

LAS LEARNING ALERTS

Library Association of Singapore



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The LAS Learning Alerts, an initiative by the Training and Development Committee, aims to keep librarians informed about the latest trends and updates within our library network.

Please contact us at training@las.org.sg if you wish to contribute materials for LAS Learning Alerts.

Data Analytics in Libraries

Data analytics is revolutionizing libraries by providing deep insights into user behavior, collection usage, and resource effectiveness. This allows for personalized services, optimized collections, and improved decision-making. To explore these advancements, we've invited librarians to share their experiences and strategies for integrating data analytics into their institutions, offering a glimpse into the future of library services.

Tell us a bit about yourself and what you do in your current role.

I am Phyllis, a senior data analyst in the National Library Board in Singapore. I make sense of library data, with the goal of improving library services to the public.

How did you get started with library data analytics?

I studied statistics back in school, then I ventured into geospatial and data visualisation as my specialisation before landing this job in the library. But I believe your degree / past experiences are not limiting factors to what you can do. For those aspiring to venture into data analytics, there are many upskilling available, and platforms to showcase one's portfolio. The library provides access to LinkedIn Learning courses and various data analytics programmes through our LearnX communities.

“It’s about understanding the evolving needs of our patrons. This is my 6th year working as a data analyst in the library, and the data analytics projects I work on differs every year.”

- Phyllis Tay



Phyllis Tay

Senior Data Analyst

National Library Board, Singapore

Tell me about a time when library data analytics had a positive impact on your work or your library.

One impactful data-driven decision we have made is to use geospatial analysis to identify potential partners that NLB could work with to set up kidsREAD clubs, so that children from less privileged family backgrounds can be reached. The team has also deep-dived to look at RFM analysis, which has helped us better understand our library patrons.

How can libraries and librarians better leverage the potential of data analytics?

Embrace AI! We have actively embarked on various AI projects, including StoryGen – which you may have seen at the Central Public Library – that uses Generative AI to transform stories in text form into a visual and multimedia experience. Within the Data Office, I have colleagues who are working on AI projects to help with genre classification.

We have also recognised that data literacy is crucial in an organisation and should extend beyond the core data team. For that, NLB has set up a community of practice to teach data analytics skills to interested staff who traditionally may not need to use data in their jobs. This has helped foster collaboration between the different functions and decentralised some of the data tasks from the core team.



Cheng Eng Aun
Library Data Analytics and
Procurement Manager
NUS Libraries

Tell us a bit about yourself and what you do in your current role.

I started my librarianship journey in 2010 and have been with NUS Libraries since, where I am currently the Library Data Analytics and Procurement Manager. I am wearing two hats (and then some) in this role: one managing the library finance and procurement functions, and another on library data and analytics.

How did you get started with library data analytics?

I became involved in library data work barely one month after joining NUS Libraries. Two of my colleagues became unavailable and I was asked to assume

responsibility for library annual collection statistics. The reasoning was that I graduated as an economics major and presumably was good with numbers. I was then learning to tell the difference between monographs, series, and periodicals as part of my cataloguing training.

Thankfully, I managed to learn the processes quickly and started to automate some of the steps using Excel formulas (because I wanted to be more efficient). I moved on to Visual Basic for Applications (VBA) and SQL when Excel formulas are no longer sufficient or efficient, and eventually to the UNIX environment, shell scripting and R/Python.

After working in Technical Services for eight years, I exchanged portfolios with my colleague in 2019 and assumed responsibility for library assessment which expanded my analytics responsibility to one with library-wide perspective.

While some of my limited skills in Excel enabled me to get started in library data work, I learned most of the skills and tricks on the job and through short courses. I tend to learn by imitation or adaptation, then seek understanding and generalise the cases to fit into my 'mental model'. I used this approach to progressively learn about LMS functionalities, Excel formulas, VBA, Python, R, SQL, regular expression, and UNIX/Linux shell scripts.

“It is satisfying to get everyone to the same understanding, thereby allowing the analysis to provide much more profound insight once everyone is asking the right questions.”

- Cheng Eng Aun

Tell me about a time when library data analytics had a positive impact on your work or your library.

I would like to think that there were many instances where our analytics work had impacted library operations positively :) It is very satisfying to see our colleagues' responses from an impactful and well-executed analytics work, for example in understanding library space occupancy and usage of e-resources. Many of such analyses were too complicated to be performed in Excel, yet it can be completed and replicated quickly in R or Python, sometimes 'live' during meetings when the issues were discussed.

A particularly memorable exercise in analytics is not actually a data analysis project, but one on deriving an impact framework for the Library's strategic goals.

During the exercise, our team focused on the education and research aspects and mapped out the output, outcomes, and impact of library work in the area. This serves as a ‘forcing function’ for us to think critically about what data, metrics and narratives are required to demonstrate our impact and tell our impact story. Some analyses and visualisations were piloted during the exercise, which gave our team a more concrete picture of how successful data analytics implementation looks like. We are now embarking on the next phase of the exercise, which is to build a system to collect and integrate these data points for library instructions and events.

How can libraries and librarians better leverage the potential of data analytics?

Libraries need to place data-driven decision making at the centre of its strategy and operations. It is critical to create an open and collaborative environment where data analytics can thrive. Many library skills, including analytics, are in high demand. The more we can collaborate and leverage on each other’s strengths, the more we can achieve.

We can learn so much with on-the-job training, where the applications are relevant to our work. It is important to grasp *ideas* behind specific techniques, which are useful with cases big and small. Do not forget to savour the learning journey while we work towards the end result - this gives us the enthusiasm and grit to succeed in data analytics!





Chua Junjie
Senior Librarian, Planning &
Effectiveness
NTU Library

Tell us a bit about yourself and what you do in your current role.

I am currently a Senior Librarian in the NTU Library Planning & Effectiveness Team, University Librarian's Office. My job portfolio includes organizational excellence, strategic planning, and library data analytics. In my current role, I focus on data analytics and automation, planning, and enhancing library effectiveness. I will soon make a transition into a managerial role centered on digital innovation, exploring AI tools, impact metrics and assessment analytics work focused on teaching and learning activities.

How did you get started with library data analytics?

My journey in library data analytics began in NTU Library Planning & Effectiveness Team, where I analyzed data for various purposes such as budget justification for top quality library journal collections/subscriptions, determining optimal library staff size, and improving library effectiveness through service excellence data. My background in applied statistics (Psychology) and skills in Python have been instrumental in this work.

Tell me about a time when library data analytics had a positive impact on your work or your library.

Through data analytics, I demonstrated that our staffing levels are well-aligned with industry benchmarks. Data analytics has also helped justified our library's budget allocation for top-quality journal subscriptions. Additionally, I developed a partially automated analytics solution to identify staff members who excel in service based on enquiry data and other forms of evidence. The result was all staff nominated using the data won departmental awards.

What do you think libraries or librarians can do more to harness the potential of data analytics?

Libraries and librarians can enhance their capabilities by focusing on developing data literacy and technical expertise related to data analytics. Including being comfortable using AI tools to perform data tasks. With advancements in Generative AI (GenAI) tools, acquiring these skills has become more accessible. These tools can expedite and streamline time-consuming tasks such as data cleaning, enabling librarians to focus on more critical aspects of data analysis.

Acquiring data skills is essential for leveraging data analytics to improve library services and operations. It allows librarians to make informed decisions that advance the library's interests. Additionally, strong data skillsets enable libraries to demonstrate fiscal responsibility and strategic resource allocation. This ensures that financial investments are effectively contributing to the library's mission and service excellence.



“In today's data-driven world, data analytics is a powerful tool that helps library understand and improve library operations. It enables us to make informed decisions, enhance user services, demonstrate, and communicate the value and impact of the library to stakeholders.”

- Chua Jun Jie

Learning Resources

Presenting in our inaugural issue of Learning Alerts: the LAS Repository of Training Materials! It is a growing collection of learning and training materials relevant to the library profession from past events such as workshops, sharing sessions.

Our highlight this issue features materials from the LAS-NLB Professional Sharing Session of November 2023: Librarian Adventures in the Data Wonderland.



Phyllis Tay from National Library Board, Singapore, shares about the data they collect, and how they aim to translate it to real improvements to library services for the public.



Chua Jun Jie from NTU Library discusses various automation initiatives in NTU Library, and how improvements can be made to library services and procedures by leveraging on new ways to work with data.



Cheng Eng Aun from NUS Libraries explains how analytics have been utilized in managing library data and discusses the organization's long-term planning efforts to ensure data integrity, consistency, and security.

The Training and Development Committee welcomes contributions of materials from your institutions to share with fellow professionals. We welcome job aids like checklists, templates, practice notes, flowcharts, step-by-step guides, quick references, documentation, etc.! You can now access the LAS Training Materials Repository via this link: <https://www.las.org.sg/wp/member-portal/members-only-training-materials>

Upcoming webinars and conferences:

IFLA Information Futures Summit

<https://2024.ifla.org/>

30 September - 3 October 2024
Brisbane, Queensland Australia

The Information Futures Summit is a new event format for IFLA, focused on bringing the energy, expertise and rich diversity of our field together to find solutions to the information challenges facing libraries today and in the coming years.

Shanghai International Library Forum (SILF 2024)

<https://silf.library.sh.cn/en/>

23 – 25 October 2024
Shanghai, China

Library experts, scholars, and researchers are invited to discuss "Digital Empowerment and Sustainable Growth," focusing on hot issues, research achievements, novel concepts, and advanced technologies.

The International Association of University Libraries 44th Conference (IATUL 2024)

<https://www.iatul2024.org/>

24 – 28 November 2024
Auckland, New Zealand

The 44th IATUL Conference focuses on openness, equity, diversity, inclusion, sharing experiences, and building relationships in academic libraries. The conference will also focus on envisioning the modern academic library and its community.

EUI Library Traineeships 2025 is now open!

The EUI Library Traineeship is a program offered by the European University Institute (EUI) that provides opportunities for individuals to gain professional experience in an academic library setting.

Job Details:

The EUI Library is a small vibrant academic library meeting the research needs of EUI professors, fellows and PhD researchers in the Social Sciences. Services include InterLibrary Loan, Circulation, Acquisitions, Institutional Repository and Open Science, Cataloguing, Electronic Resources Management, Integrated Library Systems and Journals.

Trainees have the opportunity of working in one or more of these services, carrying out both basic day to day library tasks but also being part of special projects.

For information on the qualifications and application, visit [EUI Traineeships](#).