# Standards for college libraries

## The final version, approved January 2000

Prepared by the ACRL College Libraries Section Standards Committee

## Foreword

These standards are intended to apply to libraries supporting academic programs at the bachelor's and master's degree levels. Earlier standards for college libraries relied heavily upon resource and program "inputs" such as financial support, space, materials, and staff activities.[1] These new standards continue to consider "inputs," but they also take into consideration "outputs" and "outcomes." In order to create uniformity, the definitions as described in the ACRL "Task Force on Academic Library Outcomes Assessment Report" will be used in these standards.

*Inputs* are generally regarded as the raw materials of a library program—the money, space, collection, equipment, and staff out of which a program can arise.

*Outputs* serve to quantify the work done, i.e., number of books circulated, number of reference questions answered.

*Outcomes* are the ways in which library users are changed as a result of their contact with the library's resources and programs.[2]

These standards provide both a quantitative and a qualitative approach to assessing the effectiveness of a library and its librarians. They advocate the use of input, output, and outcome measures in the context of the institution's mission statement. They encourage comparison of these measures with those of peer institutions; they provide statements of good library practice, and they suggest ways to assess that practice in the context of the institution's priorities. They address libraries only, not other components of a larger organization (e.g., computing).

In considering the application of these standards, those who make use of them should keep in mind the rapid changes in scholarly communications that have taken place in recent years. While electronic publications have increased in number, publications on paper and microtext have continued, making it necessary for librarians to store, provide, and interpret information in multiple formats. With the increase in the availability of information, user expectations have risen substantially. Librarians are increasingly expected to assist users in evaluating the information they receive. These changes evince an evolving role for college librarians, one that suggests a closer partnership with users and a greater responsibility for the educational process.

## Development and approval of the standards

The first edition of the "Standards for College Libraries" was published in 1959. Subsequent editions were published in 1975, 1986, and 1995. The standards are the responsibility of the College Libraries Section (CLS) Standards Committee, a standing committee of the College Libraries Section of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) which is a division of the American Library Association (ALA).

**About the authors**

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The CLS Standards Committee has encouraged review of the new draft standards by as many people as possible. The committee published the draft standards in the May 1999 issue of *C&RL News;* held a public hearing at the New Orleans Annual Meeting of ALA in July 1999; posted the draft standards on the ACRL Web site; reported the URL for the standards on the Oberlin Group Listserv and COLLIB-L; and published an article on the draft standards in the CLS Newsletter. These standards were reviewed by the CLS Executive Committee and the ACRL Standards and Accreditation Committee, and approved by the ACRL Board of Directors at the ALA 2000 Midwinter Meeting. Additional information about ACRL's standards and guidelines may be found at: http://www.ala.org/acrl/guides/index.html.

## Points of comparison

Each college library is encouraged to choose its own peer group for the purpose of comparisons. Peer colleges may already be identified for benchmarking purposes by the college. If not, a peer group could be identified using criteria such as college mission, reputation, selectivity for admission, size of budget, size of endowment, expenditure for library support, and/or size of collection. Once a peer group has been determined, "points of comparison" can be made to compare the strength of the library with its peers. Suggested points of comparison for input and output measures are provided. This list is not to be considered exhaustive—other points of comparison can be determined by the college.

### *Suggested points of comparison: Input measures*

• Ratio of volumes to combined total student (undergraduate and graduate) and faculty FTE.

• Ratio of volumes added per year to combined total student and faculty FTE.

• Ratio of material/information resource expenditures to combined total student and faculty FTE.

• Percent of total library budget expended in the following three categories:

1. materials/information resources, subdivided by print, microform, and electronic;

2. staff (including the head librarian, full- and part-time staff, and student assistant ex-

penditures, including federal contributions, if any, and outsourcing costs). When determining staff expenditures, care should be taken to consider comparable staff (i.e., including or excluding media, systems or development staff) and fringe benefits (within or outside the library budget); and

3. all other operating expenses (care should be taken to include the same categories, e.g., network infrastructure, equipment).

• Ratio of FTE library staff to combined student and faculty FTE.

• Ratio of library space (in square feet) to combined student and faculty FTE.

• Ratio of number of students attending library instructional sessions to total number of students in target group.[3]

• Ratio of library seating to combined student and faculty FTE.[4]

• Ratio of computer workstations to combined student and faculty FTE (consider that college requirements for student ownership of desktop or laptop computers could affect the need for work stations within the library).

### *Suggested points of comparison: Output measures*

• Ratio of circulation (excluding reserve) to combined student and faculty FTE.

• Ratio of interlibrary loan requests to combined student and faculty FTE (could be divided between photocopies and books).

• Ratio of interlibrary loan lending to borrowing.

• Interlibrary loan/document delivery borrowing turnaround time, fill rate, and unit cost.

• Interlibrary loan/document delivery lending turnaround time, fill rate, and unit cost.

• Ratio of reference questions (sample week) to combined student and faculty FTE.

## Planning, assessment, and outcomes assessment
### Planning

The library should have a mission statement and goals to serve as a framework for its activities. The mission and goals should be compatible and consistent with those developed by the college. Assessment of the quality and effectiveness of the library should be linked closely with the specific mission and goals of the college. In order to build its programs

and services in the context of the college, the library should be involved in the overall planning process. Formal planning procedures and methods, such as strategic planning, are used frequently. These planning methods require input from a broad spectrum of the college community. They help the college prepare for the future by clearly defining a vision and mission, by setting goals and objectives, and by implementing specific strategies or courses of action designed to help meet those ends. Strategic planning is an iterative process that includes evaluation, updating, and refinement. This process helps the college community focus on its essential values and provides an overall direction that helps to guide day-to-day activities and decisions.

## Assessment

Comprehensive assessment requires the involvement of all categories of library users. The choice of clientele to be surveyed and questions to be asked should be made by the administration and the staff of the library with the assistance of an appropriate advisory committee. Questions should relate to how well the library supports its mission and how well it achieves its goals and objectives. Library users should be encouraged to offer signed or anonymous comments and suggestions. Opportunities for making suggestions should be available both in the library and through remote electronic access. All categories of users should be given an opportunity to participate in the evaluation. The weight given to responses should be consistent with the focus and mission of the library. A program of assessment and evaluation should take into consideration the changing rhythm of the academic year. Evaluation, whether it involves some or all of the techniques listed below, should be an ongoing process. Formal evaluation tools may include the following:

• General library knowledge surveys (or "pre-tests") offered to incoming first-year students, re-offered at a midpoint in the students' careers and again near graduation, to assess whether the library's program of curricular instruction is producing more information-literate students.

• Evaluation checklists for librarian and tutorial instruction to gather feedback from students, other librarians, and teaching faculty.

• Student journal entries, or information literacy diaries, used to track their library use.

• Focus groups of students, faculty, staff, and alumni who are asked to comment on their experiences using information resources over a period of time.

• Assessment and evaluation by librarians from other colleges and/or other appropriate consultants.

• Reviews of specific library and information service areas and/or operations.

## Outcomes assessment

Outcomes assessment will increasingly measure and affect how library goals and objectives are achieved. It will address the accountability of institutions of higher education for student achievement and cost effectiveness. It should take into consideration libraries' greater dependence on technology, their increasing use of online services, their growing responsibility to provide information literacy skills, their increasing reliance on consortial services, the possibilities of dwindling financial resources for collection development, and new developments in the ways in which scholarly information is published and distributed.

Outcomes assessment can be an active mechanism for improving current library practices. It focuses on the achievement of outcomes that have been identified as desirable in the library's goals and objectives. It identifies performance measures, such as proficiencies, that indicate how well the library is doing what it has stated it wishes to do. Assessment instruments may include surveys, tests, interviews, and other valid measuring devices. These instruments may be specially designed for the function being measured or previously developed instruments may be used. It is critical, however, to choose the instrument, the size of the sample, and the method used for sampling carefully. The instrument should be valid, and the way it is used should be appropriate for the task. Colleagues at peer institutions may render invaluable assistance by suggesting assessment questions and sample sizes, by sharing lessons learned, and by suggesting alternative methods for measuring outcomes.

*Questions*
1. Is the library's mission statement clearly

understood by the library staff and the college administration? Is it reviewed periodically?

2. How does the library incorporate the college's mission into its goals and objectives?

3. How does the library maintain a systematic and continuous program for evaluating its performance, for informing the college community of its accomplishments, and for identifying and implementing needed improvements?

4. Is the library's assessment plan an integral component of the institution's assessment and accreditation strategies? For example, does the library revise and update its assessment procedures in conjunction with campus-wide planning and the actions of academic departments?

5. How does the library assess itself? (e.g., What quantitative and qualitative data does the library collect about its performance? How does it take into account special needs, such as those of physically challenged users?)

6. What outcomes does the library measure and how does it measure these outcomes?

7. How does the library compare itself with its peers?

## Applying the new standards for college libraries

The ACRL/CLS Standards and Continuing Education Committees will present a program cosponsored by the ACRL Standards and Accreditation Committee on applying the newly approved "Standards for College Libraries" at the ALA Conference in Chicago on Sunday, July 9, 2000, from 10:30 a.m.–noon. Members of the CLS Standards Committee and others will provide practical guidance for librarians who wish to make use of the new standards. Topics to be covered include the importance of mission statements, choosing peer institutions, quantitative analysis of input and output statistics, outcomes assessment, using the "best practices" statements and questions to assess a library, and the use of the standards for internal and external evaluation, including reaccreditation.

## Services

The library should establish, promote, maintain, and evaluate a range of quality services that support the college's mission and goals. The library should provide competent and prompt assistance for its users. Hours of access to the library should be reasonable and convenient for its users. Reference and other special assistance should be available at times when the college's primary users most need them. When academic programs are offered at off-campus sites, library services should be provided in accordance with the "ACRL Guidelines for Distance Learning Library Services" (http://www.ala.org/acrl/guides/distlrng.html).

*Questions*

1. How well does the library establish, promote, maintain and evaluate a range of quality services that support the academic program of the college and optimal library use?

2. Are reference, circulation, and government document services designed to enable users to take full advantage of the resources available to them?

3. How do student and faculty expectations affect library services?

4. How well do interlibrary loan and document delivery services support the needs of qualified users?

5. Does the library maintain hours of access consistent with reasonable demand?

6. What library services are provided for programs at off-campus sites? How are the needs of users and their satisfaction determined at those sites?

7. How are students and faculty informed of library services?

8. Does the library maintain and utilize quantitative and qualitative measurements of its ability to serve its users?

## Instruction

The library should provide information and instruction to users through a variety of reference and bibliographic services, such as course-related and course-integrated instruction, hands-on active learning, orientations, formal courses, tutorials, pathfinders, and point-of-use instruction, including the reference interview.

As an academic unit within the college, the library should facilitate academic success,

as well as encourage lifelong learning. By combining new techniques and technologies with the best of traditional sources, librarians should assist primary users and others in information retrieval methods, evaluation, and documentation.

In addition, librarians should collaborate frequently with classroom faculty; they should participate in curriculum planning, as well as educational outcomes assessment. Information literacy skills and bibliographic instruction should be integrated into appropriate courses with special attention given to intellectual property, copyright, and plagiarism.

Modes of instruction, often referred to as teaching methods, "may include, but are not limited to advising individuals at reference desks, in-depth research consultations, individualized instruction, electronic or print instruction aids, or group instruction in traditional or electronic classroom settings." [5]

*Questions*

1. Does the library provide formal and informal opportunities for instruction?

2. Does the library provide adequate space for instruction for both large and small groups? Is the available space designed to provide hands-on instruction, as well as presentation of all types of resources?

3. Does the library make appropriate use of technology in its instruction?

4. How do librarians work with classroom faculty in developing and evaluating library curricula in support of specific courses?

5. If applicable, how does the library facilitate faculty research?

6. Does the library provide a variety of educational programs?

7. How does the library promote and evaluate its instructional programs?

**Resources**

The library should provide varied, authoritative, and up-to-date resources that support its mission and the needs of its users. Resources may be provided on site or from remote storage locations, on the main campus or at off-campus locations. Moreover, resources may be in a variety of formats, including print or hard copy, online electronic text or images, and other media. Within budget constraints, the library should provide quality resources in the most efficient manner possible. Collection currency and vitality should be maintained through judicious weeding.

*Questions*

1. What criteria are used to make decisions about the acquisition, retention, and use of print, electronic, and media resources? How does the library select resources for its users?

2. What is the role of the classroom faculty in the selection of library resources and in the ongoing development and evaluation of the collection?

3. Does the library have a continuing and effective program to evaluate its collections, resources and online databases, both quantitatively and qualitatively?

4. Do print, media, and electronic resources reflect campus curricular and research needs?

5. Does the library have sufficient user licenses for its electronic resources so that on-site and remote users can be accommodated?

6. How are consortium purchasing and licensing agreements utilized?

7. If the library has responsibility for collecting and maintaining the college archives, how does it address these responsibilities?

8. How do the library's collections and online databases compare with its peers?

9. Does the library maintain the currency of the collection through a judicious weeding program?

**Access**

Access to library resources should be provided in a timely and orderly fashion. Library collections and the catalog for accessing them should be organized using national bibliographic standards. A central catalog of library resources should provide access for multiple concurrent users and clearly indicate all resources. Provision should be made for interlibrary loan, consortial borrowing agreements, access to virtual electronic collections, and document delivery to provide access to materials not owned by the library. Furthermore, distance learning programs should be supported by equivalent means such as remote electronic access to collections, the provision of reliable network connections, and electronic transmission or courier delivery of library materials to remote users. Policies re-

garding access should be appropriately disseminated to library users.

*Questions*

1. What methods are used to provide maximum intellectual and physical accessibility to the library and its resources?

2. How are the accuracy and currency of the catalog assured?

3. Is the arrangement of the collections logical and understandable?

4. Does the library provide timely and effective interlibrary loan or document delivery service for materials not owned by the library?

5. Does the library participate in available consortial borrowing programs?

6. Does the library provide sufficient numbers of appropriately capable computer workstations for access to electronic resources?

7. Is access to the catalog and to other library resources available across campus and off-campus?

8. If materials are located in a storage facility, are those materials readily accessible?

9. In what ways does the library provide for its users who are engaged in distance learning programs?

## Staff

The staff should be sufficient in size and quality to meet the programmatic and service needs of its primary users. Librarians, including the director, should have a graduate degree from an ALA-accredited program. In addition, there may be other professional staff who will have appropriate training, experience, or degrees. All library professionals should be responsible for and participate in professional activities. The support staff and student assistants should be assigned responsibilities appropriate to their qualifications, training, experience, and capabilities. The further development of professional and support staff should be promoted through an ongoing commitment to continuing education, including training on security, emergencies, and the preservation of materials. Professional library staff should be covered by a written policy that clearly establishes their status, rights, and responsibilities. This policy should be consistent with the ACRL "Standards for Faculty Status for College and University Librarians."

*Questions*

1. Does the library employ staff capable of supporting and delivering information in all available formats, including electronic resources?

2. Is sufficient budgetary support provided to ensure the ongoing training of all staff?

3. Does the library have qualified librarians, other professional staff, skilled support staff, and student assistants in adequate numbers to meet its needs?

4. How does the college ensure that the library's professional staff have the appropriate accredited degrees and how does it encourage them to engage in appropriate professional activities?

5. How does the size of the library staff relate to the goals and services of the library, the college's programs, degrees, enrollment, size of the faculty and staff, and auxiliary programs?

6. How do library staff policies and procedures compare with college guidelines and sound personnel management, especially in the areas of hiring, recruitment, appointment, contract renewal, promotion, tenure, dismissal, and appeal?

7. How do staff members who are responsible for instruction maintain sufficient knowledge and skills to be effective instructors?

8. How does the library provide security, preservation, and emergency training for its staff?

## Facilities

The library facility should be well planned; it should provide secure and adequate space conducive to study and research with suitable environmental conditions for its services, personnel, resources, and collections. The library's equipment should be adequate and functional.

*Questions*

1. Does the library provide well-planned, secure, and adequate space for users?

2. Are building mechanical systems properly designed and maintained to control temperature and humidity at recommended levels?

3. What are the perceptions of users regarding the provision of conducive study spaces, including a sufficient number of seats and varied types of seating?

4. Is there enough space for the library's collections?

5. Does the staff have sufficient workspace and is it configured to promote efficient operations?

6. If there are branch libraries, do they have sufficient space for the collections and staff?

7. Is the library's signage adequate?

8. Does the library provide ergonomic workstations for its users and staff?

9. Are electrical and network wiring sufficient to meet the needs associated with electronic access?

10. Does the library meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act?

11. Are facilities provided to distance learners in accordance with the "ACRL Guidelines for Distance Learning Library Services."[6]

## Communication and cooperation

Communication is essential to ensure the smooth operation of the library. Communication should flow from all levels of the library: from the director to the staff and from the staff to the director. The library should have a regular mechanism to communicate with the campus.

Library staff should work collaboratively and cooperatively with other departments on campus. A special relationship should be encouraged between the library and information technology staff in providing access to electronic information resources. In some cases, a vice president, dean, or director of information services may administer both library and information technology operations and services. The library is usually responsible for selecting and providing information content. Information technology usually provides the technical infrastructure and support to deliver information. There is no single organizational model that will work for all colleges. Regardless of whether the services are independent or are integrated in some way, it is important that the services work collaboratively and keep each other fully informed.

### Questions

1. Is there effective communication within the library that allows for a free flow of administrative and managerial information?

2. Are staff members encouraged to suggest new ideas or procedures to improve operations or working conditions within the library? Is there a process to facilitate this?

3. Does the library have a regular means to exchange information with the campus?

4. Has the library established cooperative working relationships with other departments on campus?

5. If library and information technology are administered separately, does the organizational structure provide opportunities for productive communication and collaboration?

6. If one administrator has responsibility for both the library and information technology, how well have the two functions been integrated?

7. Is the library able to obtain technical support for information technology in the form of in-house expertise to provide electronic resources to on-site and remote users?

8. Is the capacity of the campus network sufficient to provide reasonable response times for local and remote information resources?

## Administration

The library should be administered in a manner that permits and encourages the most effective use of available library resources. The library director should report to the president or to the appropriate chief academic officer of the college. There should be a standing library advisory committee. The responsibilities and authority of the library director should be defined in writing. If there are branch libraries, they should be administered by the library director in accordance with the "ACRL Guidelines for Branch Libraries in Colleges and Universities." The library should be administered in accordance with the spirit of the ALA "Library Bill of Rights."

### Questions

1. How does the library administration encourage effective use of available library resources?

2. What is the statutory or legal foundation (e.g., college bylaws) for the library's activities?

3. To whom does the library director report? Is that reporting relationship appropriate?

4. Is there a document that defines the responsibilities and authority of the library director?

5. Does the library have a standing advisory committee? Does the committee have adequate classroom faculty and student representation? How effective is the committee?

6. How effective are the policies and procedures that determine internal library governance and operations?

7. Does the library operate in accord with the spirit of the ALA "Library Bill of Rights"?

## Budget

The library director should prepare, justify, and administer a library budget that is appropriate to the library's objectives. The budget should meet the reasonable expectations of library users when balanced against other college needs. The library should utilize its financial resources efficiently and effectively. The library director should have authority to apportion funds and initiate expenditures within the library budget and in accordance with college policy. The budget should support appropriate levels of staffing and adequate staff compensation.

### Questions

1. Does the library director prepare, justify, and administer the library budget in accordance with agreed upon objectives?

2. Are the library's annual authorized expenditures adequate to meet the ongoing, appropriate needs of the library?

3. How is the college's curriculum taken into account when formulating the library's budget?

4. How are the instructional methods of the college, especially as they relate to independent study, considered when formulating the library's budget?

5. What methods are used to determine the adequacy of existing collections? Is the budget adequate to maintain an appropriate rate of collection development in fields pertinent to the curriculum?

6. How does the size, or anticipated size, of the student body and the classroom faculty affect the library budget?

7. Does the budget support an appropriate level of staffing and compensation?

8. How is the adequacy and availability of funding for other library resources (e.g.,

Archives and Special Collections) determined?

9. Does the library budget reflect the library's responsibility for acquiring, processing, servicing, and providing access to media and computer resources?

10. To what extent does the library director have authority to apportion funds and initiate expenditures within the library budget and in accordance with college policy?

11. How does the library monitor its encumbrances and the payment of its invoices? How does the library determine its choices and schedule its expenditures?

12. Does the budget include adequate support for extended campus programs?

## Notes

1. The present document will replace the "Standards for College Libraries," 1995 edition (*C&RL News,* April 1995, pp. 245–257). The CLS Standards Committee was guided by the work of the ACRL Taskforce on Academic Library Outcomes Assessment, a group that was charged by ACRL to develop a philosophical framework for assessing libraries in terms of desired campus outcomes. (The taskforce's final report was accepted by the ACRL Board in July 1998.) These standards also address recent concerns of accrediting agencies (i.e., outcomes and assessment measures, as well as rapidly emerging and changing instructional and information technologies).

2. ACRL Task Force on Academic Library Outcomes Assessment, June 27, 1998, http://www.ala.org/acrl/outcome.html.

3. Ibid, p. 4.

4. For a further discussion of space requirements refer to Keyes D. Metcalf, *Planning Academic and Research Library Buildings.* 3rd ed. Philip D. Leighton and David C. Weber. (Chicago: American Library Association, 1999), Appendices B and C.

5. "ACRL Guidelines for Instruction Programs in Academic Libraries," *C&RL News* 60, no. 4 (1997): 264–66. http://www.ala. org/acrl/guides/guiis.html.

6. "ACRL Guidelines for Distance Learning Library Services," *C&RL News* 59, no. 9 (1998): 689–94. ∎

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## Program Proposal Deadline is May 1, 2000

Program proposal forms are located on the Web at:
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