

UNL Libraries Assessment Committee Report: Principles, Guidelines, and Recommendations

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This report contains principles and guidelines for assessment in the Libraries. It takes into account the recommendations of the ARL consultants' report. It includes the assessments we are required to do, those we already do at regular intervals (such as LibQual+), and assessments that could be done in the future. The recommendations and ideas in the report do not necessarily apply to everyone in the organization, e.g., not everyone will need to use statistical software such as SPSS. All of the ideas and recommendations in this report are meant to be applied reflectively and appropriately. The report includes general recommendations, examples and suggestions of methods, tools, and sources of expertise, training, and data. It divides assessment into four areas: Collections, Programs and Services, Work Process, and Communication and Evaluation. Those four areas are discussed individually in the last section of the report.

The ARL consultants' report recommends "creating a culture of assessment" in the Libraries. The University of Georgia Libraries assessment website (<http://dataserv.libs.uga.edu/assessment/>) defines this as,

"an organizational environment in which decisions are based on facts, research, and analysis and where services are planned and delivered in ways that maximize positive outcomes and impacts for customers and stakeholders. A 'culture of assessment' exists when staff care to know about the results they produce and how these results relate to customers' expectations. A culture of assessment is an integral part of the process of change and the creation of a customer-centered culture."

Strengthening the UNL Libraries' culture of assessment does not mean that every decision or new idea must have statistical or other data to validate it. The Libraries have a practice of making changes and trying new ideas for a period of six months or a year and then evaluating those changes. That practice itself is a form of assessment, and lends to a "culture

of assessment” in a way that leaves us free to assume reasonable risks and try things.

Decisions about library programs and services should be informed by data gathered through qualitative and quantitative assessment. Assessment is much more than counting. Assessment data is more than just data that has been collected locally. If data can be gathered automatically, it should be collected that way. If it must be manually compiled, or requires a substantial amount of time and effort to interpret, it should be gathered through sampling. Sampling may be appropriate in many different contexts. The ratio of responses in data is more important than the gross count of responses. Insofar as is possible, we should try to achieve consistency in the way data is collected, and to discover and adhere to standards for data collection that have been developed.

Communication about the results of assessment is crucial. Libraries faculty and staff should identify efficient and effective ways to communicate the quantitative and qualitative data gathered on collections, services, and programs in a way that furthers our strategic plan, leverages increased public and private funding, and generates information about future services and goals for the Libraries. Continuous communication with library users and stakeholders should be maintained through needs assessment, quality outcome, and satisfaction measurements. Relevant data and user feedback should be routinely collected, analyzed, and used to set priorities, measure progress on strategic goals, allocate resources and make decisions.

Recommendations

- Create a standing committee on assessment to facilitate and coordinate assessment activities by connecting people with expertise, sources of data, and methods of collecting it
- Identify and bring together stakeholders within program areas to identify common data elements that have a direct relationship to decisions that are made about the program, using standard definitions and standard methods of collecting and reporting.
- Identify existing data that can be applied to the UNL Libraries, such as the OCLC user profile study.
- Make cost-benefit analysis a part of assessment practice
- Maintain an inventory current assessment practices
- Create assessment plans specific to functions, programs, or units
- Create centralized access to assessment data
- Identify faculty and staff who need training
- Evaluate and enhance our existing automated data collection, through sources such as the Webpac and Millennium

Examples

- **Methods and modes of collecting data**

The following are examples of data collection methods that are applicable to many situations.

- System-generated statistics from Millennium, OCLC, etc.
- Qualitative data from surveys, interviews, focus groups, and other channels
- Data that has already been collected about other organizations and populations and that is relevant to UNL
- Reduced reliance on counting (manual tally or machine) as a means of assessment

- **Software and Training**

These are examples of tools and training that may be needed to implement the recommendations.

- Excel
- SPSS/SAS
- Qualitative software
- Awareness of the need for assessment and the elements of quantitative and qualitative approaches

- **Sources of expertise and data**

There are a number of local and national sources of data and of assessment expertise that may be useful

- LibQual+ (data)
- OCLC (data)
- ARL (expertise)
- UNL resources (expertise)
 - Survey, Statistics and Psychometrics (SSP) Core Facility, the Department of Statistics, or pertinent faculty in the College of Business Administration
 - Statistics classes and training sessions on campus

Summary of Current Activities

This chart summarizes current assessment activities, including tools (e.g. Gallup climate survey), required assessments such as the ARL statistics, the interval (e.g., yearly), and sources of data such as Illiad, counting, etc.

Category	Tools and methods we use now	Assessments that are needed or required	Timeframe	Data sources
Collections	Stats spreadsheets	ARL	Annual	Count
		Vendor performance	Annual	ILL
		Funding – price increases	Annual	SAP
Services	Counting	ARL/ILL	3-year	Count/Illiad
		LibQual+	Annual	survey
		Sample programs	Sampling	count
Work process	Flowchart Time studies	Efficiencies	As needed, based on changes in data	ILL
		Vendor performance		Vendors
Learning Organization	Staff development			
	Gallup	University-required plans and follow-up on plans	2 years or event-based	Gallup

Assessment Categories

Collections

- Reasons to Assess
 - The Libraries’ strategic direction 3, “enhance collections to support research, instruction, and service for today’s users and tomorrow’s scholars.”
- Questions to Ask and Answer:
 - What the collection has and what it should have
 - Where items are located
 - How much is being and ought to be spent on various portions of the collection.
- Quantitative

- Data may be collected on the use of items in the collection, the addition of items to the collection, and the placement and density of items in the collection.
- Comparative data may be collected on the Libraries' status relative to its peers (e.g., volumes owned, dollars spent).
- Qualitative
 - Data may be collected on the several characteristics of the items in the collection over which the Libraries may have some influence (e.g., price, publisher, call number).
 - Data may also be collected on patrons' perceptions of the collection (e.g., its usefulness, its comprehensiveness, its shortcomings)

Programs and Services

- Reasons to Assess
 - The Libraries' strategic direction 1, "to expand the Digital Scholarship and Literacy Program," and priority 2, "to enhance reference and instructional services to students, faculty, and the community."
- Questions to ask and answer
 - Quantitative
 - How many instructions sessions are taught each year and how many users are reached via those sessions? (ARL)
 - How many reference questions are answered annually via all formats? (ARL)
 - Level of Satisfaction with our services and resources. (LibQUAL+)
 - When are our facilities, equipment, and services being used?
 - Qualitative
 - How are our facilities, equipment, and services being used?
 - How can we make our electronic resources more user-friendly?
 - How can we make our services more user-friendly?
 - How can we improve our instruction and improve student learning outcomes?

Work Process

- Reasons to assess
 - Work processes are connected with all areas of the Libraries' strategic plan, but are most closely associated with strategic direction 3, "to enhance collections to support research,

instruction, and service for today's users and tomorrow's scholars through increases in acquisitions".

- Questions to ask and answer
 - Quantitative
 - Number of titles cataloged, volumes added, etc.
 - Speed of ordering, cataloging, processing (e.g., average number of days from request to shelf)
 - Funds expended
 - ILL requests by title, class number, and so on
 - Repair, preservation, and conservation statistics
 - Digital project statistics
 - Qualitative
 - choice of vendors (both quantitative and qualitative aspects)
 - internal customer satisfaction
 - workplace climate issues
 - value-added activities (e.g., what level of cataloging is best for various types of material? What projects should have priority?)

Communication and Evaluation

- Reasons to assess
 - All Libraries faculty and staff share in communicating and evaluating the results of our assessment activities.
- Questions to Ask and Answer
 - How will we track our communications and the effectiveness of these activities?
 - With whom will we communicate assessment results and how frequently?
 - What level of effort should we devote to communication and evaluation of assessment activities?

References

Self, J. & Hiller, S. (2006). University of Nebraska—Lincoln Libraries evaluation and suggestions for effective and sustainable assessment. Visiting Program Officers, Association of Research Libraries.