Re-Building a Library Assessment Program: From Add-On to Integrated

Lynda M. Duke, Academic Outreach Librarian, Associate Professor

Self-Study/External Review – Assessment of Assessment

In spring of 2012 we underwent an external review of the library. The process involved a self-study summarizing library services/programs and related accomplishments, challenges and changes. As documents and data were reviewed, a critical concern emerged: the library had no formal, organized assessment program in place to adequately reflect the current practices and focus of the library. Although data were being collected, upon reflection three patterns emerged:

1. We were not collecting needed data and/or assessing the most crucial services and programs.
2. Problems with overall accuracy and/or continuity emerged with some of the collected data.
3. A culture of assessment was lacking, including program goals, information sharing, clarity of purpose in collecting data, appropriate archiving, and use of data for decision-making purposes.

New Integrated Assessment Program

We set out to create a sustainable, innovative and comprehensive ongoing assessment program. In essence, our goal is to embed assessment in our daily work and routines in order to develop a holistic understanding of how our efforts affect our users.

The process of creating our Assessment Program included systemized consultation with all library faculty and staff. The structure is designed to foster their continued involvement in assessment.

This re-focused and integrated program links our revised strategic priorities and goals with assessment measures, including who will conduct the assessment work, when and with what frequency the assessment will occur, and how the assessment will be conducted (specific tools to be employed).

Additionally, our program outlines ways in which the data should be consulted as decisions and plans are made within the library. A component of how to assess the Assessment Program has also been included in our plan.

Building on work conducted by the ERIAL Project (an intensive two-year study of our students using ethnographic methodologies), innovative techniques are incorporated into the program and unnecessary data collection has been eliminated.

A. Strategic Assessment Plan

Describes our overarching assessment agenda, guides annual assessment activities for future years, and is updated at regular intervals. It includes:

I. Strategic Priorities

Nine action items involving all aspects of our library.

II. Goals

A series of goals were developed for each of our strategic priorities. Each goal must have at least one assessment measure; not all measures need to be implemented every year.

III. Measures

Specific measures are included for each goal, with a mixture of indirect (requires individuals to reflect on their learning rather than demonstrate it) and direct (requires individuals to demonstrate knowledge and competencies as they respond to the instrument itself) measures.

B. Yearly Action Plan

Describes our planned assessment activities for the year-to-come and is based on our Strategic Assessment Plan.

C. Annual Assessment Report

Provides a record of our actual assessment activities in the previous academic year:

- What have we assessed, and why? (measures implemented)
- What did we learn? What strengths/weaknesses were revealed? (analysis)
- What are we doing in response to the findings? (action)

Why do we do assessment?

Assessment answers questions about how we have met our stated goals and:

1. Guides subsequent planning, in ways that are meaningful and systematic.
2. Provides critical feedback that both encourages and challenges us.
3. Confirms successes and offers insights into how we can improve on our efforts.

Who is responsible for assessment?

1. Assessment Liaison – coordinates assessment efforts.
2. All library faculty and staff play a role in their areas.

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