

**Management Information for Decision
Making in Academic Libraries:
The Library Challenge**

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Management Information for Decision Making in Academic Libraries Panel

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Management Information in Libraries: The Dream

The goal is for the library manager or director to ask:

How is the library today? The system would respond with such comments as “terrible,” “lousy,” “fair,” “good,” “not bad,” or “great.” The questioner could then ask why. The system would respond with a summary report of all of the indicators using predefined criteria that would indicate exceptions.”

Dowlin, K. and McGrath, L. (1983). Beyond the numbers – a decision support system. In F. Lancaster (Ed.), *Library Automation as a Source of Management Information/ Clinic on Library Applications of Data Processing*.

Management Information in Libraries: The Reality

Libraries in many cases are collecting data without really having the will, organizational capacity, or interest to interpret and to use the data effectively in library planning . . . The result is a kind of purposeless data collection.

Covey, D. (2002). *Usage and usability assessment: library practices and concerns.*

What Are We Measuring?

“Institutional assessment efforts should not be concerned about valuing what can be measured, but instead about measuring what is valued.”

Astin, A. (1991). *Assessment for Excellence*.

“What is easy to measure is not necessarily what is desirable to measure.”

Kyrillidou, M. (1998). “An overview of performance measures in higher education and libraries”, *ARL: A Bimonthly Newsletter of Research Library Issues and Actions*

Why Assessment and Management Information?

- Accountability and justification
- Improvement of services
- Comparison with others
- Identification of changing customer behavior
- Marketing and promotion
- Decisions based on data, not assumptions
 - **Assumicide!**

Barriers to Management Information and Using Data Effectively in Libraries

- Organizational culture/leadership support
- Time/Staff/Resources
- Data issues – Too much, compatibility, validity
- Establishing priorities
- Knowing what to measure and methods to use
- Inexperience, perceived lack of skills and expertise
- Understanding, presenting and knowing what to do with the results

Hiller, S. and Self, J. (2004). From Measurement to Management: Using Data Wisely for Planning and Decision-Making. *Library Trends*.

Making Library Assessment Work: Practical Approaches for Developing and Sustaining Effective Assessment

- New 2 year ARL project to assist libraries with moving assessment and data use efforts forward
- Led by Steve Hiller (UW), Jim Self (UVa), Martha Kyrillidou (ARL)
- Recognition that libraries are aware of the value of data but find it difficult to sustain efforts and use results
- Conduct site visits to evaluate assessment and develop practical approaches to effective local assessment
- Identify common barriers and facilitators to assessment
- 7 libraries participating in Phase I Spring 2005; 10-14 during 2005-06 academic year; final report in 2006

ARL Project

Preliminary Observations after 4 Site Visits

- Strong interest in moving beyond one-time or project-based efforts to sustainable assessment
- Management information system seen as crucial component
- Major barrier appears to be incorporating data use effectively into ongoing library management
- Few libraries allocate sufficient resources (staff and funding) for assessment or management information
- Little understanding of what's happening on the campus level and beyond in data warehousing and management, and in using data to improve services

UW Libraries Data Focus

User Needs Assessment

- Faculty and student information seeking behavior/use
- Library use patterns
- Library importance and impact
- User priorities for the library
- User satisfaction with services, collections, overall
- Use of print and electronic information resources
- Using data to make informed decisions that lead to library improvement

UW Libraries Assessment Methods Used

- Large scale user surveys every 3 years (“triennial survey”): 1992, 1995, 1998, 2001, 2004
 - All faculty (1560 responses in 2004, 40% response rate)
 - Sample of undergraduate and graduate students
 - 2004 survey Web-based (with paper option for faculty)
- In-library use surveys every 3 years beginning 1993
- LibQUAL+™ in 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003
- Focus groups (annually since 1998)
- Observation (guided and non-obtrusive)
- Usability
- Emetrics/Usage

Information about assessment program available at:

<http://www.lib.washington.edu/assessment/>

What We've Learned About/From the UW Community

- Libraries remain very important to learning and research
- Community satisfaction is high
- Library needs/use patterns vary by and within academic areas and groups (e.g. faculty and undergrads)
- Library as place remains important to undergraduates, less so for graduates, least important for faculty
- Faculty and students use libraries differently than librarians think they do (or prefer them too)
- Library/information environment is perceived as too complex; users find simpler ways (Google) to get info
- Remote access is preferred and has changed the way faculty and students work and use libraries

Moving Management Information Forward

- Recognize that it will take additional or reallocated resources to do this
- Organizational structure and culture are important facilitators
- Staff need training, skills and expertise in this area
- Measure and assess what is **important** to the library, the institution, stakeholders, AND the customer
- Use data wisely and appropriately
- Use the data to make your library better

Retain Focus On The Customer