

ACRL Proficiencies for Assessment Librarians and Coordinators

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Academic librarians face a higher education environment with increasing accountability and diminishing resources. The value of the library is no longer assumed on campus, and administrators are asked to demonstrate the library's contribution to student success and faculty productivity. Library administrators have responded by assigning assessment duties to librarians or creating assessment librarian positions in their libraries in order to assess library value and to create a culture of assessment. But what defines an assessment librarian? What competencies and proficiencies do they need to succeed?

Background

Recognizing the need to define the proficiencies needed by assessment librarians, the ACRL Executive Committee formed the Task Force on Standards for Proficiencies for Assessment Librarians and Coordinators in April of 2014 with the charge:

To develop a list of proficiencies required of assessment librarians and other librarians who contribute to assessment programs at their institutions, focusing on broad areas of proficiency rather than a comprehensive list of skills; consider similar documents such as ACRL's "Standards for Proficiencies for Instruction Librarians and Coordinators" and RUSA's

"Professional Competencies for Reference and User Services Librarians;" outline an approach to assist individuals and organizations in selecting the proficiencies most appropriate for their environment; and follow the standards development requirements in the ACRL Guide to Policies and Procedures.

Task Force members included: Mark Emmons (chair), Stephanie Alexander, Karen Brown, Alice Daugherty, Lisa Horowitz, JoAnn Jacoby, Carol Mollman, Megan Oakleaf, Zoltán Szentkirályi, and Terry Taylor.

The Task Force collected more than 250 potential proficiencies by brainstorming, conducting a literature review, reaping assessment proficiencies from existing library standards, and surveying assessment experts in librarianship and in higher education. The Task Force applied card sorting techniques to categorize proficiencies and identified 11 broad categories and 52 specific proficiencies. The Task Force then solicited comments from the library assessment community and revised the document based on the feedback received.

Application of proficiencies in academic libraries

The ACRL "Proficiencies for Assessment Librarians and Coordinators" allows academic libraries to begin with a common definition

of assessment librarian responsibilities. Proficiencies may be used to write job descriptions that define the duties of assessment librarians, assess performance and guide evaluation, and design professional development programs.

The document focuses on proficiencies rather than on positions. A library creating a specific position for learning assessment or collections assessment or seeking a librarian specializing in user experience or program evaluation, for example, will be able to pick and choose the proficiencies that will best define the job duties. Library administrators can also use the proficiencies to create an individualized assessment librarian position that will serve the specific needs of their library.

The definition of assessment librarian in these proficiencies includes any librarian with assessment duties. Individual libraries will need to define and apportion the range of responsibilities or to emphasize select proficiencies. In some cases, an assessment librarian position may encompass the entire span of assessment proficiencies and may serve as the coordinator of all assessment activities. In other cases, individual librarians may need only a portion of the proficiencies to complete their assessment assignment or a team of librarians might be responsible for separate proficiencies. Librarians with the position of assessment coordinators are most likely to need the leadership, management, and mentoring proficiencies described in categories 9, 10, and 11, though the skills described are useful for all librarians with assessment duties. The decision to emphasize one proficiency over another should be made based upon an evaluation of the purpose of the assessment program. Ultimately, the “Proficiencies for Assessment Librarians and Coordinators” should help librarians demonstrate their library’s value to the institution.

Proficiencies for Assessment Librarians and Coordinators

1. Knowledge of Assessment in Libraries and Higher Education

The assessment librarian recognizes the

purpose and value of assessment in both libraries and higher education. The assessment librarian:

1.1. Understands the purposes, values, and theories guiding assessment and evaluation methodologies and activities.

1.2. Has a broad understanding of research literature in the field of assessment and the scope, growth, and role of library assessment.

1.3. Recognizes the need to connect library value to university goals and mission through key indicators (learning analytics, library’s role in research activity, quality, and visibility). Distinguishes the difference between library and institutional definitions of assessment.

1.4. Monitors and describes current issues related to higher education accountability, multi-institution assessment initiatives, and regional and professional accreditation that guide higher education assessment.

1.5. Stays current with regional and disciplinary accreditation compliance requirements, including data requirements specific to the library.

1.6. Demonstrates familiarity with current national initiatives (LibQUAL+, ROI, NSSE, IPEDS/NCES, Ithaka Survey, balanced scorecard, value of academic libraries, etc.), influential library assessment methods (EBLIP, SAILS, RAILS, Conspectus, etc.) and relevant library standards (ACRL “Standards for Libraries in Higher Education”).

2. Ethics

The assessment librarian displays integrity and respect for humans. The assessment librarian:

2.1. Protects the welfare and dignity of human subjects and respects the privacy and confidentiality of all library users and library employees. Follows guidelines established by ethical or institutional review boards to maximize benefits and minimize harm.

2.2. Ensures that data is analyzed and reported with integrity and honesty. Displays impartiality and discloses conflicts of interest.

2.3. Abides by professional codes of ethics for librarians such as the ALA Code of Ethics and the IFLA Code of Ethics for Librarians and other Information Workers.

3. Assessment Methods and Strategies

The assessment librarian selects the appropriate tools or solutions and aligns the assessment activity with institutional mission and priorities. The assessment librarian:

3.1. Applies quantitative and qualitative assessment methods with the ability to implement and integrate multiple methods for a mixed-methods approach.

3.2. Selects appropriate influential library assessment methods and applies relevant library standards.

3.3. Designs assessment instruments, such as surveys, focus groups, interviews, rubrics, balanced scorecards, and internal data collection forms.

3.4. Manages different approaches to assessment, such as action research, ethnographic research, user-centered design, collection and use analysis, citation analysis, usability studies, and evaluation design utilizing input, output, outcomes, and impact measures.

4. Research Design

The assessment librarian designs research based on theoretical foundations. The assessment librarian:

4.1. Identifies problems or questions that can be answered by available data sets.

4.2. Demonstrates knowledge and skills of analytical tools (databases, spreadsheets, statistical analysis, qualitative analysis, and data visualization).

4.3. Is trained in ethical or institutional review processes, specifically data management, sharing, security, and ethical conduct in human research.

4.4. Designs research projects to generate data to address a research problem.

4.5. Applies statistical or quantitative research methods to a research problem.

5. Data Collection and Analysis

The assessment librarian understands best

practices for efficient and sustainable data collection, data management, and data storage. Knowledge of data practices includes documentation of the library's current data practices and steps toward improvement. The assessment librarian:

5.1. Visualizes and implements a roadmap for attaining optimal data collection and reporting processes, including data automation and integration of multiple data sources.

5.2. Utilizes available time-stamped system data, library data, institutional data, and third-party data to enable integrated library reporting capabilities and analysis across multiple data sources.

5.3. Identifies and defines metrics and data sets needed to measure assessment outcomes that are considered high priority.

5.4. Ensures accessibility and appropriate distribution of available data to staff and stakeholders.

6. Communication and Reporting

The assessment librarian serves as a catalyst for change within the library by delivering evidence and analysis to fuel better decision making. The assessment librarian:

6.1. Utilizes data visualization tools and techniques with both qualitative and quantitative data to communicate assessment results. Understands the purpose of charts, graphs, and tables and uses them correctly.

6.2. Prepares and formats data for decision-making processes by both internal and external stakeholders. Demystifies basic metrics and statistics for users.

6.3. Writes compelling narratives, creating reports that follow basic graphic design rules and include evidence-based, actionable analysis. Consults with units or departments to frame needs, outcomes, and next steps. Develops well-crafted business cases for stakeholder buy-in.

6.4. Communicates effectively in oral and written communications. Uses multiple channels to communicate results, such as presentations, as well as staff meetings, via email and LibGuides, etc. Regularly "closes

loops” with users, reporting “what you told us” and “what we’re doing about it.”

7. Advocacy and Marketing

Building on the insights of data and analysis, the assessment librarian expands the voice of the library in arenas that can impact the life of the institution. The assessment librarian:

7.1. Provides data and communications that market the library’s value to academic faculty, administrators, staff, students, parents, and other stakeholders.

7.2. Demonstrates persuasive skills to justify resources needed for improvement of the library, and to build institutional capacity and buy-in for projects.

7.3. Encourages participation in library assessment activities (e.g. advocating for key stakeholder participation, managing response rates, etc.).

7.4. Promotes library value and library contributions to the institution’s mission and priorities through evidenced-based narrative for deployment by library employees.

7.5. Frames and communicates library impact on institutional focus areas. Demonstrates benefits of library programs and services to the university’s current and aspirational state through key indicators. Supports strategic communication.

8. Collaboration and Partnerships

The assessment librarian works collaboratively within the library, with partners on campus and at other institutions, and with professional library and higher education organizations. The assessment librarian:

8.1. Determines key collaborative partners around issues related to assessment, accountability, and impact on campus and beyond. On the campus level, this will include offices responsible for institutional research, assessment, and learning analytics, as well as student support groups.

8.2. Proactively establishes, develops, and maintains partnerships. Contributes to joint initiatives. Seeks advice and consults with others when appropriate.

8.3. Integrates library assessment and data gathering with institutional and national initiatives related to research and learning in higher education.

9. Leadership

Librarians responsible for assessment, whether they have formal positional authority or not, should ideally possess the full range of leadership proficiencies. The following proficiencies are particularly critical for assessment librarians with leadership responsibilities. The assessment librarian:

9.1. Acts as a catalyst for change by establishing a shared vision for assessment, conceiving an assessment action plan, and designing and implementing an assessment program that will meet library and institutional goals.

9.2. Takes a systems approach to assessment, recognizing that the library is part of a larger institution with a shared mission and goals. Identifies institutional context, priorities, and decision-making processes. Monitors assessment activities across the institution. Commands a “place at the table” for library initiatives and contributes to institutional initiatives.

9.3. Gains organizational support and advocates for resources for the assessment program.

9.4. Leverages library and institutional politics and team leadership to persuade managers and colleagues to accept and act on recommendations regarding assessment.

9.5. Utilizes assessment results to inform decisions, solve problems, make plans, and set policies.

10. Management

Librarians who have formal responsibility for assessment should possess the full range of management proficiencies. The following proficiencies are particularly critical for assessment librarians with management responsibilities. The assessment librarian:

10.1. Manages and coordinates library assessment activities.

10.2. Conducts program evaluations, assessing the need for a new program and the effectiveness, efficiency, and impact of existing programs.

10.3. Develops, implements, and maintains systems for collecting, analyzing, and interpreting assessment data. Schedules recurrent assessment tasks. Manages assessment data using appropriate tools (e.g., assessment management systems). Develops data reporting forms for efficient internal reporting. Creates dashboards.

10.4. Provides data for reports and surveys (e.g., ACRL, ARL, and NCES IPEDS surveys and accreditation library reports).

10.5. Serves as assessment consultant and provides expertise to managers and librarians.

10.6. Analyzes staffing needs for assessment and develops a staffing strategy.

10.7. Applies principles of project management to assessment projects.

10.8. Prepares and manages the assessment budget allocations.

11. Mentoring, Training, and Coaching

Mentoring, training, and coaching are key to building a culture of assessment and building organizational capacity for assessment. The following proficiencies are important for all librarians with responsibility for assessment, but are especially critical for coordinators working with a team or committee. The assessment librarian:

11.1. Builds capacity for assessment in the library through training and mentoring activities.

11.2. Trains others throughout the library in order to develop expertise, knowledge, and skills in assessment.

11.3. Promotes a culture of assessment and encourages broad engagement by all levels of staff in assessment projects.

11.4. Acts as a point of contact for support on assessment projects, providing technical expertise in a selection of assessment measures

11.5. Mentors librarians engaged in assessment activities.

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The bibliography lists resources that the Task Force consulted for best practices in developing competencies and proficiencies, for examples of competencies and proficiencies in librarianship, and to gather potential assessment proficiencies. In addition, the task force added select resources recommended by reviewers.

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