



## **Describing the Research Library of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: the Association of Research Libraries' (ARL) Profile**

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For a decade the Association of Research Libraries has promoted novel methods of describing and evaluating the value of research libraries through its *New Measures Initiative*. During this time a suite of services including LibQUAL+, MINES, and ClimatQUAL have been developed that build upon the basic set of ARL descriptive statistics collected annually since 1907 for assessment and evaluation of North America's major research libraries. Taken together the historical ARL descriptive statistics and *New Measures* services provide a robust set of methods and tools available to assess research libraries today. However, when ARL directors were interviewed in 2005 and asked to describe a research library in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there was general sentiment that even the ARL Statistics and the toolkit of services through *New Measures* together were insufficient in answering the question. There was a need for greater flexibility in describing the research library today in qualitative terms. Open ended descriptions of collections, services, programs and physical spaces were necessary if the essence of a research library today were to be described and evaluated. As a result the ARL community will now be submitting a qualitative, descriptive profile of their libraries in 2009. From the profiles, similarities and differences among libraries will be evaluated. If quantifiable, similarities may be candidates for additional descriptive variables in the ARL statistics set, e.g., virtual chat sessions. The paper will describe the profiles and discuss similarities and differences among research libraries emerging from the profile data. The viability of using profiles as an evaluative device will be discussed. Pros and cons of profiles will be discussed.

**Keywords:** Association of Research Libraries, Textual narratives, Profiles, Qualitative and Quantitative Methods