



Modeling a Great Library: A Schema for Assessment in Research Libraries

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Over the previous decade, academic libraries have engaged in a myriad of assessment activities in order to measure service quality as determined by both qualitative and quantitative indicators, according to different user groups. The early literature on assessment tended to present methods and case studies, indicating that libraries tended to conduct assessment on a project-by-project basis. Other publications discussed the organizational factors that support assessment, including support from staff at all levels of the library and the creation of a “culture of assessment” (Lakos 2002). The emerging literature now focuses on models that allow libraries to organize their assessment activities into the process of their workflows in particular areas (e.g., collections management or information literacy). This shift can allow librarians to reconceptualize assessment, from a reactive activity that attempts to measure the success of individual projects to a regular activity of evidence-based practice within our work processes.

Library administrators are concerned with the role assessment should play in strategic planning and decision-making. They must understand assessment not as a series of discrete activities, but within the context of revealing the organization’s successes and failures as a whole. Further, administrators must be able to see where assessment results recommend the allocation of limited resources, whether to enhance effective services, improve ineffective services, or discontinue services altogether. This paper will present a schema for identifying critical assessment points within the work of a research library. The schema will allow administrators and those responsible for assessment a model for academic library planning and resulting resource allocation.