Assessing Student & Faculty Needs in a School Library

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Background

Forest Ridge is a private, all-girls Catholic school that serves 325 students in grades 5-12. In response to the librarian's concerns about student and faculty underutilization of library resources and services, we developed surveys to assess user needs and barriers to library usage.

Determining Information Needs

Our sponsor expressed a desire to integrate the library more fully into academic life at Forest Ridge, noting that faculty collaboration tended to be ad hoc and few High School students visit the library or use print resources.

As this was the library's first formal assessment project, we decided to use surveys to gather baseline data about Middle School, High School, and faculty use and expectations of the library. Our project aimed to help the librarian better understand barriers to library usage and provide a tool for communicating the library's value to stakeholders.

Implementing Survey Instruments

In consultation with our sponsor and the UW Libraries Assessment & Planning Unit, we developed three distinct survey instruments for Middle School students, High School students, and faculty. The library funded a gift card raffle as a participation incentive.

We received a 42% response rate for students and a 20% response rate for faculty.

Data Analysis & Presentation

To make sense of our survey results, we coded respondents' comments and triangulated these with the quantitative data. We documented the results in a written report that includes high-level synthesis of themes and a granular breakdown of each question.

Key finding: High School students and Middle/High School faculty often lack the time to seek out meaningful relationships with the library, contributing to inconsistent information literacy instruction across grade levels and underutilization of the library space, resources, and services.

In a follow-up meeting with our sponsor, we reviewed the report and co-developed ideas for addressing barriers to library usage.

Next Steps

- Build assessment of student learning into library instruction sessions to support advocacy for integrated information literacy curriculum.
- Partner with High School student groups to discuss possible outreach initiatives focusing on independent reading.
- Pilot a library Instagram account to increase engagement with the collection.
- Propose a part-time graduate student position to allow the librarian to focus on high-level goals.

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