LIS INVESTIGATIONS:
LIBRARY STORIES THAT INFLUENCE — TAKING ADVOCACY FROM THE LIS CLASSROOM TO PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

FIONA SALISBURY looks at two research papers which show that, when it comes to defending their work, LIS professionals can successfully use the accessible technique of storytelling to get their message across. And when storytelling is combined with evidence, advocacy can be even more successful.

Successful advocacy requires effective storytelling to influence outcomes. This is the underlying premise of Judi Moreillon and Ruth Nicole Hall's 2015 investigation into LIS graduate student candidates' use of digital tools to develop and disseminate advocacy stories. They analysed students' assignments in the subject 'The Art of Storytelling' in the School of Library and Information Studies at Texas Woman's University. This subject builds student competency in storytelling as a foundational skill for successful advocacy. It provides a framework for developing the story, creating the story using digital channels, seeking feedback, revising the story and reflecting on the story. Their case study highlights the importance for librarians of developing storytelling skills. Storytelling provides an accessible approach to advocacy, whether the purpose is strategic campaigning or everyday influencing.

Their findings suggest that the storytelling assignment strengthened students' library values and increased their ability to advocate for those values and use social media tools to do so. All but one of the 21 students involved responded to the post-assignment survey, and detailed content analysis of three assignments was undertaken. The authors conclude that it may not be possible to generalise the results because of the small number of assignments analysed. However, they indicate that the students became better prepared to tell effective advocacy stories. As passionate storytellers, they were able to demonstrate the value of library services and programs. For current practitioners the value of this study is its emphasis on storytelling as a way for all library staff to become effective advocates. It was also a reminder that continual reflection throughout the advocacy process is vital.

Advocacy stories need to be backed up by evidence. Debra Kachel explores this by taking a very practical approach to using data

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as a critical component of successful advocacy. Her 'talking points' are stories that focus on what is meaningful for different stakeholders. Her five steps to turn research results into talking points, which are similar to Moreillon and Hall's conclusions, included identifying the position, knowing the audience, being concise and compelling, putting the student first, and following up.

To demonstrate how this works she provides an example that takes state-based research data, matches it with what library communities care about at the local level, and translates it into a compelling story. While the example is specifically aimed at school libraries, the method is easily transferable to any library environment and could be used as a starting point by all librarians who are interested in a simple method for integrating data into advocacy work.

Both articles cited a focus on the importance of advocacy skills as an essential part of professional practice and that good advocacy is about stories and evidence. Most importantly, it is about telling stories about what libraries do well to set the scene for future successes.

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From our collection:

Kachel, D. (2015). 'Using research in talking points and elevator speeches'. *Teacher Librarian*, 43(1), 36–40.

Moreillon, J., & Hall, R. N. (2014). 'Digital advocacy stories: A pedagogical tool for communicating and strengthening library values'. *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science*, 55(2), 100-111.