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## Measuring Value

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# Measuring Value

University Libraries takes a multi-faceted approach to the assessment of its role in student success



## ARTICLE BY

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Librarians teach information literacy to nearly 10,000 Grand Valley State University students every year. Information literacy—an important set of critical thinking skills and concepts that include the ability to efficiently find, critically evaluate, and ethically use information—is deeply embedded into the curriculum at Grand Valley. It is a core component of the general education curriculum, is woven through classroom assignments, and is a crucial life skill that prepares students to be engaged, thoughtful, well-informed citizens.

University Libraries takes great care in knowing and communicating *what* information literacy is and *why* it's important. Librarians also care about *how well* students recognize and can apply it. Information literacy is regularly assessed at Grand Valley, on a small scale in individual courses and on a very large scale using national assessments

such as the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) information literacy module and the Standardized Assessment of Information Literacy Skills (SAILS).

Although these national assessments reveal interesting trends, they can miss local details. For example, some libraries, including Grand Valley's, have shifted into a more modern program structure, with a single service desk for all user questions. When the SAILS assessment survey asked Grand Valley students about the difference between the reference desk and the circulation desk, the answer was meaningless because University Libraries phased out this traditional structure. To supplement those general national assessments, we also have developed unique, customized assessment activities because the libraries' programs and facilities have unique characteristics.

## Assessing the Instruction Program

The instruction program is one of the main ways University Libraries reaches students with information literacy. This multi-faceted program includes a range of activities, including librarian collaboration with faculty to craft research assignments, librarian video tutorials in Blackboard, and librarian-led class sessions to teach students information literacy skills in connection with course assignments.

In order to complement national assessments and provide a more localized understanding of impact, University Libraries and Rachael Passarelli from Institutional Analysis have worked together since 2012 to answer some fundamental questions about the University Libraries instruction program. This partnership has found, for example, that during the 2015-2016 academic year, liaison

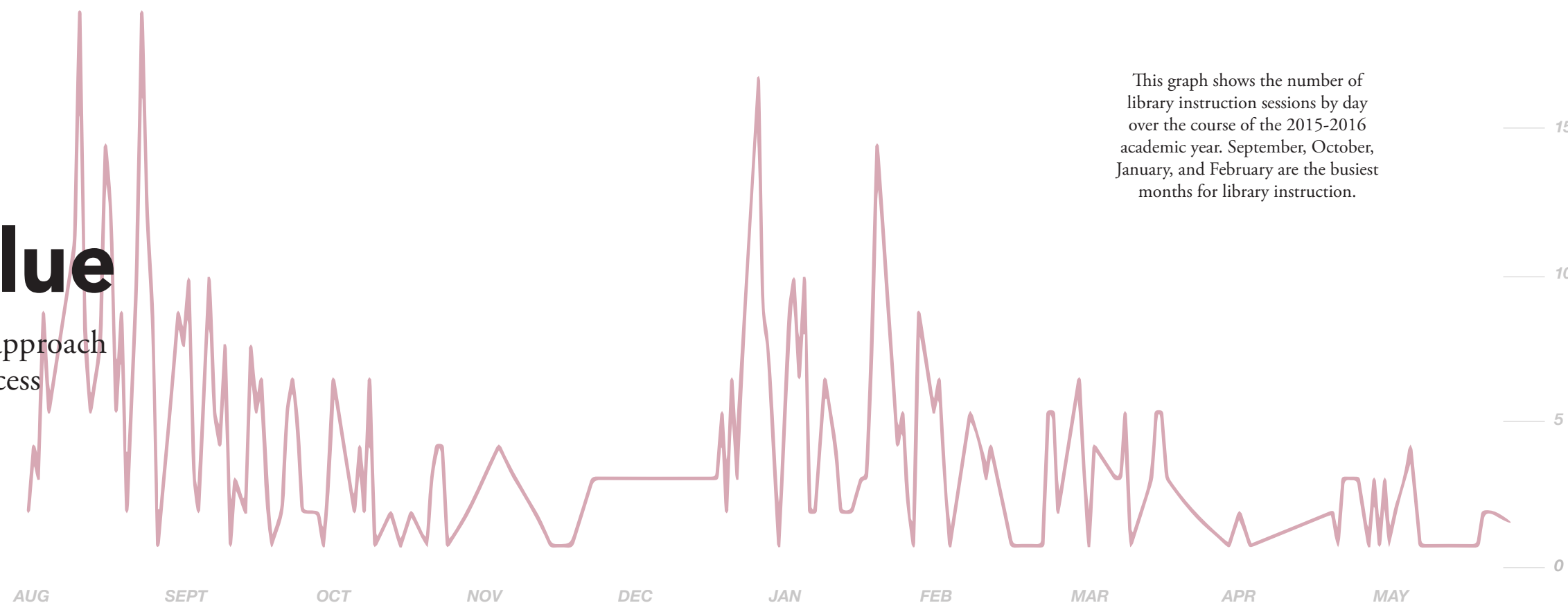
librarians taught 9,795 students in 69 major programs. Four programs had more than 50% of their students work with a librarian in class: history of science; women, gender, and sexuality studies; athletic training; and writing.

Liaison librarians also pay attention to how well library instruction is distributed across the curriculum. The top five courses by raw number of students who saw a librarian in class are in writing; history; women, gender, and sexuality studies; economics; and biomedical science, representing a mix of humanities, social sciences, and sciences.

## Assessing the Knowledge Market

Library instruction is only one way University Libraries supports information literacy in the curriculum. Research consultants in the Knowledge Market, who

This graph shows the number of library instruction sessions by day over the course of the 2015-2016 academic year. September, October, January, and February are the busiest months for library instruction.



## SPECIAL FOCUS CONTINUED

self-reported confidence as a possible marker for self-efficacy, and 97% say, yes, they do feel more confident.

### Student Retention

Working with Institutional Analysis, University Libraries has discovered a correlation between Grand Valley library instruction and student retention. Students who have a librarian visit class re-enroll at a higher rate the following fall than students who do not have a librarian in class. This does not mean that library instruction has a direct effect on retention, but it certainly is interesting that this significant difference in retention has been found four years in a row. These results provide a good foundation to begin additional robust measurements of student success and how libraries contribute.

Many other academic libraries also are actively exploring the relationship between library use and student success. Some have found positive relationships between general library use (e.g., checking out books and logging into databases) and retention, first-year student library use and retention, library use and grade-point average, and library expenditures and retention. All of this points to library use—use of programs, spaces, and resources—as a way to actively engage students.

George D. Kuh (2008) identified ten high-impact practices in “High-Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who has Access to Them, and Why They Matter.” The library is deeply embedded into these practices, which are believed to positively influence student achievement and retention. Library activities can be directly mapped to every high-impact practice, further suggesting a strong relationship between student engagement and library use. For example, one high-

impact practice is diversity and global learning, which University Libraries supports through special collections such as the Puerto Rican activist papers in the Young Lords collection. Another practice is first-year seminars and experiences, which are a significant focus of library orientation activities and customized library workshops. In a third example, liaison librarians and student research consultants work directly with Writing 150 courses (writing-intensive courses are also a high-impact practice) to support the development of information literacy and critical thinking skills.

Each high-impact practice is actively supported by several library programs and resources, and each provides a rich potential for future assessment. Library instruction is already part of the assessment plan; next could be exploration of additional high-impact practices, such as undergraduate research support in the

libraries, group study and collaborative learning support, and community-based co-curricular programming.

### Next Steps

University Libraries, like all other academic units on campus, prepares an assessment plan and reports on results. Every year there is at least one new way to evaluate the work of University Libraries, whether large (like NSSE) or small (revising workshop evaluation forms). Measurement of direct student learning can be challenging because of the broad, interdisciplinary nature of information literacy and because of the wide range of classes that our 17 liaison librarians visit. Yet despite the complexity of such measurements, University Libraries is committed to ongoing, meaningful evaluation of library instructional programs and continually reflects on and revises programs to best meet the needs of the Grand Valley campus community.

861  
**Total Knowledge Market research  
consultations in 2015-2016**

56%  
**First-year students reached  
through library instruction**