Metrics Madness
Facilitating an Organizational Culture of Assessment at the University of Michigan Library

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In a large, highly complex library system, understanding how to make practical decisions about increasing efficiencies and being innovative requires continuous assessment. Through taking a multi-pronged approach and seeking opportunities to utilize existing channels and internal advocates, librarians have made progress in developing sustaining assessment structures.

After the 2010 Library Assessment conference, U-M attendees were energized about finding ways to integrate assessment into all aspects of the library system. Librarians sought to generate interest and buy-in at all levels. This strategy involved sharing information as part of a Community of Learning series, and a subsequent report out to Executive Council. These initial efforts led to the development of a Special Interest Group (SIG), and ultimately, the establishment of a standing assessment committee.

Findings

- Assessment is happening in multiple forms at MLibrary, but not within a systematic structure, and many projects have limited visibility. Often people are working on assessment-related projects but never classified them as assessment.
- There seems to be a primary focus on instructional assessment, but not necessarily a broad understanding or shared definition of assessment.
- Staff are interested in meeting and sharing information and learning about all the assessment projects that are happening even if they are not perceived or described as assessment projects.
- Organizational change takes time and continuous effort, even when there is an interest level and desire to share projects.

Timeline

2010
- Attended Library Assessment conference.

2011
- Shared information from the conference as part of library’s Community of Learning series.
- Presented conference highlights to senior management to gain their support.
- Created MLibrary Assessment special interest group (SIG) which hosted Midweek Metrics Madness (MMM) – monthly brown bag meetings with topics ranging from assessment of library instruction to statistical methods for data analysis.

2012
- Organized an assessment forum featuring a talk from the Library Dean followed by group activities to discuss local assessment initiatives.
- Established a standing committee, MLibrary Assessment Committee (MAC), by Library Administration with representative membership chosen from the staff that put their names forth.
- Started work on an environmental scan to gather, analyze, preserve, and provide access to local assessment research projects.

Goals

- Develop and maintain the inventory of assessment projects through collaboration with other existing MLibrary committees.
- Examine the inventory of assessment projects and analyze where opportunities exist.
- Support ongoing sharing of routine and project-based assessment activity.
- Offer continuing education through special events and brown bags.
- Increase staff involvement through recruiting additional volunteers for MLibrary Assessment Committee spin-off working groups.
- Seek technological solutions to sharing assessment projects and associated data.