EFFECTIVE, SUSTAINABLE, AND PRACTICAL LIBRARY ASSESSMENT

Assessment Visit Background Information

Below are some areas we would like information about before our assessment visit. Your response will give us a better sense of assessment work that has been done at your institution, specific issues that you’d like to see addressed, and your expectations for this visit.

Short summary of what’s been done in assessment in last few years, including how you’ve used assessment information. Attach any relevant documents (or provide URLs)

Under the direction of the Library Survey Team (LST) the LibQUAL+ survey has been conducted annually for the past four years. The quantitative results, published by ARL, are shared on the library’s intranet. Additionally, the LST consolidates and quantifies LibQUAL+ comments and presents annual and multi-year summary and graphical representation of these comments to illustrate trends (see attached top10comments.pdf.)

Individual library departments perform ongoing evaluative activities and maintain statistics and numerical data for routine reporting requirements. These measuring activities include door counts, building usage counts, reference transactions, electronic databases and computer usage, circulation stats, acquisition and cataloging reports, numbers of ILL lending and borrowing requests. These statistics are then available for requests for information from the Library Administration and are included in the library's annual report (describing initiatives reached in the previous year and outlining goals and objectives for the next year), our ARL statistics, the university's Fact Book, and other "bragging" publications and talking points - i.e. tours and presentations. The library also continuously solicits patron comments and feedback via a paper suggestion box and an online email form. These comments are moderated for inappropriate language, and then shared on the intranet; some of these suggestions have been acted upon.

One time assessment projects have been developed as needed to gather data on specific services and products and to address ad hoc inquiries. For example, the Collection Management Department evaluated the collection in response to new curricula proposals. Data collected by focus groups and usability studies helped to inform changes to online applications (see attached FocusGroupUndergrads.pps, UsabilityDigitalCollections.doc.) The Library's Computer Lab administered an online survey to gather user feedback (see attached computerlabsurvey.htm.) Electronic database trials are set up via the intranet where internal feedback is requested from library personnel. Occasionally, our directives are driven by assessing the literature and reviewing what other academic libraries are currently doing. Some of our building policies and remodeling projects were influenced this way.

Important assessment motivators
External (e.g. accreditation, governing board, university)
Presently, the major external motivator is the University's (SACS) accreditation reaffirmation date of 2011. The libraries will begin participating in this review process in FY '08-'09. Also, in 2003, the Board of Trustees adopted a value-centered management budgeting process that requires a cost/benefit analysis approach at the unit level. (This budgeting model underscores the need for an outcomes-based blueprint that justifies money and funding sources.) Additional motivators include maintaining data for inclusion in the University's annual Fact Book and gathering statistics regularly required for ARL reporting.

Internal (e.g. process improvement, better service/support, we should be doing this)

Our internal motivators include improving our services and meeting our patrons' needs in the most cost effective manner - identifying what we do well and where we could improve. We are particularly motivated to learn more about the expectations of our patrons (or potential patrons) and responding as quickly as possible. Our major goals include improving and streamlining public and technical services, remodeling and reconfiguring library spaces, and managing the collection to support teaching, learning, and research.

Organizational structure for assessment
Individual with responsibilities

As outlined in the short summary above, assessment initiatives are largely the responsibility of department heads in the library. Individuals within a department may be responsible for ongoing assessment activities and/or may lead a special assessment project as needed.

Committee or other group

The Library Survey Team coordinates user survey activities, administers the LibQUAL+ survey and oversees the analysis and presentation of survey data to the library faculty, staff, and administration. Recently, the Assessment Information Management team was formed to coordinate the library-wide assessment process.

Reporting line

Individual assessment units - largely by department - report assessment data to the Library Administration. Occasionally, assessment findings are announced via a weekly internal email distribution called LINKS. Some reporting and information sharing occurs between departments. Nearly all reporting to external parties, i.e. ARL, the University, Friends groups, etc. is communicated by the Library Administration. The library is currently processing applications for the position of Director of Administrative Services. This new position will have responsibilities for overseeing the library's assessment functions.
What’s worked well (short description)

Subject liaisons have communicated with university departmental faculty to help inform collection and resources management decisions. Feedback from specific, targeted user surveys has guided software and web projects. LibQUAL+ data and comments have identified some positive trends and allowed some issues to be addressed. Evaluating user comments and staying aware of academic trends has led to upgrades in library services and building reconfigurations - i.e. 24 hours, coffee shop, group seating, relaxed food policy, virtual and chat reference, wireless access, database purchases, assessment of journal titles.

What’s been a problem/sticking or breaking point (short description)

The lack of a well defined, evidence-based decision making process is the major sticking point. Often our decision making is not well qualified, but rather impressionistic. Presently, we collect lots of data but lack the tools, infrastructure, and in-house statistical and technical expertise to scientifically analyze and use this information. We are also lacking a systematic means of storing organizational data and communicating along broader, multi-directional channels. We would like to develop additional user-center, locally significant assessment activities while avoiding survey fatigue.

Areas that you want us to address (e.g. organizational/culture, specific issues, methodology, analysis and reporting, using data for improvement)

We want to address defining assessment as a core function and learning to use our data wisely. We need to explore ways to increase our expertise in statistical methodology and evaluate software tools for analysis and reporting. We'd like to ensure that the data we spend time collecting actually have metrics applied and can be tied to measurable outcomes.

Expectations/outcomes for our participation in this effort

We look forward to defining a process that allows us to discuss our data intelligently and to effectively communicate this information as it relates to our initiatives. We need to bridge the gap between the numerous Excel spreadsheets and the objectives outlined in our strategic plan. Ideally, processes could be put in place that would allow future projects to be merged into a more robust assessment management system.