University Libraries Faculty and Staff Publications   University Libraries

2016

Assessment committees: good practices from ARL libraries

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Recommended Citation

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Abstract

Purpose – Assessment activities in academic libraries continue to grow as libraries explore assessment endeavors. Ranging from basic stats gathering and reporting to surveys, focus groups, and usability studies and beyond. Many practitioners are finding it necessary to create new processes and programs, with little guidance. The purpose of this paper is to paint a broad picture of assessment activities in Association of Research Libraries (ARL) university libraries with the goal of creating a resource for libraries developing or improving their assessment programs.

Design/methodology/approach – A survey was developed that asked questions about assessment personnel, activities, mission, and website. A total of 113 surveys were sent to academic library members of ARL. Survey results were analyzed to compile a list of recommended good practices for assessment and working with assessment committees in academic libraries.

Findings – The investigators had a response rate of 43 percent. The open-ended nature of the survey questions allowed for the respondents to specifically narrow down the problems and opportunities inherent in library assessment committees.

Originality/value – This study takes the temperature of the current state of assessment programs in ARL libraries, demonstrating the growth of assessment programs. It begins to document the practices of these libraries, particularly in regards to the sometimes informal and hard to track use of committees and other in-house collaborations, as a first step toward developing best practices for the field. The results illuminate productive areas for further study, including investigating how to measure a culture of assessment and maximizing impact of assessment information presented on assessment websites.

Keywords Survey, Decision making, Models, Academic libraries, Library assessment, Library committees

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The explosive growth of assessment programs in academic libraries over the last decade is well established by now. The same elements and pressures that have necessitated more systematic assessment in all of higher education show no sign of receding. On the contrary, it seems clear that assessment is here to stay.

In 1979, Tennessee was the first state to include a performance-funding piece to their funding model for higher education (Banta *et al.*, 1996). The performance-funding model requires that a percentage of state provided funds be tied to university performance in terms of student retention and graduation rates (Lederman, 2011). This legislation is considered by some to be the catalyst for the "assessment movement" in higher education (Astin and Antonio, 2012). Since that time, calls for accountability and outcomes-based assessment in higher education have steadily increased. Presently,

everyone from national and state legislators, to regional and academic program accrediting bodies, to the general public, require ever more stringent evidence that institutions of higher learning are indeed fulfilling their missions. The requirements relating to outcomes-based assessment of education have inevitably affected academic libraries as well, forcing them to grow their own assessment-related infrastructure and programs, and create a "culture of assessment."

"In a culture of assessment, assessment becomes the norm," and an institution systematically and habitually gathers and uses actionable data with the goal of using the results to create change and improve student learning (Farkas, 2013). But, while the need for assessment in higher education has grown ever more pressing, the development of systematic library assessment programs has been less than smooth. One possible reason cultures of assessment are not achieved is because higher administration often mandate assessment, while faculty and staff are not empowered to implement their own assessment programs that incorporate organic goals. Farkas (2013) suggests that it may be easier to "change culture by changing behavior, rather than the other way around."

One of the many challenges faced by academic libraries in developing a culture of assessment is the lack of clear and well-tested best practices. Not arbitrary procedures and structures mandated by administration, but best practices created out of experience and well tested in action. Such best practices have always been the backbone of the library practice and are, perhaps, the best way to effect the behavior change called for by Farkas. As noted by Lewin and Passonneau (2012), there is "a disconnect between professional organizations' recommendations and ARL members' practices. Professional library organizations need to determine and disseminate best practices assessment practices."

The current study grew organically from practitioners' attempts to address the issue of a lack of stated best practices related to the formation of library assessment programs and, in particular, the formation, organization, and functioning of assessment committees and other groups in academic libraries. While such groups are routinely used to accomplish assessment planning and implementation, especially in the early stages of starting an assessment program, little study has been made of how these groups are formed and how they function, or of what practices are most effective in maximizing the utility of such groups. This paper explores the results of a survey of Association of Research Libraries (ARL) member libraries on practices related to assessment groups and begins with an overview of the literature on administrative elements of assessment programs in academic libraries, particularly in relation to the formation and management of collaborative groups.

Literature review
The literature on the use of committees and teams in libraries tends toward case studies and how-to's (Besemer *et al.*, 1993; Whatley, 2004; Shofner, 2004), or advice/ observations based on the experiences of the author, often an administrator (Fitsimmons, 2013a, b; Lubans, 2003; Matthews, 1978). Bessemer *et al.* (1993) detail how teams became increasingly more important in libraries in the mid to late 1980s, due primarily to rapid changes in the organization, including budget cuts, rapid serials cost inflation, automation, and technological changes. This echoes research in the fields of organization management and group dynamics. According to sociotechnical systems theory, "teams should be used when jobs are technically uncertain rather than routine, when jobs are interdependent and require coordination to perform, and when the

environment is turbulent and requires flexibility" (Levi, 2016), a description that surely applies to most academic libraries today, and in particular to assessment activities in libraries.

In 2007, the ARL administered a survey that attempted to begin a systematic approach to tracking the growth of assessment programs and activities in ARL member libraries (Wright and White, 2007). The survey covered many aspects of assessment in academic libraries, including the timeline of the development of assessment programs, the impetus for assessment, the structure of assessment programs, and the nature of assessment activities. Of the 123 libraries surveyed, 73 libraries responded (a 60 percent response rate). At that time, all but one of the libraries surveyed engaged in some type of assessment activities beyond gathering and reporting statistics to the ARL annual survey. The survey revealed that while some of the libraries engaged in formal assessment as far back as the 1980s or earlier, the most growth in library assessment occurred between 1990 and 2004. During that time period, most libraries surveyed reported that the impetus for assessment came primarily from within the library, with 91 percent reporting that the top impetus to begin assessment was to "know more about their customers." Only 26 (38 percent) of respondents at that time reported "accountability requirements from your parent institution" as being an impetus (p. 11).

While assessment programs were developing, the concept of creating a culture of assessment in academic libraries arose. Lakos and Phipps (2004) explored the drive for developing this culture, stating that "[…] libraries are challenged to be nimble, innovative, responsive, proactive, and, most of all, able to demonstrate their value" (p. 346). In addition to the drive toward a culture of assessment, the paper explores organizational culture and the conditions necessary to promote a successful cultural shift in the library and how moving to a culture of assessment will refocus library efforts on developing services based on a deeper understanding of customers (Lakos and Phipps, 2004).

The ARL survey asked about the structure of assessment programs and found that that 24 (34 percent) respondents reported that primary responsibility for assessment activities was on a single individual working either full or part-time as an assessment coordinator, while 16 (23 percent) had either ad hoc or standing committees. Nine (13 percent) respondents had a whole department or unit charged with assessment, while 21 (30 percent) respondents had some other organizational structure, generally a more decentralized approach. Of those with a committee, 12 (17 percent) had a standing committee or team and four (6 percent) had an ad hoc committee; the committees averaged six-seven members (p. 12). The survey also found that standing committees "are less likely to coordinate the collection, reporting, or archiving of data, to fill requests for library data, or to submit external surveys." (p. 13) (Wright and White, 2007). A similar survey performed in the UK in 2009, was consistent with these results (Stanley and Killick, 2009).

In 2006, Hiller *et al.* graded the progress of research libraries in regards to their assessment capabilities and progress in creating sustainable assessment programs. Their project found that assessment responsibilities were spread throughout the libraries studied. They also found that assessment work tended to be one-time projects and were often not communicated throughout the library. In 2008, the authors continued this study and reported on the findings of their two-year assessment project aimed at examining the factors that facilitated and impeded library data use and its implications for assessment in research libraries. They found that the libraries

surveyed were not organized in such a way as to create a "research culture" that supported data-based decision making. When assessment was being done, it was badly coordinated with researchers lacking the formal training and time to communicate effectively and efficiently. They recommended that libraries, with the capabilities and willingness to assess services, undertake steps that included a formal assessment program and library wide research agenda that provided training and support for library staff and faculty (Hiller *et al.*, 2008).

But, while many studies have looked at the need for assessment in academic libraries and many others have detailed numerous and varied assessment methods, fewer have looked at the structure of assessment programs within institutions, or the struggles faced by practitioners who are often not only new to assessment, but new to academic librarianship, as they attempt to create processes, workflows, and departments from scratch. An analysis of 231 job postings for assessment-related positions that appeared between Summer 2012 and Winter 2014 found that the term "assessment" in these ads "encompassed a variety of meanings including evaluation, analysis, communication, and/or program development" (Passonneau and Erickson, 2014). Out of 44 job postings in which assessment was the main focus of the job, half (22) mentioned "program-project/people management" and all of the ads included content relating to collaboration, In addition, 33 of these ads listed skills and concepts related to "program improvement" as among the necessary core competencies (Passonneau and Erickson, 2014). Yet, in a related study that analyzed LIS course syllabi, Askew and Theodore-Shusta (2013) found that "assessment" was mentioned in only 10 percent of course materials.

Anecdotally, tales of new assessment librarians who are charged with starting a program from scratch are numerous in the field, but with little preparation from their previous educations (Fleming-May and Mays, 2015) and few best practices to guide them, this can be a rocky and difficult road.

Background
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville Libraries has been engaged in various assessments for the last 30 years. However, the development of a more formal assessment program is more recent. The genesis of the Libraries' Assessment Planning Group began in 2007, with the creation of an exempt staff position, titled assessment analyst. The assessment analyst, in conjunction with the then assistant dean, created an Assessment Committee in 2008. The charge of that committee was to: "develop and monitor an assessment plan for the Libraries; set assessment priorities; establish and implement a review and planning process for assessment projects; ensure appropriate training and support for staff involved in assessment; communicate results of assessment; and work to build a culture of assessment."

The resignation of the assessment analyst in 2010 provided an opportunity to revisit the structure of the burgeoning assessment program at UTK Libraries. When reevaluating the position, library administration decided to classify the new assessment position as a librarian with faculty status. By classifying the position as faculty the new assessment librarian would participate in library faculty meetings, serve as a principal investigator for IRB purposes, travel to and present at national conferences, and gain a larger understanding of library assessment programs on a national stage in a way a staff member would not be able to.

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville started searching for an assessment librarian in early 2011 and hired for the position in the Summer of 2011. The advent of

this new position occasioned a re-tooling of the assessment program, and the creation of a new group, the Assessment Planning Group. The Assessment Librarian serves as the de facto head of the Assessment Planning Group. The membership is comprised of a mix of faculty and staff, who serve a two-year staggered term with three members cycling on and off each year. Under current leadership the group has moved from task oriented projects to a non-voting advisory body. The group meets monthly but communicates between meetings via e-mail regularly. While the Assessment Planning Group is advisory, small working groups are created to execute assessment projects as needed.

The reflections on the development of this assessment committee, the evolution of the committee's function and purpose, and conversations about variations in UTK's organization of assessment programs and use of assessment committees prompted the authors to consider exploring this topic with an aim at determining potential good practices for the organization and function of assessment committees in academic libraries.

Methodology of survey

This project began as part of panel discussion at the Southeastern Library Assessment Conference in 2013. The panelists presented "Working by Committee: Formal and Information Assessment Collaborations – Assessment Committees and Beyond" in which participants from three different institutions shared information about the role of their assessment librarian and assessment committees in strategic planning. The ensuing discussion and interest provided evidence that examining the role of assessment committees in academic libraries was needed.

The researchers considered the issue of the formation of assessment programs and the function of assessment committees in academic libraries and began developing a survey to distribute to academic libraries. The design of the survey was informed by the above-mentioned discussion at SELAC 2013, as well as by portions of the 2007 ARL SPEC survey on assessment. Survey questions were designed to explore if institutions have assessment committees, committee charge or function, committee membership, committee web presence, and the types of assessment activities taking place in the library.

Selected individuals received an e-mail invitation asking them to complete the survey. The invitation provided an introduction to the project and a link that directed the participants to the survey, hosted on a secure server running Qualtrics. Invited participants were librarians at selected ARL institutions, ARL libraries that are not university libraries were excluded. The total number of participants invited to participate was 113. The invitation to participate in the survey was sent to individuals at these institutions who have library assessment as part of their job duties. In organizations where there were no clear individuals associated with assessment, the survey was sent to library administration.

Survey results

Of the 113 individuals who were invited to take the survey, 61 respondents started the survey, with 49 actually completing it, for a response rate of 43 percent. When asked: "Does your library have a position with assessment as a formal part of its job duties?" over half of respondents (56 percent) reported that their library has a position that is solely or primarily dedicated to assessment. It is noteworthy that in the 2007 ARL survey, only 34 percent of respondents reported having such a position, indicating growth in this area. Another 33 percent of respondents in the current study reported having positions with assessment as part of their job duties and only 11 percent of respondents had no such position at all at their institution. It should also be noted that the

survey did not ask whether the library has a whole department dedicated to assessment, and in at least one case that omission inhibited a respondent from completing the survey.

When asked about the existence of an assessment committee, group, or task force, close to half of respondents (44.4 percent) reported a formal standing committee. Another (20 percent) indicated they form ad hoc committees or task forces as needed. Combined, this (64.4 percent) indicates that more than half the respondents do have some form of group but (35.6 percent) continue to have no formal committee or group devoted to addressing assessment needs.
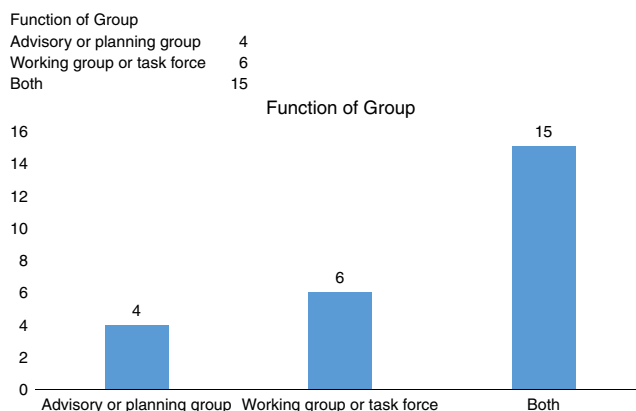
Of the five libraries who responded that they do not have any position with assessment as part of the job duties or a dedicated assessment position, three libraries indicate no assessment group, one library forms ad hoc committees or task forces, and one library has a standing, formal committee. Only three respondents (6 percent) indicate that their institutions have no assessment position or committee of any kind (Table I).

The libraries that do have a standing committee or form ad hoc committees were asked about the nature of that committee. In total, 60 percent of respondents indicated the committee serves both as an advisory or planning group and as a working group or task force. In total, 16 percent of respondents indicated their committee is strictly an advisory or planning group while (24 percent) indicated their committee acts as a working group or task force. The one library from the five without an assessment position who responded to this question indicated their group is an advisory or planning group (Figure 1).

In total, 25 libraries responded when asked about assessment committee, group, or task force membership. In total, 22 (88 percent) indicated a clear number or number range of

Libraries with assessment positions and/or assessment committees				
	Assessment position	Assessment part of duties	No assessment position	Total
Formal standing committee	13	6	1	20
Ad hoc committee	5	3	1	9
No committee	7	6	3	16
Total	25	15	5	45

Table I.
Cross-tabulation of libraries with assessment positions and/or assessment committees

Function of Group
Advisory or planning group 4
Working group or task force 6
Both 15

Figure 1.
Function of assessment committees or working groups

people with 7.5 people being the average. Six (24 percent) libraries indicated that the number varied and four of those mentioned that the variation was based on the assessment project. One library indicated three to four additional part-time student employees in the assessment department (not included in the membership average above).

The same 25 libraries with a committee, group, or task force were asked about the status of members. Most of the committees (56 percent) are composed of a combination of librarians (some are faculty) and library staff. A few indicate additional members including one with a graduate assistant, one with library student employees and three with library administrators. Only three committees (12 percent) are composed only of librarians or library faculty and only three (12 percent) are composed only of library staff (not librarians or library faculty). Although not asked specifically, four of the libraries included mention that representation on the committee was varied to include most (and in some cases all) library departments or functional areas. One library indicated a desire to expand to include campus administration in the future, although none currently are. Two libraries indicate that the membership varies based on what is being assessed.

Respondents indicated two primary methods for gaining membership to assessment committees: appointment or an open invitation or call for volunteers. In total, 44 percent utilize multiple methods to gain membership while (56 percent) indicate they use only one method. The 14 libraries that reported using only a single method to gain membership was split evenly between appointing members and calling for volunteers. In addition to these primary methods, a few libraries have additional methods including: two libraries that invite specific people; four libraries who put out a call but then review applicants and make appointments; and one library takes nominations from department heads. Additionally, two of the libraries indicate they have ex-officio members that were the assessment librarians and two libraries indicate that the recruitment method is based on the project. The researchers did not specifically ask about ex-officio members and estimate a higher number based on number of institutions with an assessment librarian or a position dedicated to assessment.

Again, variation was found when respondents were asked about the length of the term of service on the committee. Out of the 24 responses, only ten had defined terms and the average was two years. At seven libraries, participating in the assessment committee meant you signed up for an indefinite term. Finally, seven libraries report that the term is based on the project. All of the defined and indefinite terms were reported from libraries with a formal standing committee while all of the project-based terms were reported by libraries that form ad hoc committees or task forces for assessment duties as needed. In addition to these terms, four of the libraries reporting defined terms indicate that there are ex-officio members with the average being two people working in this capacity. In three of these cases, the responses indicate that these members are assessment librarians or part of the assessment team (Table II).

When asked about the charge or mission of the assessment group, the majority of the respondents (80 percent) stated that they did have a charge or a mission.

| | Length of term of service on formal and ad hoc committees | | | |
	Defined term	Indefinite term	Project based	Total
Formal or standing committee	10	7	0	17
Ad hoc committee	0	0	7	7
Total	10	7	7	24

Table II.
Length of term on assessment committees

Two groups stated the first duty of the assessment group was the creation of a charge, with one group stating they had difficulty creating a charge to due to the fact they were created without an administrative mandate and were struggling with crafting a purpose. Two groups stated that their missions were task dependent and changed depending upon the specific projects of the group. Overwhelmingly, the most common charges of the committees involved overseeing and supporting assessment-related activities in the library and communicating and reporting assessment activities and reports (Table III).

Other large patterns within the charges included maintaining data for decision making, nine instances, providing training and infrastructure for library staff in assessment, seven instances and fostering a culture of assessment within the library, five instances. While the charges and missions of most the respondents fit the above patterns, there were a few outliers in the charges. Two respondents stated that their primary focus included identifying user needs. One group stated that their focus included clarifying the value of the academic library and two other groups stated that their goals involved making assessment manageable in their libraries' with limited resources.
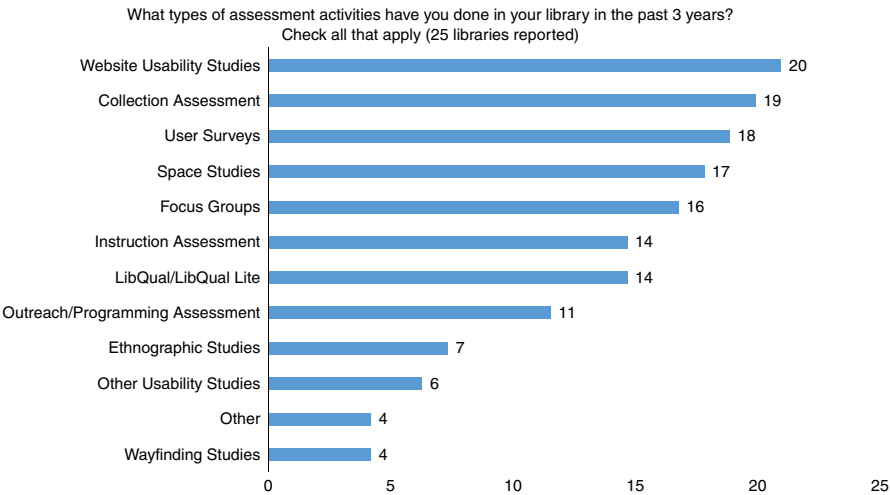
The 25 libraries with either a formal standing committee or who form an ad hoc committee or task force responded to questions about a committee website or online presence. The results were nearly evenly split with 13 respondents having an online presence while 12 do not. Only two of the seven libraries that form an ad hoc committee or task force have an online presence. The scales tilt the other direction for the libraries with formal assessment committees with 11 of the 18 indicating an online presence. In total, 13 libraries that indicated having an online presence were asked about the intended audience of the site. No library reported having an online presence solely for an external audience. Of the 13 respondents, only five or (38 percent) reported that this site was intended for an internal audience while the remaining eight or (62 percent) reported the site being intended for both an internal and external audience (Figures 2 and 3).

When responding to questions concerning the types of assessment activities the committee is engaged in, more than half of the respondents indicate involvement in assessment planning, creating or participating in library strategic planning, gathering usage statistics, creating or participating in research design, collecting data, advising administration and/or the assessment librarian, and presenting data. Additionally, more than half report that they had done specific activities including: LibQual or LibQual Lite, user surveys, focus groups, website usability studies, instruction assessment, collection assessment, space studies, and analysis of library data. When comparing assessment activities with the size of the institution, it becomes clear that some activities such as website usability studies are more commonly practiced at larger institutions while other activities such as collecting data and participating in research design are done at institutions of all sizes.

Type of group and presence of charge or mission Does your group have a charge/mission?			
	Yes	No	Total
Advisory or planning group	2	2	4
Working group or task force	4	2	6
Both	14	1	15
Total	20	5	25

Table III.
Types of groups and charge/mission

What types of assessment activities have you done in your library in the past 3 years?
Check all that apply (25 libraries reported)

Website Usability Studies	20
Collection Assessment	19
User Surveys	18
Space Studies	17
Focus Groups	16
Instruction Assessment	14
LibQual/LibQual Lite	14
Outreach/Programming Assessment	11
Ethnographic Studies	7
Other Usability Studies	6
Other	4
Wayfinding Studies	4

Figure 2.
Library assessment
activities over
previous three years

What types of activities has your committee, group, or task force engaged in? Check all
that apply (24 libraries reported)

Advising administration and/or assessment librarian	20
Collecting data	19
Presenting data	17
Assessment planning	17
Gathering usage statistics	16
Creating or participating in library strategic planning	13
Creating/Participating in research design	12
Implementing research	9
Other	7
Creating a formal assessment plan	7

Figure 3.
Committee
assessment activities
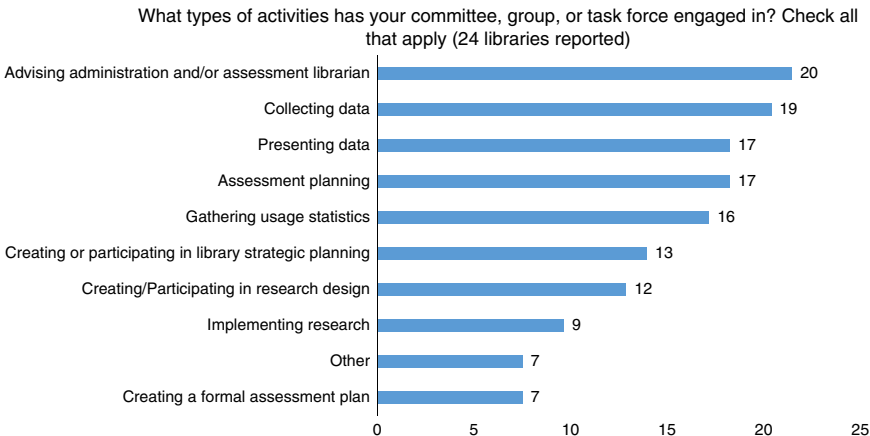
Recommended good practices for working with assessment committees

Many authors in the library world seem to agree that people tend to have "disdain" for committees and committee work (Fitsimmons, 2013a) and that it can be difficult to get productive results from committees. Lubans (2003) opines that, due to the necessarily representative nature of library committees, they can be prone to turf wars and therefore, "[e]xpecting a collaborative solution from a committee is like asking a pack of wolves to share its food with you." He further makes a distinction between committees and teams, and prefers the latter for productive work. Shofner (2004), likewise, states that "[l]ibrary committees can seem to be at their most cumbersome and political in academic settings.". How can an assessment committee or team, then, avoid these pitfalls and have the greatest chances for success?

As with many things, libraries are highly individual when it comes to assessment programs, goals, and resources. The size of the library and the individual goals of the

institution will heavily influence the practices that should be instituted. Further, research in the field of group dynamics also indicates that the importance of any one aspect of group success is highly dependent on context and that there are many different ways for groups to operate successfully (a concept known as "equifinality") (Levi, 2016). The authors therefore hesitate to recommend "best" practices, as what is a successful practice at one institution may be contradictory to what works at another. Instead, what follows is a list of "good" practices to consider at during the formation and implementation of an assessment committee or group. The researchers created a list of recommended "good practices" by coding the responses from questions 9-14 in the survey. The codes were then tallied and those with more than three schools recommending were then incorporated into the recommended practice list. These "good practices" are listed in numerical form and reflect the authors' interpretation of survey data and a selected review of the literature, coupled with experience and reflection on our institutions' growing assessment programs, and ongoing conversations with assessment librarians and practitioners:

(1) Develop clear goals for the group. Having a stated charge or mission for the group and making sure that all members understand the shared goals may be the most important and oft-cited factor of success for any group (Shofner, 2004; Lubans, 2003; Whatley, 2004; Levi, 2016).

(2) Put together a team that is representative, inclusive, and the right size. Group dynamics theory defines a team as being between three and 12 people (Levi, 2016), while Matthews (1978) claims that efficiency diminishes with more than eight members. Anecdotal evidence suggests between six and eight members as being optimal. Fitsimmons (2013a) points out that a representative group can help garner buy-in and avoid the appearance of favoritism. A group with diverse talents can make use of each other's strengths (Whatley, 2004). Research also indicates that much of the success of a group stems from recruiting good team members in the first place (Bennis and Biederman, 1997). Look for members with the necessary skills, as well as good group process skills (i.e. plays well with others), and the authority to do the job (Levi, 2016). Do not just put forth a call using your usual committee mechanics. Send a personalized e-mail or sit down to speak with potential members and create a list of reasons as to why they are invited and how they would fit into the group goals for the term of the committee membership.

(3) Set regular meeting times and share the group's agenda and meeting minutes. Also, consider a public website that briefly details the goals, activities, and successes of the group, as well as contact information, members, charge, and other organizational information. The library assessment community is small, but it is getting larger and visible contact information can help grow a network. Not all assessment projects get published and homegrown tools are plentiful, and the assessment network will be a way to tap into smaller scale but relevant projects all over the country.

(4) Organizational support at the highest level is crucial to success. As Lubans (2003) says, "for teams to perform well, a library administration has to make extraordinary commitments – in support, training, and patience". Research supports this view, finding that teams need not only support at the highest level, but also feedback (Levi, 2016). Likewise, accountability of the team to top leadership, as well as clear and respected deadlines, is important (Lubans, 2003; Whatley, 2004).

(5) Establish how the group will work and each member's role. Lubans (2003) suggests that team member roles be explicit, agreed upon, and well understood by all members of the group, and that all members understand how the team will work through problems and give feedback, in short how the group will function in a practical way. In addition to bringing ideas back to the group, and executing the tasks required of them, individual members have a role to play in promoting assessment in the organization. "What we need to do is to help everyone realize that assessment is an activity that can move us forward and that it can generate new ideas and possibilities. It is really a way of documenting what we have done to transform the library into a more vital center of activity" Jackson (p. 69)(MRN1).

(6) Multiple authors stress the importance of giving members "real work" (Lubans, 2003; Whatley, 2004; Fitsimmons, 2013b), and having the tasks they perform be meaningful and tangible, as opposed to "busywork." The work should also be equally shared among members. Even if your group functions primarily as a planning group or advisory board, the mechanism for getting feedback from members should require concrete input and real engagement from each person.

(7) When creating goals, aim for small sustainable projects with easily measurable impacts. If the group decides on a larger scale project, aim for a multi-year plan, where each year has a measurable impact. If the group is unsure of where to start, look at what the institution prioritizes and align goals along with institutional priorities.

(8) Communicate results. Ensure that the group's agenda and minutes are freely accessible to the library as a whole. Additionally, maintain and update a publically accessible website. The website does not have to extensive, but it should include the goals of the group and contact information. Present important findings to different groups within the library, ideally tailored to their interests. Repeated communication through multiple channels is the best way to engage your audience and ensure that assessment actually has an impact.

Future research directions

While this study identifies some trends and observations about the use of committees to perform assessment functions in libraries, it also raises a number of issues or questions that could be useful to explore in future research.

The concept of "culture of assessment" is mentioned repeatedly in the charge or mission of assessment programs and committees and, indeed, it can be found in much of the literature. How do libraries measure if they have successfully created a culture of assessment? Once established, how does the culture of assessment persist in an organization? Related to this concept, Oakleaf (2013) asks if establishing a dedicated assessment librarian helps an organization become more informed on assessment practices. Lakos and Phipps (2004) point to the need to explicitly include assessment in job descriptions as well as a need to provide ample time for staff to learn and develop assessment skills. A study comparing the general assessment knowledge of library staff in libraries with a dedicated assessment librarian compared to those without could provide data to support the formation of assessment positions. Additionally, learning exploring successful methods used for staff training and skill development would assist assessment librarians in developing training opportunities.

While this study touched on assessment websites, additional work investigating impact and use could be done. Lewin and Passonneau (2012) explored assessment data publicly available on library websites and found that there is a lack of consistency. They specifically state that "the limited mention of ROI and value-added, on websites or in key organizational documents, points to a disconnect between professional organizations' recommendations and ARL members' practices. Professional library organizations need to determine and disseminate best practices assessment practices" (Lewin and Passonneau, 2012, p. 91).

Finally, comparing assessment committees and activities across different types of libraries, not limited to academic research libraries, may lead to finding commonalities or differences between types of libraries that could point toward recommended best practices that are more detailed and specific.

Conclusion

Assessment programs in academic libraries continue to increase and expand, bringing new opportunities and challenges. The findings of this survey confirm that this is still a malleable and varied area, with no standard best practices being widely followed. Even among ARL member libraries, that might be assumed to be more alike than most, the range of structures for assessment is great. From programs without a dedicated position or at most with a part-time position for assessment, to those programs with an assessment department with multiple members, there is no one size fits all for these organizations.

The survey findings do confirm that assessment committees and groups are still extensively used, though their structures and functions also vary widely. The experience of UTK Libraries is echoed in these findings as well, that these groups still play a vital role in creating and furthering a culture of assessment, as well as accomplishing the nuts and bolts of those processes that support assessment.

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Appendix. ARL Library Assessment Committee Survey

Q1 INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

Assessment Committee & Activities in ARL Libraries Survey

INTRODUCTION You are invited to take part in a research survey, conducted by librarians at the University of Tennessee Libraries. The purpose of this survey is to gather information about the assessment history, programs, and activities in ARL libraries.

INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPANTS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE STUDY You are being asked to complete an online survey with 17 questions. It should take about 20 to 25 minutes to complete. You must be 18 years of age or older to participate.

RISKS AND PROTECTIONS There is minimal risk for harm or injury. Some discomfort may be felt after spending time sitting in front of a computer and/or typing.

BENEFITS Your participation in the survey will help the UT librarians add to the best practices related to library assessment and assessment committees. This project is an attempt to paint a broad picture of assessment activities in ARL libraries with the goal of creating a resource for libraries developing their assessment programs or attempting to improve their assessment efforts, and to work toward developing best practices for library assessment.

CONFIDENTIALITY The information in this study will be kept confidential and will only be reported as group data with no identifying information. Data will be stored securely and viewed only by persons conducting the study. No reference will be made in written or oral reports that could link participants to the study.

CONTACT INFORMATION If you have questions at any time about this study or the procedures, (or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study,) you may contact the one of the researchers, Michelle Brannen, at (865) 974-6396 or brannen@utk.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, contact the IRB Administrator in the Office of Research at (865) 974-3466.

PARTICIPATION Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your responses will be destroyed.

CONSENT By clicking "yes" below I indicate that I have read the above information. I can print out a copy of this form. I am 18 years of age or older. I agree to participate in this study.

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

If No Is Selected, Then Skip To End of Survey

Q2 Do you have a position with assessment as a formal part of its job duties?

- A. Yes, we have an assessment librarian or a position that is dedicated solely or primarily to assessment duties. (1)
- B. Yes, we have a position where assessment is part of the job duties but it is not the sole or central focus of the job. (2)
- C. No, we do not have a position where assessment is a formal part of the job duties. (3)

Q3 Do you have an assessment committee, group, or task force?

- A. Yes, we have a formal standing committee (1)
- B. Yes, we form an ad hoc committee or task force for assessment duties as needed. (2)
- C. No, we do not have a formal committee or group. (3)

If C. No, we do not have a for... Is Selected, Then Skip To End of Block

Q4 1. If you have a committee, group, or task force, is it a:

- A. Advisory Group or Planning Group (1)
- B. Working Group or Task Force (2)
- C. Both (3)
- D. Other option (4) _____

Q5 1.   How many members are in the committee, group, or
task force?

- Number of Members (1)

_____

Q6 1.   What is the makeup of your committee, group, or task
force? I.e. Library faculty and staff. Mostly staff. Members of
the library and members of the campus administration.

Q7 How is membership determined for the committee, group,
or task force? I.e. Appointment, Volunteer, Invitation, etc.

Q8 What is the length of term of the committee, group, or task
force?

Q9 Does your assessment committee, group, or task force have
a charge or mission?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q10 What is the charge or mission of the committee, group, or
task force?

Q11 Does your committee, group, or task force have a website
or other online presence?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

If No Is Selected, Then Skip To What types of activities does
your co...

Q12 If you do have a website or online presence, is the website
internal or external?

- Internal –for library and campus use only. (1)
- External – available publicly. (2)
- Both (3)

Q13 What types of activities does your committee, group, or
task force engage in? Check all that apply

- Creating a formal assessment plan (1)
- Assessment planning (2)
- Creating or participating in library strategic
  planning (3)
- Gathering usage statistics (4)
- Creating/Participating in research design (5)
- Implementing research (6)
- Collecting data (7)
- Advising administration and/or assessment
  librarian (8)
- Presenting Data (9)
- Other _____ (10)

_____

Q14 1.   What types of assessment activities have you done in your library in the past 3 years? Check all that apply

- LibQual/ LibQual Lite (1)
- User Surveys (2)
- Focus Groups (3)
- Website Usability Studies (4)
- Wayfinding Studies (5)
- Other Usability Studies (6)
- Instruction Assessment (7)
- Collection Assessment (8)
- Outreach/Programming Assessment (9)
- Space Studies (10)
- Analysis of Library Data (11)
- Ethnographic Studies (12)
- Other_____ (13)

_____

Q15   How many librarians or library faculty are in your organization?

Q16 How many library staff are in your organization?

Q17 What is the approximate size of the population you serve?

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