

Book Reviews



Assessing Liaison Librarians: Documenting Impact for Positive Change.

Eds. Daniel C. Mack and Gary W. White. Chicago, Ill.: Association of College and Research Libraries / A division of the American Library Association, 2014. 154p. \$44.00 (ISBN 978-083898708-7). LC 2014041523.

As part of ongoing efforts to communicate the value of institutions of higher learning to donors, funding organizations, legislators and the general public, academic administration has embraced the rhetoric of business and seeks to develop a “culture of assessment” to provide evidence of a return on investment. For academic libraries, the term “assessment” now occurs more frequently during our daily conversations, but the concept and practice of documenting certain activities in libraries has a long history. Where library tasks have well-defined, quantifiable process steps, measures of productivity and efficiency are common and recognized across institutional boundaries. However, measures in areas like liaison services have both defied easy expression and resisted standardization. Also, the linkage of measures of liaison services to the larger institutional mission and strategy has become vitally important. The roles of liaisons in research services, teaching and learning, collections, scholarly communications, and outreach and engagement have impact throughout the library and the academic community. A unified approach to assessing and measuring the value of liaison librarians is overdue.

Assessing Liaison Librarians: Documenting Impact for Positive Change provides a framework for both liaison librarians and library administrators to create and tailor effective liaison assessment programs that fit their institution. Edited by Daniel C. Mack and Gary W. White, Associate Deans at University of Maryland Libraries, the book contains chapters written by both library administrators and liaison librarians with experience in assessment activities. The resulting content speaks to both management and front-line librarians, providing both conceptual guidance for the formation of assessment programs and practical advice for implementation of particular assessment tools.

The authors of each chapter write succinctly and clearly about the topics, often including helpful tables and graphics to illustrate concepts or better visualize assessment tools. The editors have effectively organized the narrative of the book into a unified whole. Upon finishing this book, the reader will have gained a better appreciation and understanding of the entire spectrum of liaison activities, as well as the vital need to communicate the value of these activities throughout the library and the academy.

In the first chapter, Gary W. White establishes the definition of assessment, the difference between assessment and evaluation, and the three types of assessment covered in this book: assessment of outcomes, of processes, and of inputs. White stresses that the motivation for this book was to focus attention on liaison librarianship as a critical role in higher education and research libraries, one that has not been adequately addressed in the literature on library assessment.

The second chapter will have particular appeal for the administrator or supervisor tasked with developing an overall assessment plan for public services that involve liaison librarians. The authors, Sarah Anne Murphy and Craig Gibson from The Ohio State University, present an “Engaged Librarian Framework,” developed to bring five core liaison activities into closer relationship with the academic research process. Each of these five core activities has separate chapters devoted to its assessment in the book. Murphy and Gibson identify these core liaison activities as research services, scholarly communication, collection development, teaching and learning, and engagement. Murphy and

Gibson also present what they call a logic model for evaluating research services. This conceptual model places inputs, outputs, and outcomes/impacts of particular services into relationship with each other, graphically illustrating the service to be evaluated. Included in this chapter are extremely helpful tables illustrating the types of evaluation questions, their purposes, and the indicators to be measured in the assessment.

The next two chapters deal with the instructional roles of liaison librarians. In chapter 3, Ellysa Stern Cahoy of The Pennsylvania State University Libraries deals with defining literacy goals, learning gaps, and assessing instruction effectiveness within the context of the information literacy assessment model presented at the ACRL/Institute for Information Literacy Immersion program in 2002. Cahoy stresses the importance of mapping institutional information literacy and learning outcomes to not only curricular objectives, but to state, regional, and national goals as well. The ACRL's *Information Literacy Standards in Higher Education* will prove useful for this purpose. Cahoy also makes clear that a good instruction assessment program will include both formative and summative assessment components. Here Cahoy characterizes formative assessment as being more informally structured, helping the individual librarian understand strengths and weaknesses of his or her instruction through simple feedback and encouragement of dialogue between the librarian and the supervisor. Cahoy then characterizes summative assessment as more formal in nature, including regular documentation at prescribed intervals that measure the individual librarian's instruction placed within the context of the library's information literacy and learning outcomes.

Maria R. Barefoot of Youngstown State University examines how to apply instructional assessment to teaching methods involving online components, including totally online instructional approaches and blended instructional environments. Barefoot references both the ACRL *Standards for Distance Learning Library Services* and *Standards for Libraries in Higher Education* as important resources for goals, objectives, and sample outcomes that individual institutions consult too infrequently when planning assessment of online learning. The standards could prove extremely beneficial in getting an assessment program off the ground. The problems of soliciting student feedback through online environments are discussed, and Barefoot presents suggestions from successful implementations of asynchronous and automated feedback.

In chapter 5, Daniel C. Mack writes about changing assessment activities in collection development in response to academic libraries' shift toward more emphasis on digital, online resources (both eBooks and e-journals). Mack stresses that, while earlier assessment focused on the collection itself as developed by the liaison, libraries need to refocus assessment on the liaison activities associated with collections. This includes how liaisons select subject-specific content, how liaisons facilitate and promote access to resources and integrate resources into library services, and how liaisons collaborate with discipline faculty to develop policies and make decisions about formats for resources. As a starting point for identification of areas for assessment, Mack recommends the RUSA *Guidelines for Liaison Work in Managing Collections and Services*. A useful table suggests specific assessment activities and measurements for each proposed category of collection development activity.

Dawn Childress of The Pennsylvania State University and Daniel Hickey of Cornell University cover the critical role of the liaison librarian in issues of scholarly communication. Many academic libraries have formulated initiatives in this area, and Childress and Hickey interviewed 16 librarians at 9 different institutions to survey the current practice and assessment of scholarly communication. Based upon this research, they developed a conceptual framework for discussing and placing liaison scholarly communication activities into one of five major categories: exploration, engagement, advocacy, agency, and innovation. The framework is flexible and allows individual institutions to tailor

their approach to the staffing and resources available, as well as to the priority or emphasis level placed by the institution on each major category of scholarly communication. An appendix to the chapter includes a liaison librarian scholarly communication evaluation rubric that can serve as the basis for institutional assessment development.

In chapter 7, Marcy Bidney of the American Geographical Society Library discusses assessments for outreach and engagement activities by liaisons. Bidney analyzes three resources for their criteria related to outreach and scholarly engagement: the Auburn University Faculty Handbook, the Committee for Institutional Cooperation (CIC) Committee on Engagement's categories of engagement, and the National Review Board for the Scholarship of Engagement's criteria for the assessment of the scholarship of engagement. Her analysis led to the development of a matrix of individual and programmatic assessment questions and indicators under two main element headings, librarianship and scholarship. The questions and indicators can be directly applied into a variety of institutional settings.

Gary W. White builds upon the concepts discussed in the first seven chapters in writing a chapter on professional development for liaison librarians. He presents professional development rubrics for collections content and access; research services; teaching, learning, and literacies; outreach and engagement; and scholarly communications that provide plenty of material and direction for both supervisors and librarians to work on learning and aligning their knowledge and skill sets to enhance their job performance as liaisons. Daniel C. Mack's brief final chapter provides an executive-style summary of the key steps for managers to consider in designing and implementing an assessment program.

Each chapter has a complete list of references, and the book has a useful index to key concepts and names of researchers cited in the text. Because of the breadth of topics covered, there is broad value in the information and tools provided for both managers and librarians. The applicability of the material to this important, strategic area of library service is significant. This book should be read by all academic liaisons and managers who seek to better document their value, identify opportunities, and improve liaison services.—*Scott Curtis, University of Missouri–Kansas City*

Victoria Martin. *Demystifying eResearch: A Primer for Librarians*. Santa Barbara, Calif.: Libraries Unlimited, 2014. 189p. Paper, \$75.00 (978-1-61069-520-6).

At first blush, the notion of writing a primer on electronic research seems an impossible task. However, Victoria Martin, the life sciences librarian at the University Libraries of George Mason University, has taken up the task, creating a resource whose strengths are found in those chapters where the scope of the discussion are more focused on the practical considerations of electronic research and whose weaknesses are the result of expanding into more theoretical or historical aspects of the topic at hand. Ultimately, this is a useful resource that provides in-depth introductions into important aspects of electronic research despite its flaws.

The overall structure of the book is sound: ten chapters divided into two parts (five chapters each). Each of the ten chapters includes its own works-cited list (often lengthy) as well as a list of suggested readings (often succinct) so that those who want to delve even more deeply into a particular topic may do so. Also included is a list of acronyms that is more than five pages in length, a glossary of terms that is nearly eight pages in length, and a full index.

The first part of the book ("eResearch Defined and Explained") provides detailed yet digestible perspectives on some of the fundamental characteristics of electronic research: a working definition of "eResearch," the issues surrounding the creation and management of research data, the technological requirements of researchers and