

Systematic Evaluation of UPR Libraries: Reaffirms Collaboration, Promotes Evaluation and Assessment Culture

Julia Vélez, MLS, Ed. D.

Professional Accreditation and Evaluation, Academic Affair Vice-President Office and Director of Information and Technology Center, Natural Science College, University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras Campus

Abstract:

The presentation is about the innovative quality management practices implemented at the University of Puerto Rico to develop an evaluation and assessment culture, incorporate these initiatives as part of the daily work of the library staff, and the application of results to generate organizational change. The exposition describes the process of design, implementation and results of the University of Puerto Rico (UPR) Library Evaluation and Assessment Project based on the application of the ACRL standards, the use of external evaluators from ACRL and the development of communities of practice to address the findings of the evaluation process.

The evaluation process implies the design and implementation of evaluation instruments, qualitative and quantitative data gathering, organization, and analysis. Most importantly: it includes an evaluation visit by ACRL members. As a result, the libraries received a certificate of completion for their efforts. This is the first system-wide university library evaluation project performed by ACRL. The presentation demonstrates how our model helped us in the implementation of the assessment process, shows a way to contribute to a cultural change and leadership development among libraries of the UPR and mechanisms to build an effective and sustainable practical assessment culture.

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Keywords: Library evaluation, Library Assessment, Qualitative and Quantitative Methodology, Library Self-Study, Library Assessment Culture, Systematic Library Evaluation

1. Introduction

The Professional Accreditation and Evaluation Project at the University of Puerto Rico (UPR) in 2004, began a process of systematic assessment using the Standards of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) (2004, 2005), 14 libraries located in different campuses across the island. The evaluation process is centered in documenting and highlighting the work being done in libraries through the use of qualitative and quantitative methodologies. The evaluation exercise was conducted in order to help develop a culture of evaluation, to reaffirm the need to maintain a way of continuing this process and thus a process of continuous evaluation. Another aspect that encouraged the emergence of the initiative was the role of libraries in other processes of evaluation and accreditation in which the University has been submitted, such as the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) and the Council of Higher Education Puerto Rico (CES).

During the libraries assessment process we were committed to develop, adapt and use measurement tools to track their performance in relation to the ACRL standards. This helped identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in order to use the results in planning, self-management and continuing

excellence in service. Furthermore, as a consequence the results have facilitated the creation of action plans and evaluation aligned with the planning level in each campus and the UPR System.

The results of the evaluation produced changes in the way services are given, in the administrative processes and the redefinition of the mission of libraries according to the campus teaching-learning and research processes. The experience has helped strengthen the institutional planning, accreditation of academic programs and the continuous improvement of the units. In addition, the fruit of experience has resulted in the exchange of ideas with other professionals in the field of information science, greater openness to the emerging changes and new trends that impact the teaching and learning processes and research.

2. Background

The processes of self and external evaluation principles are necessary to achieve quality in teaching and learning processes. This principle has guided many of the global initiatives of the universities in recent years. UNESCO recognizes it in the Eleven Article (UNESCO, October 9, 1998), which raises the importance of doing it with transparency, by independent experts and that they are essential to improve the quality of services. Like many institutions of higher education the University of Puerto Rico has generated initiatives of assessment and appraisal of the institution, academic programs and courses. A sample is in *Diez para la década* (2006), the priority is set to "obtain and maintain the professional accreditation of all programs of study subject to it". In support of the University Plan and in recognition of the virtues of the evaluation and appraisal, the Board of Trustees established the Certifications 130, 136 and 138 of 2003-04 (Universidad de Puerto Rico, Junta de Síndicos 2003-04), which establishes an institutional policy that includes programs and services likely to be subject to external accreditation process as a mechanism to promote the institutional assessment and build a culture of appraisal.

Among the projects and activities aimed at achieving the evaluation and accreditation of academic programs for all campuses, comes the Professional Evaluation and Accreditation Project of UPR, which is attached to the Office of Professional Accreditation of the Vice-Presidency of Academic Affairs. The UPR Library Evaluation and Assessment Project was included in its first group of programs that are likely to be accredited because they already have standards established by the professional organization of the Association of College and Research Libraries, part of American Library Association (ALA-ACRL) and these have been validated by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (2006) and the Council Higher Education of Puerto Rico (CES). The standards recognize the library as a central element that contributes to the teaching-learning processes and research.

Since 2004, the University of Puerto Rico began to organize in a systematic way its fourteen libraries located in different campuses to have an evaluation process in order to be accredited by the ACRL. In the process we found out that this agency does not provide accreditation of professional libraries and their standards were created as a guide to be followed by other accrediting agencies. But despite this limitation, libraries were chosen to be included in the first group as they all shared one element in common, each of them is considered in the institutional accreditation process, the accreditation of all individual

programs, and to the central role and impact of services and resources in the teaching-learning process.

Before this project was implemented the libraries of the University of Puerto Rico had several initiatives, but not a systemic process. All campuses of the UPR go through the accreditation process of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (2006) and the Council of Higher Education of Puerto Rico (CES) and although the libraries are part of the process, very few had experienced being self evaluated. The participation of the vast majority of libraries in this process of evaluation and accreditation was a timid report done on a descriptive way without any analysis. Self-study reports available were done only in two libraries and just a few libraries were doing reports submitted at professional accreditation agencies for specific programs based on descriptions and not presented with evidence to support the report. Although some libraries collect statistical data about the resources and services, its purpose was not clearly defined and sometimes it was not used for anything. The libraries directors complained that they received requests of information about the libraries in order to answer to accreditation reports, but the data asked for was not available or not as complete as requested, was being asked at the last moment, and sometimes were unaware of the purpose for which the information was requested.

The knowledge of the libraries staff on assessment, evaluation, quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection, evaluation of results and reporting was very poor. The basic documentation of the libraries as to mission, vision, plans, and procedures manuals, if available, wasn't updated. None of the libraries had a plan for institutional assessment and learning assessment as is being required to all UPR units. Another aspect that was being required to the libraries to answer past accreditations was a program about integration of information skills into the curriculum, only a few had some initiatives but lacked evidence of the work performed.

3. Evaluation Process

The UPR Libraries Evaluation Project was conducted so that the units could demonstrate the effectiveness of resources and services through an assessment process by means of self-diagnosis and the vision provided by external experts. It was developed in several stages focused on identifying the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to generate a plan for improvements in areas that would be necessary and begin the development of assessment initiatives. This involves collecting, organizing and analyzing information in order to document the operation, demonstrate its effectiveness and reaffirm the collaborative and participatory process that the libraries of the UPR have. The evaluation model served as the basis for libraries to begin assessing their performance and present their achievements to show the appraisal of the results (outcomes assessment).

The design process consists of two periods: a summative and a comparison between units. The first step is a summative to issue a diagnosis upon analyzing its components, functions, processes and results, in order to recommend possible changes to contribute to the excellence of the institution. The second period is a comparative assessment to establish benchmarking between Puerto Rico's libraries and its design began on January 2009. All UPR libraries participated in the first stage which was conducted over a period of five years.

Work began on 2004 and will end in 2009. The first period consists of five stages which are: a study of standards, pre-conditions, internal evaluation, external evaluation and integration of both assessments to create a plan for improvement. In the figure 1 describe the stages on the evaluation model of UPR Libraries.

Figure 1: UPR Libraries Evaluation Model

STAGE 1	STAGE 2	STAGE 3	STAGE 4	STAGE 5
D Define E Committee S Responsibility I Model N Selection -ACRL -Spain Quality -MSA -CES P Define R Objectives O Planning C Process E Schedule S Budget	P Development R Evaluation E Guide & - Instrument C Actual O Situation N Diagnostic D Identify I Information T Resources -Community members -Library staff -Students -Professors -Researches I O N S	INTERNAL & EXTERNAL EVALUATION ACRL-Standards self study internal external evaluation reports ACRL-Standards self study internal external evaluation reports ACRL-Standards self study internal external evaluation reports		I Integration N Internal & T External E Report R Findings A Action Plan T I O N
		Self Study Report Internal Evaluation Report	External Evaluator visiting - Interviews - Review documents - Oral Report	

The first stage of the evaluation process is called the Design Process, which spanned for two years. It comprised the discussion of the standards, defining the steps, the establishment of the process components, defining the participating members functions and the selection of indicators. The evaluation process is based on the standards of the Association of College and Research Libraries, American Library Association (ACRL-ALA) (2004, 2005) and set indicators to show the results of the work (outcomes assessment). A UPR System wide Evaluation Committee was created, headed by the Coordinator for Assessment of UPR Libraries and the participation of the Libraries Directors and the Assessment Coordinators in each unit of the UPR. In each UPR library a Library Evaluation Committee was formed Library with responsibility and functions to conduct the evaluation process in their units where all staff have a participation role. This leads to a complex structure due to the composition of all participants in the evaluation process. The meetings were conducted via remote video meetings and the Blackboard platform used as a means of communication and information sharing.

Another aspect comprised in the design process was defining objectives, process planning, budget establishment and work schedule and an assessment manual. The targets set were:

- To document the progress of libraries over the past five years to determine the degree of harmony between the services, organizational performance and its impact on students.
- The use of the assessment process to focus on the internal obstacles

and threats faced by libraries to establish priorities for action.

- To consolidate the strengths and correct weaknesses in a process of continuous improvement.
- Develop and implement an assessment plan for the institution and student learning that will provide the mechanisms for obtaining quantitative and qualitative information on the effectiveness of academic and administrative strategies.
- Provide information and analysis needed to contribute to the decisions on re-accreditation and renewal of licenses by the relevant agencies.

The second stage involves the creation of indicators for assessment, identification of information resources, such as documents and people who can provide the necessary data, the preparation of the unit's personnel, the creation or updating of documentation to demonstrate the findings, the creation of standardized tools to collect data in a systematic way and establish or modify the working mechanisms for documenting the work and services performed.

One of the documents created was *the Manual for the Evaluation and Assessment of UPR Libraries* (Universidad de Puerto Rico, 2006) which consists of definitions, instructions and Indicators Guide for UPR Libraries. The guide was created in response to the need as the document only contains descriptions of the standards with questions and doesn't include indicators to help document the answers. A working group was established to create the guide where for each standard's question indicators were established and also potential evidence to support the answer. The guide's wording was based on the standards of ACRL (2005) and ideas were taken from several consulted indicators, among the most used were the standards of the *Certificado de Calidad de España* (Agencia Nacional de Evaluación de la Calidad y Acreditación, 2004), *Estándares para bibliotecas universitarias Chilenas* (Consejo de Rectores de Universidades Chilenas, Comisión Asesora de Bibliotecas y Documentación, 2003), Middle States Commission on Higher Education, MiddleStates (2002), Consejo de Educación Superior de Puerto Rico y Alonso Arévalo (2003); Alonso Arévalo, Echeverría Cubillas & Martín Cerro (1999); Nelson & Fernekes (2002), (2005); Van House, Weil, McClure (1990); Whitmire, (2002) & Unidad para la Calidad de las Universidades Andaluzas (Cádiz, España) (2002). The guide consists of questions from ACRL, indicators, tools and evidence.

The units were visited to assess the status of each one as to identify documents that could provide the answers to the ACRL standards and those needed by the libraries in order to begin an internal and external evaluation. This step was called meeting the preconditions for an evaluation. We identified areas where the staff needed training in the following topics: differences between assessment and evaluation, benefits of the evaluation process, strategic planning, creation or revision of the mission and vision, ways to document the work, application of assessment tools and how to do a self-study, identification of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, identification of external and internal environment and report writing. All units were dedicated to create or update the documentation, in particular plans, the mission and vision. This stage helped to establish groups on which an external evaluation could be conducted. At the same time an agreement was reached with ACRL to send a team of external evaluators to assess the fourteen libraries in four different dates and a certificate was given at the end of the process.

Another important aspect of this stage is the creation of several tools for data collection. All units were involved in the creation and implementation of satisfaction questionnaires for teachers, researchers, students and library staff. The data obtained from the questionnaire was used, although the implementation process in some units was not the most effective, and in others the results did not represent the units surveyed. This was due to several flaws in the design of the questionnaire or in the implementation process. In the Rio Piedras Campus, being the largest and most complex, focus groups were used. The results were positive but with some limitations due to the scarce time it had to be administered and the complexity of the site.

The conclusion of the internal evaluation was the third stage, where each unit conducted a self-study using the ACRL Standards and *the Guía de Indicadores de las Bibliotecas UPR* (Indicators Guide for UPR Libraries). The standards are composed of twelve areas, which are: planning, evaluation, performance appraisal, service, instruction, resources, access, personnel, physical facilities, communication, cooperation, administration and budget. A detailed report was prepared using the self-study answers to the questions of each standard including their evidence and an internal evaluation report which is a summary of the findings of the self-study. All units began the self-study on May 2006 but were completed at different dates depending on their complexity, or whether they met the preconditions.

The fourth stage is called the external evaluation, where the units were visited by external evaluators who were chosen by the ACRL professional agency. The visit of the external evaluators was performed considering the size of the campuses, in the large ones the visit lasted two or more days, in the small ones the visit lasted a day. During the visit, the evaluators conducted interviews, reviewed documents, reports and the self-evaluation report. A few months after the visit, the external evaluators delivered the evaluation report and a certification from ACRL for having gone through the experience. The visits were conducted on four occasions from May 2006 and ended in October 2008, at each visit different types of libraries were grouped depending on whether they were ready to be visited. This experience makes the UPR the first library system being evaluated and obtained a certification for having gone through the process of meeting the minimum standards of ACRL.

The last stage of the cycle is the integration, where the reports of internal and external evaluation are consolidated to prepare a plan for improvement. The findings were discussed at the units at all levels, from chancellors to the library staff. Input of reports, recommendations and discussions of findings were drawn up on an improvement plan, which addresses the recommendations in the weak areas and reinforces the strengths. Strategic plans are being revised to add the planned improvements in the plan. Currently all units are in this stage, the majority of them have the improvement plan and are in the process of finding the necessary resources for implementation.

4. Conclusion

The assessment initiative of the UPR Libraries reaffirms the importance of the process of assessment and evaluation as an integral part of the university's academic environment. This evaluation process has helped develop a structure with guidelines to be followed by all libraries in the UPR and contribute to the development of a culture of assessment and evaluation in the institution. It has laid the groundwork to repeat the process and turn it into a continuous and

systematic cycle based on models and standards established by organizations and local and international agencies that are part of the processes of institutional and professional accreditation.

All libraries in the UPR have been evaluated and are working on action plans or improvements. The model developed for the evaluation of libraries is being revised to improve the aspects that did not worked out. The second period of the evaluation process is already in the planning stage and will give continuity to ensure the updating and creation of innovative services to support its foundations on criteria and standards for professional recognition both locally and internationally. The process it's in a revision all the procedure and instruments used in the first period to enhances or eliminates or created a new. The focus of the second part is an assessment to establish a comparative benchmarking between libraries in Puerto Rico.

Among the achievements of the evaluation process is the updated documentation for library operations and creation of working tools such as the Evaluation Guide. Another significant achievement is the experience of using quantitative and qualitative methods such as using focus groups, satisfaction questionnaires for teachers, researchers, students and library staff. In summary, as a significant result can be seen the reaffirmation of the collaborative-participatory character that particularizes the libraries of the UPR. A sample of this effort is that libraries have been unified as a single group and are creating innovations, projects and working to benefit them and the entire institution. They are working in areas that need improvement in order to make an assessment in a systemic way. One of the initiatives that will contribute to greater integration is the development of the Libraries Information Collection System (Sistema de Acopio de Informacion de Bibliotecas – SAIB) is a database for collecting quantitative data on different aspects, facilities and human and physical resources. In addition, some communities have developed practices to address areas in common that need improvement in all the libraries of the UPR but using different and unusual mechanisms in the university structure.

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