



Quality metrics in academic libraries

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Quality Assurance is a part of accrediting an institution. In South Africa the HEQC (Higher Education Quality Council), a sub committee of the CHE (Council for Higher Education), is responsible for this issue. The academic library functions in a larger context and one has to look how the library contributes to achieving the overall objectives of the parent institution. Quality assessment of the academic library is part of the Total Quality Management of the institution. Quality assessment includes products, services, individuals, as well as the institution. Quality metrics of the service will have to include evaluations at an individual, service, and organisational level. Instruments such as SERVQUAL and LibQUAL+TM are valuable tools in measuring library service quality. PABER

Some basic principles are common to all measurements. In the 20th century the focus was strongly on quantitative measurements such as the number of items in stock, the use thereof, number of visitors and reference requests. A paradigm shift characterises the 21st century, as user's expectations, technology, measurements, and many other library scenarios have changed. The focus is strongly on user expectations and needs. The quality of service is defined by the customer's perception of both the quality of the product and the service providing it. The shift is "from measuring what you can count to measuring what counts". This implies qualitative measurement, which is fundamentally subjective.

Quality in academic libraries is a multi-dimensional construct. Quality assessment is done from the perspective of different groups of people. Both quantitative and qualitative measurements are required to determine the quality and effectiveness of the library. The ultimate goal of measurement is improving the "fitness for purpose" of the library. It is the task of the academic library to move from a passive service provider to an active and vital force in the institution.