shaped by it.

Given that libraries are no strangers to developing services that are guided by values, what might the HuMetricsHSS framework look like in practice in libraries?

4 APPLYING THE HUMETRICSHSS FRAMEWORK TO LIBRARY SERVICES

Taking the IFLA 2017 World Congress theme of *Libraries. Solidarity. Society.* as a starting point, in this section, we will explore how certain proposed HuMetricsHSS values and related metrics might be applied in the context of library services.

4.1 Equity and collection management

In a library landscape that embraced Equity, more collection dollars might go towards supporting Open Access publishing practices in the humanities and social sciences, so that everyone might benefit globally from the production of knowledge locally. In particular, the support of “monograph subvention funds” would grow, benefiting scholars and readers in the humanities and social sciences the most.

Collection budgets might also be allocated in a manner that prioritizes the purchase of materials needed by marginalized communities locally: for example, social sciences research related to LGBT issues, or humanities research on the refugee and migrant experiences.

In a way, these efforts towards Equity are relatively easy to measure. One could showcase the growth in Open Access fund monies, or in the percentage of community-relevant materials in one's budget, as means of demonstrating support for more Equity in managing library collections. One might also consider growth in citations to and discussions of (via a vis altmetrics) their institution's Open Access research from communities worldwide as an indicator of increased access, and therefore Equity.

4.2 Openness and library purchasing decisions

Similarly, support of the Openness value might encourage libraries to make their support for subscription HSS journals contingent upon that journal's acceptance of increased authors' self-archiving rights, or the use of Creative Commons licensing for its publications. Another obvious means of supporting Openness might lie in allocating collection budgets towards initiatives like the Open Library of the Humanities, or other Gold Open Access journals and monograph publishing options.

Academic libraries might also consider directing purchasing dollars towards services that support more transparent researcher practices, such as Figshare for sharing data, or Zotero for managing and sharing public bibliographies. Any of these practices would not only benefit HSS researchers locally, but also readers and researchers worldwide.

Similar to the measurement strategies listed above, indicators of Openness could include the growth in percentage of one's budget that supports either Gold Open Access HSS journals, subscription journals who allow for author self-archiving rights, or tools like Zotero that support greater transparency in researcher workflows. An increase in citations to and altmetrics for one's institution's research could be an indicator to measure success in Openness.

4.3 Community and digital preservation services

Libraries can also support the value of Community by continuing their leadership in the area of preservation, specifically for both physical and digital archives and special collections. Special collections that preserve and share local history in accessible formats, such as the North Carolina African American Education Collection, are invaluable community resources. Moreover, the availability of such resources to scholars worldwide is an essential component of disciplinary community-building in the humanities and social sciences.

Community as a value might be more difficult--but not impossible--to find indicators for. Some examples might include the number of local primary schools that use a library's collections for research purposes, the number of local residents who visit a library's physical collections for genealogy research, or the number of digital library website visitors who are based locally (often accessible via Google Analytics demographics information). Tracking public discussions and sharing of digital special collections across social media (via altmetrics tracking services) could be another means of measuring an increased dispensation towards Community.

4.4 Quality and data management services

Academic libraries increasingly offer data management services, which create an important infrastructure for guaranteeing research Replicability and Reproducibility (and thus Quality). Archiving and data sharing systems like ICPSR make it easier for researchers to find and test the data, software, and calculations that underlie quantitative and qualitative research alike. By continuing to support and expand these efforts in partnership with researchers, libraries can directly tie their services into the value of Quality and its related subvalues.

Indicators for Quality might include the number and growth of deposited data, software, and related materials to data archives; the number of researcher trainings offered per year in data management; or narrative evidence of some of the steps that a library has taken towards supporting the value of Quality. The reuse of data, methods, and software, as measured by scholarly citations or tools like Depsy, could be yet another indicator of a library's support for Quality.

4.5 Collegiality and interactions with our colleagues

Solidarity is an important building block of the value of Collegiality. Understanding that we often work towards the same goals, no matter our speciality or country of origin, we can practice the subvalues of Kindness, Generosity, and Empathy in our interactions with our fellow librarians, in pursuit of professional solidarity.

Admittedly, measuring Collegiality is a difficult thing to do. In theory, service to the profession might be one indicator that could showcase Collegiality. Carefully designed coworker evaluations could also indicate one's Kindness, Generosity, and Empathy shown in everyday interactions with fellow employees.

5 SUMMARY

In this paper, we have introduced the HuMetricsHSS framework and the need for values-based research evaluation practices. We have suggested that libraries might also consider how the HuMetricsHSS framework could be applied to the evaluation of the services they offer, and shared examples of how that might work. We encourage academic librarians to consider how the HuMetricsHSS framework might also be of use to the humanities and social sciences researchers they serve, and to engage their patrons to think more critically about research evaluation practices.

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