

True Value: Calculating and Communicating the Value of Library Labor

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ABSTRACT

We have seen a multitude of methods used to calculate and communicate the value of libraries to society. However, most of the existing techniques—such as return on investment or individual receipts that provide cost savings information to patrons—focus on the value of resources and services: that is, the products provided to library users and related stakeholders. None of these calculations quantitatively consider the value inherent in the labor necessary to provide those resources and services and make them available. This project draws on critical design (Dunne 1999; Bardzell and Bardzell 2013)—a specific form of activist research inquiry that uses the creation of provocative artifacts to challenge established assumptions, shift perspectives, and think in new ways—to uncover and communicate the value of library labor. Using the results of a nationwide survey distributed to librarians and library workers in varying contexts, we are creating an interactive website that will allow library users and other stakeholders to calculate the value of library services, including the value of labor. Without this fundamental consideration, librarianship will always lack successful communication of true calculation of value—one that may lead to increased understanding of the full range of what libraries offer society.

ALISE RESEARCH TAXONOMY TOPICS

public libraries; information system design; critical librarianship

AUTHOR KEYWORDS

library workforce; labor; critical design

