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Amanda Bird, Kelly Rhodes McBride, and Elizabeth Cramer

# Modeling ACRL's Standards for Libraries in Higher Education

## A path to creating a culture of assessment

**A**cademic libraries are being held more accountable to prove their value through quantifiable assessment. The University Libraries at Appalachian State are in the formal process of identifying, documenting, and quantifying our contributions in a way that provides clear statements of our value to our internal and external stakeholders. As an organization, we are working to create an environment that values assessment and continuous improvement. In a practical sense ACRL's "Standards for Libraries in Higher Education"<sup>1</sup> provides us with a framework to think strategically about our value, role, and contributions to institutional effectiveness and assists us in our efforts to effectively communicate this importance to all of our constituents.

The University Libraries have strong connections with the standards. Our former dean, Mary Reichel, served as president of ACRL (2001-2002) and was a member of the ACRL Standards for Libraries in Higher Education Task Force. Our current dean, Joyce Ogburn, also served as president of ACRL (2011-2012) and was involved in the creation and promotion of the standards released in 2011.

In addition to our deans' involvement, other library colleagues voiced an interest in incorporating the standards into our evaluation and planning processes. Associate Dean Georgie Donovan asked select library faculty to choose one of the nine principles and give a brief presentation at a faculty meeting.

Donovan, who had just finished chairing the university's Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) Compliance Certification,

thought this would be a great way to introduce the new principles and performance indicators to the faculty, and serve as a type of assessment exercise. Faculty members presented on all nine of the principles over the spring and summer of 2013. These presentations led to several discussions throughout the library on the importance of incorporating the standards into strategic planning efforts.

### **Incorporating academic trends, issues, and the language of accreditation**

As emphasized in the standards, academic libraries need to be aware of current trends and issues critical in higher education. Two important documents guiding our efforts are the University of North Carolina (UNC) System Strategic Plan 2013-2018,<sup>2</sup> which outlines five priority goals for all 17 UNC system schools, and the Appalachian State University Strategic Plan, completed in 2014. The issues include increased institutional accountability tied to workplace needs and jobs received after graduation, program prioritization, and declines in state funding. In this current political and economic climate, it is imperative that libraries demonstrate their value to their institutions, particularly administrators and key stakehold-

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ers. It could not be a better time for putting the standards into action.

The standards outline a path for academic libraries to align their work within the parameters of accreditation criteria for institutions of higher education, rather than develop a separate set of library standards. As a matter of fortunate timing, Appalachian's Reaffirmation of Accreditation process for the SACS Commission on Colleges began in fall 2010. The fact that our associate dean was chairing the University SACS Compliance Certification created the opportunity for librarians to participate in a process that focused on institutional effectiveness at the university level. The libraries were tasked with identifying operational and learning outcomes, conducting assessment, and gathering data to measure our impacts, and use this information to make improvements and changes as needed. This required an extensive review of the collections, budget, staffing, instruction programs, and services.

In developing our strategic plan, we will communicate and quantify our standards in a manner understandable and accepted by the larger academic body. Our experience in working through the Reaffirmation of Accreditation process, coupled with the fact that librarians have faculty status and are heavily involved in university service, assessment, and faculty governance, enable us to speak the language of accreditation.

### **Strategies to combine the standards and strategic planning**

We have a number of things in place that will help us incorporate the standards into the strategic planning process. Our previous Strategic Plan spanned 2008-2013, and since we had not received the UNC system and Appalachian State strategic plans, we created a two-year Bridge Plan, 2013-2015.<sup>3</sup> The Bridge Plan provides forward momentum and direction, giving us time to formulate a new strategic plan for 2015-2020.

The University Libraries' Planning and Assessment Committee (PAC) plays another key role. The committee's charge includes supporting library strategic planning; developing,

implementing, and reviewing library assessments and action plans; and communicating and improving assessment efforts in the library. The committee is in the process of collecting and quantifying internal and external assessment efforts and working with various teams in the library to foster greater participation in outcomes based assessment efforts.

### **Getting on board with assessment**

We want to spread the gospel of assessment, but our challenge is finding the most effective method for communicating the benefits of working within an assessment-planning cycle. Prompted by the standards, PAC identified targeted strategic initiatives in the Bridge Plan for focused development of performance indicators and measurable outcomes, followed by assessment and analysis of collected data for continued improvement.

In following the seven assumptions articulated in the standards, PAC worked with related teams, committees, and individuals to identify and select strategic performance indicators and user-centered outcomes, and to conduct quantitative or qualitative assessment for selected Bridge Plan objectives. In preparing for the creation of our 2015-2020 Strategic Plan, this process acclimates all of us to the outcomes-assessment model as illustrated in the standards.

### **Conclusion**

Treating the "Standards for Libraries in Higher Education" as a "living" document is useful in laying the foundation for strategic planning and demonstrating our value. We believe the intent of the standards is reflected in the following quote:

... guide academic libraries in advancing and sustaining their role as partners in educating students, achieving their institutions' missions, and positioning libraries as leaders in assessment and continuous improvement on their campuses.

Part 2, Analytic Report (U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare), <http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015035420895;view=1up;seq=15>.

7. U.S. Office of Education (1969), Library Statistics of College and University, Fall 1969, Part 2, Analytic Report (U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare), <http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015036789520;view=1up;seq=66>.

8. Edmon Low, "ACRL Legislation in 1961," *C&RL* 23, no.2 (1962): 112.

9. ACRL, "President's Report, 1966/67," *C&RL News* 28, no.4 (1967): 163.

10. Bronson Price and Doris C. Holladay, Library Statistics of Colleges and Universities: Fall 1969 Analytic Report (U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, 1970), <http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015036789520;view=1up;seq=5>.

11. Robert B. Downs, "Crisis in Our University Libraries," *C&RL* 22, no.1 (1961): 7.

12. The Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis has specific information on the CPI and inflation for all years in the 1960s, [http://www.minneapolisfed.org/community\\_education/teacher/calc/hist1913.cfm](http://www.minneapolisfed.org/community_education/teacher/calc/hist1913.cfm).

13. ACRL, "ACRL Constitution and Bylaws Committee Report to the Board of Directors, June 1960," *C&RL* 22, no.3 (1961): 224.

14. ACRL, "ACRL President's Report July 1963," *C&RL* 24, no.5 (1963): 427.

15. ACRL, "Time Produces the Organization. Annual Report of the ACRL President, 1963/64," *C&RL* 25, no. 4 (1964): 327.

16. ACRL, 163.

17. Edmon Low, 112-114.

18. Edward G. Holley, "Building a Firm Foundation: ACRL Leadership, 1939-1989," *C&RL News* (1989): 465.

19. ACRL, "ACRL Report to Council, July 1961."

20. ACRL, 163.

21. Charles Edward Hale, "The Origin and Development of the Association of College and Research Libraries, 1889-1960" (PhD diss., Indiana University, 1976), 187.

22. ACRL, "ACRL Board of Directors, Midwinter Conference Washington, D.C. 1969, Brief Minutes, January 30, 1969-10:00 a.m.,"

*C&RL News* 30, no.2 (1969): 99.

23. ACRL, "From the ACRL Executive Secretary," *C&RL News* 29, no.5 (1968): 247.

24. ACRL, "ACRL Board of Directors Midwinter Meeting 1963, Brief of Minutes, January 30," *C&RL* 24, no. 2 (1963): 149.

25. James O. Wallace, "Two-Year College Library Standards," *Library Trends* 21, no. 2 (1972): 227.

26. ACRL, "ACRL Highlights, Annual Conference, June 25-July 1, 1967."

27. ACRL, 1967.

28. ACRL, "Association of College and Research Libraries Highlights Midwinter Meeting, January 9-13, 1967."

29. ACRL, "ACRL Board of Directors Meeting, Atlantic City, Brief of Minutes, June 26, 1969-8:00 a.m.," *C&RL News* 30, no.5 (1969): 317.

30. CHOICE, "Second Annual Report, 1964-1965." *ZZ*

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*(Modeling ACRL's Standards . . . cont. from page 615)*

The process has been slow, but we know that our grassroots approach will facilitate the incremental shift in our thinking that is necessary to work within a culture of assessment for continued improvement and alignment with Appalachian State University and the UNC System.

## Notes

1. "Standards for Libraries in Higher Education," American Library Association, October 2011, accessed November 10, 2013, [www.ala.org/acrl/standards/standardslibraries](http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/standardslibraries).

2. "Our Time Our Future: The UNC Compact with North Carolina. Strategic Direction 2013-2018," University of North Carolina, accessed November 10, 2013, [www.northcarolina.edu/strategic\\_direction/STRATEGIC\\_DIRECTIONS\\_2013-2018.pdf](http://www.northcarolina.edu/strategic_direction/STRATEGIC_DIRECTIONS_2013-2018.pdf).

3. "Appalachian State University Library Bridge Plan, 2013-2015," Belk Library & Information Commons 2013, accessed November 10, 2013, [www.library.appstate.edu/sites/library.appstate.edu/files/documents/university\\_library\\_bridge\\_plan\\_2013-2015.pdf](http://www.library.appstate.edu/sites/library.appstate.edu/files/documents/university_library_bridge_plan_2013-2015.pdf). *ZZ*