Developing an Assessment Plan for Measuring Student Learning Outcomes

Teaching library and information literacy skills is viewed as directly affecting student outcomes because these skills support such general/liberal education outcomes as critical thinking, computer literacy, problem solving, and lifelong learning.¹

Based on the requirements of the regional accrediting body and on standards and reports by ACRL, staff of the Mildred F. Sawyer Library at Suffolk University in Boston (hereafter referred to as the Sawyer Library) decided to create a student learning assessment plan. They reviewed information from articles and reports from other libraries and higher education institutions to identify and determine a process by which they would write the first formal assessment plan for the library. This chapter discusses the development effort, and appendix B includes the resultant assessment plan for student learning outcomes.² A similar effort produced the library’s first faculty assessment plan as shown in appendix C.

Recognizing the Need for an Assessment Plan for Student Learning Outcomes

The requirements of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) concerning assessment of institutional effectiveness is most succinctly stated in its Policy of Institutional Effectiveness. “An institution’s efforts and ability to assess its effectiveness and use the obtained information for its improvement are important indicators of institutional quality.” Its policy states that assessment enhances institutional effectiveness but notes that assessment efforts can vary among institutions. Furthermore, it asserts that assessment is not a one-time activity; rather, it is evolutionary, ongoing, and incremental. Finally, the policy notes that “assessment and accreditation share
the common goal of enabling the institution to reach its fullest academic potential by providing the highest quality education possible. In pursuing that goal, institutional autonomy should be preserved, innovation encouraged, and the distinct character of each institution recognized and honored.”

The six library and information resources standards presented in NEASC’s 1992 *Standards for Accreditation* are input, output, and process based. In 1998–1999, NEASC studied its current *Standards for Accreditation* and found that technology should either comprise a separate standard or be subsumed under standard 7: “Library and Information Resources.” While NEASC did not incorporate the student learning assessment findings from this study in a draft revision of the existing standards, a memorandum concerning proposed revisions in the standards for accreditation stated that revisions in standard 7 “are meant to address the significant changes wrought by technology on information resources at member colleges and universities.”

The proposed changes in standard 7 are clear: First, the emphasis of the revision is reflected in the shift of the title of the standard from “Library and Information Resources” to “Information Resources and Services.” The phrase “library and information resources” in standard 7 was often replaced by “library, information resources, and services.” NEASC also added a new emphasis on information literacy. In standard 7.4, one sentence has been changed to “The institution provides appropriate orientation and training for use of these resources, as well as instruction in basic information literacy” (the italics denote the addition to this sentence). The revisions also strengthened standard 7.5 on resource sharing with other institutions to include “appropriate support for distance education learning students and faculty.”

The proposed NEASC revisions are silent on library assessment. Using the revised standard 7.4 on information literacy and existing standard 7.6 on usage, together with the Policy on Institutional Effectiveness, the staff decided to leverage both points as a stated need for the Sawyer Library to become a stronger institutional partner regarding the assessment of information literacy and student learning outcomes.

ACRL documents were invaluable when identifying the possible components of an outcomes assessment plan. A most useful document was the 1998 report from the Task Force on Academic Library Outcomes Assessment, which provided and discussed definitions that clarify the context of assessment:

Outcomes, as viewed by the task force are *the ways in which library users are changed as a result of their contact with the library's resources and programs*. Satisfaction on the part of a user is an outcome. So is dissatisfaction. The task force considers simple satisfaction a facile outcome, however, too often unrelated to more substantial outcomes that hew more closely to the missions of libraries and the institutions they serve. The important outcomes of an academic library program involve the answers to questions like these:

- Is the academic performance of students improved through their contact with the library?
- By using the library, do students improve their chances of having a successful career?
- Are undergraduates who used the library more likely to succeed in graduate school?
Does the library’s bibliographic instruction program result in a high level of “information literacy” among students?

As a result of collaboration with the library’s staff, are faculty members more likely to view use of the library as an integral part of their courses?

Are students who use the library more likely to lead fuller and more satisfying lives?

Questions like these are difficult to answer. That is to say, empirically rigorous measurement of academic library outcomes is hard to do. This task force firmly posits, however, that it is changes in library users such as the ones addressed in these questions that comprise the outcomes with which academic librarians should be concerned. It may be that these outcomes cannot be demonstrated rigorously, or in a short period of time, or even by very many institutions. The task force believes that they can be measured, however, and their relationship to resource inputs and program inputs can be meaningfully determined through careful and lengthy research.7

For the most part, academic libraries have been successfully measuring inputs and outputs. However, this report provides this sharp distinction:

“Outputs” serve to quantify the work done, i.e., number of books circulated, number of reference questions answered. They are valuable measures for making decisions about staffing levels, setting library hours of operation, and so forth. However, they do not relate these factors to the overall effectiveness of the library in affecting user outcomes. It is important to track the library’s outputs, but insufficient for assessing outcomes.8

The task force determined that outcomes assessment conducted by libraries should be user, not institution, centered; that it needed to measure the contributions that the library made to the educational mission of the university or college; and that the use of a variety of methodologies to corroborate conclusions drawn was necessary.9 Outcomes assessment measures changes in library users as a result of their contact with a library’s programs, resources, and services as related to the stated educational goals of the parent institution.

A second ACRL document providing direction is “Standards for College Libraries 2000 Edition.” Definitions of outcomes, outputs, and inputs were taken from the aforementioned Task Force on Academic Library Outcomes Assessment Report. The standards also provide a rationale for increasing the role of the academic library in the educational process:

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.10

These standards also provide guidance on the relationships between library planning and assessment: Outcomes assessment measures how and what library goals and objectives achieve, provides accountability for student achievement, and serves as a mechanism for improving library practices.
Furthermore, academic librarians should provide assistance to users concerning methods of information retrieval, evaluation, and documentation, thereby facilitating student academic success and encouraging lifelong learning.11

ACRL also released Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education in 2000. The standards define information literacy thus:

>[Information literacy is] a set of abilities requiring individuals to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information. . . . Information literacy forms the basis for lifelong learning. It is common to all disciplines, to all learning environments, and to all levels of education. It enables learners to master content and extend their investigations, become more self-directed, and assume greater control over their own learning.12

Developing lifelong learning is central to the mission of higher education institutions. In turn, information literacy is a contributor to lifelong learning.13

The second part of this document identifies five standards and twenty-two performance indicators that focus upon the information literacy needs and skills of university and college students. In addition, the standards list potential outcomes as “guidelines for faculty, librarians, and others in developing local methods for measuring student learning” concerning progress toward the attainment of information literacy.14 In using the Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education, the staff of the Sawyer Library reviewed the standards and performance indicators, choosing those immediately supportable by the library’s existing resources for inclusion in its outcomes assessment plan.

ACRL released Objectives for Information Literacy Instruction: A Model Statement for Academic Librarians in early 2001.15 These helpful objectives, intended as suggestions for creating institutional goals and performance objectives and identifying appropriate institutional responsibilities, support the Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education document. Staff of the Sawyer Library referred to those objectives as they developed objectives for their student learning outcomes assessment plan.

Sawyer Library staff also reviewed articles and reports from academic librarians concerning bibliographic instruction and information literacy. A study at The Citadel’s Daniel Library found that outcome-focused library instruction appears to lead to skill development, improved efficiency, and a positive attitude change. The Hutchins Library at Berea College and the Jeremy Richard Library of the University of Connecticut at Stamford found that codevelopment of outcomes-based instruction by course and library faculty may be an effective approach to improving students’ skills in navigating numerous library and digital resources.16

Two recent articles helped the Sawyer Library focus on specific student information skills needs. A study at the University of California–Berkeley found that students’ perceptions about their ability to gain access to information and conduct research exceeded their actual ability to do so.17 A study by Deborah J. Grimes and Carl H. Boening found that, at most, students only superficially evaluate Web sites and use unauthenticated Web resources rather than taking advantage of databases or Web guides provided by the library. Grimes and Boening suggest that librarians need to emphasize evaluative criteria, help students find “good” Web resources by including links to librarian-reviewed sites in the library’s online public access catalog, and provide individual
training for faculty members about Web resources so that they are better prepared to instruct students concerning appropriate use of the Web.\textsuperscript{18}

In “Defining and Measuring the Library’s Impact on Campuswide Outcomes,” Bonnie Gratch Lindauer makes a convincing case for academic librarians to undertake outcomes assessment to “measure the ways that the library, learning resources, and computer services units make a real difference in the academic quality of life for students and faculty.” Lindauer goes on to succinctly argue that the teaching of information literacy skills directly affects student outcomes, contributing to the student’s development of critical thinking and instilling such values as lifelong learning.\textsuperscript{19}

In a 2000 report for the Association of Research Libraries (ARL), Kenneth R. Smith, the distinguished service professor of economics and faculty associate to the provost at the University of Arizona, states that institutions are changing:

[They are] moving from a model in which we package knowledge around the expertise of the faculty to a model based on the learning outcomes realized by students. These outcomes include not only what students know but also the skills they develop, what they are able to do, and the attitudes of mind that characterize the way they will approach their work over a lifetime of change. . . . [Furthermore, the institutional focus on learning] involves looking at the academic program not from the perspective of its subject matter content but from the perspective of the competencies to be developed by students. [Therefore, the library] must move from a content view (books, subject knowledge) to a competency view (what students will be able to do). Within the new environment, we need to measure the ways in which the library is contributing to the learning that the University values.\textsuperscript{20}

Smith refers to the student learning outcomes in ACRL’s \textit{Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education} while identifying additional student learning outcomes compiled from focus groups on his campus.

\textbf{Identifying the Processes and Components of an Assessment Plan for Student Learning Outcomes}

There is no shortage of recommendations concerning the process of creating and developing the format for assessment plans. Librarians Lois M. Pausch of the University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign and Mary Pagliero Popp of Indiana University–Bloomington recommend that assessment plans begin with a mission statement and purpose followed by statements of expected student achievements and information concerning performance measures, evaluation, and use of the evaluative results.\textsuperscript{21} A paper from the Schreyer Institute for Innovation in Learning, Pennsylvania State University (PSU), states that a “well-designed assessment plan starts with identifying the goals for the course or program as they relate to such areas as student learning, student attitudes, cost effectiveness, and program implementation. The student learning goals should be phrased in terms of what the students should be able to do at the end of the course.”\textsuperscript{22} Once all the goals and areas (student learning, student attitudes, cost effectiveness, and program implementation) are determined, the methods
of assessment should be identified. Gloria Rogers and Jean Sando of the Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology outline eight steps to developing an assessment plan:

1. identify goals
2. identify specific objective(s) for each broad goal
3. develop performance criterion(criteria) for each objective
4. determine the practice(s) to be used to achieve goals
5. select assessment methods for each objective
6. conduct assessments
7. determine feedback channels
8. evaluate whether the performance criteria were met and the objectives achieved

California Polytechnic State University’s Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Model employs a similar eight-step process, but it emphasizes an evaluative feedback loop that takes the analysis and interpretation of the assessment findings from step 8 and determines “implications of results for program modification” by returning to step 3, which creates “educational objectives (EOs) for each program component.”

Assessment techniques and measures are difficult components to write in an assessment plan for student learning outcomes. Reflecting the literature on program and impact evaluation, PSU’s Schreyer Institute for Innovation in Learning discusses formative assessment, which is the gathering of feedback during the semester, and summative assessment, which measures the course’s overall success at its conclusion. Formative assessment relies on surveys, quality teams, peer evaluations, problem-solving tasks, or focus groups, while summative assessment uses multiple-choice tests, essay tests, pretest/posttest designs, control/experimental group designs, portfolios, poster sessions, presentations, case study analyses, concept maps, and interviews. The Schreyer Institute also identifies assessment measures by performance objectives. For example, methods used to measure student attitudes include pretest and posttest surveys and surveys of student perceptions of how well-prepared they were for subsequent courses.

The University of Wisconsin–Madison differentiates between direct and indirect learning indicators. Direct indicators include capstone course evaluation, course-embedded assessment, tests and examinations (both locally/faculty designed and commercially produced standardized tests), portfolio evaluation, pretest/posttest evaluation, thesis evaluation, and videotape and audiotape evaluation of performance. Indirect indicators rely on external reviewers, student surveying and exit interviewing, alumni surveying, employer surveying, and curriculum and syllabus analysis.

An emphasis in most of the library assessment plans discussed concerns the involvement of faculty in focused information literacy instruction and outcomes assessment. Faculty involvement at the Daniel Library at The Citadel, the Hutchins Library at Berea College, and the Jeremy Richard Library of the University of Connecticut at Stamford have already been mentioned. Additionally, Pausch and Popp state the following:

Librarians should begin to work with other teaching faculty in assessment activities aimed at providing instruction in information literacy within the department’s or school’s curriculum. This could include
helping to develop a set of learning goals and objectives that teaching faculty themselves can use in providing instruction and evaluating their students' abilities in finding and using information.

fostering a team-teaching partnership.

making a library lecture/workshop a regular part of a discipline-related course. This will require librarians to give up the idea that only they can teach the basic library information skills and . . . provide help and encouragement to teaching faculty as they incorporate the teaching of information literacy in their classes.28

The American Association for Higher Education’s “Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning” looks at faculty-librarian collaboration in assessment from the institutional perspective:

Student learning is a campuswide responsibility, and assessment is a way of enacting that responsibility. Thus, while assessment efforts may start small, the aim over time is to involve people from across the educational community. Faculty play an especially important role, but [assessment] questions can’t be fully addressed without participation by student-affairs educators, librarians, administrators, and students. Assessment may also involve individuals from beyond the campus (alumni/ae, trustees, employers) whose experience can enrich the sense of appropriate aims and standards for learning. Thus understood, assessment is not a task for small groups of experts but a collaborative activity; its aim is wider, better-informed attention to student learning by all parties with a stake in its improvement.29

Smith’s ARL report also discusses the interaction of faculty and librarians. He contends that the student learning outcomes are often common to learning outcomes identified by faculty for departmental courses and programs. The library, he notes, could assist academic programs with student learning and assessment efforts by delivering “offerings,” which are “units of learning materials designed to develop competency in specific learning outcomes that are considered important by the library and by other academic programs.” The offerings, which should be incorporated into required courses, are a means to “give the library a curriculum (its own set of course segments) and an opportunity to connect this curriculum to other academic programs.” Smith states that the library must internally develop these learning units and then proactively convince the faculty that the library can “contribute to the learning outcomes of the academic program,” because it is unlikely that the academic department will formally request such assistance from the library.30

Creating the First Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Plan for the Sawyer Library

Taking all of the information and opinions gathered, the staff of the Sawyer Library began creating its student learning outcomes assessment plan. The learning outcomes that were sought should have a lifelong effect on students, and although that effect would be difficult to measure, there should be an effort to do so. While faculty involvement was essential, the staff wanted to identify and design learning modules that were in concert with their strengths
and within the limits of available resources. Therefore, they identified a process by which to approach the effort to create the plan:

1. Create a rationale for the assessment effort based upon information literacy skills
2. Determine the learning outcomes (learning objectives) from the library’s perspective required for student success:
   a. review the university mission statement
   b. revisit the Sawyer Library’s strategic plan
   c. review other university/college planning and learning objectives documents
   d. use ACRL’s documents concerning standards and information literacy
3. Determine methodologies for teaching the outcomes
4. Develop curriculum-based learning modules through which the library would present the methodologies as the effort to achieve the outcomes:
   a. understand the learning outcomes of academic degree programs
   b. create modules based upon the library’s realized strengths and within its available resources
   c. determine how to convince the faculty that the library’s learning modules may be integrated into academic courses to achieve shared outcomes
5. Identify ways to measure how well outcomes are being achieved (both directly and indirectly)
6. Collect data and measure the extent to which outcomes are achieved
7. Use the assessment results to improve academic programs (evaluative feedback) by incorporating results and analysis into a
   a. progress report
   b. modification/revision of the goals, objectives, and methods employed

The staff began by writing the rationale for the library’s involvement in information literacy. Although they had been conducting bibliographic instruction for years, they wanted to formalize their relationship to the university’s educational and learning mission and to increase the value of the library as a teaching/learning department for the faculty. Furthermore, Suffolk University is preparing for its reaccreditation in 2002; the regional accrediting body wants academic libraries involved in basic information literacy, and conducting assessment is one component of accountability for the accreditation review. As a consequence, the staff reviewed their instructional efforts and broadly identified that they offer

- student orientation to library-held information resources and their role or use
- explanations of the differences between scholarly and nonscholarly resources
- demonstrations of the value of using Boolean searching strategies across all resources
- evaluations of information sources, especially Web sites
- explanations of the concept of collection development, including electronic resources
Next, it was decided to

build on known strengths, formalizing what staff members do well into staff-taught instructional modules that they could offer the faculty
conduct assessment practices (measures, analysis and interpretation of results, and evaluative feedback) to become familiar and comfortable with the effort made in information literacy
develop additional learning modules as identified by library staff or requested by faculty

The rationale appears in a supporting statement, as follows:

Outputs serve to quantify the work done, such as the number of books circulated or the number of reference questions answered. They are valuable measures for making decisions about staffing levels, setting hours of operations, etc. However, they do not relate to overall effectiveness of the library in affecting user outcomes. In addition, while it is important to track the library’s inputs, they too are insufficient for assessing outcomes. In fact, the purpose of all inputs is to achieve outcomes.

The focus to date has been on making information more accessible rather than addressing specifically the learning outcomes important to student success. The Mildred F. Sawyer Library is evolving from measuring only inputs (such as the annual and cumulative resources concerning collections, staffing, the physical facility, and installed information technologies) and outputs, to identifying and measuring learning outcomes (student known content, developed skills and abilities, and acquired attitudes and values). We need to measure the ways in which the library is contributing to the learning that the university values. Because of the nature of information access and availability, the major focus for the library concerns improving student information literacy competencies and skills.

Student outcomes are statements about what students will know/think/be able to do as a result of library programs. They are not statements about what the library should/could do to bring about desired outcomes. Conducting student learning outcomes assessment is designed to improve services. The results may not be able to stand up to scientific scrutiny, but they should provide informed judgment on what does and does not work. Specifically, the staff want to identify the ways in which library users are changed as a result of their contact with library resources and programs:

Does the library’s bibliographic instruction program improve students’ information literacy?
Are students’ learning attitudes improved through their contact with the library?
As a result of collaboration with the library staff, are faculty members more likely to view use of the library as an integral part of their courses?

Although group bibliographic instruction is one of the primary teaching methodologies, the staff still wanted to review how information literacy was being taught in higher education. First, they looked at the 1990 Comparative Data on Teaching Goals Inventory (commonly known as TGI) in Four-Year Colleges. Of the 52 TGI included in Classroom Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for College Teachers, two involve information literacy skills and attitudes. In cluster 1: higher-order thinking skills, 49 percent of faculty rated “develop ability to synthesize and integrate information and ideas” as essential. In cluster
4's liberal arts and academic values, 33 percent of faculty rated “develop a lifelong love of learning” as essential. Furthermore, none of the classroom assessment techniques (CATs) presented in Classroom Assessment Techniques directly focused on information literacy. Only CAT 39 (process analysis) could be adapted to the Sawyer Library’s information literacy instruction process. As a result, the library staff decided to develop their own assessment techniques for the classroom.

Another difficult component in developing the assessment plan concerned the identification and application of direct and indirect measures. Although the staff had experience in conducting student and faculty satisfaction surveys, they had little experience in using direct measures. The direct measures identified in the assessment plan may not be adequate to reflect a change in student behaviors over their programs of study; only application and analysis will reveal weaknesses and strengths. As one example of the difficulty concerning the deployment of direct assessment measures, the staff identified and developed a measure that they thought directly contributed to improving lifelong attitudes:

The statistics from the proxy server (which enables students and faculty to access and retrieve information from our subscription electronic databases from off-campus locations such as their homes) reveal that over 50 percent of use is from 9:00 P.M. until 1:00 A.M. This high level of use suggests that the Sawyer Library has made it convenient to use library resources from home. The timing of this heavy use could be interpreted as “family friendly.” That is, hang out at home with the family. Then, once the children are in bed, log onto the library and do your course research work. By providing the proxy server, we are “changing” students’ lives by enabling them to be at home for family hour and then access the library to do their work without leaving home.

However, this measure is indirect because there could be commitments other than family time; the life change is temporary (it only lasts for as long as they are students with access to the proxy server); and the proxy server is a means to the end, not the end in itself. The end is still information literacy because the students could be using the databases via the proxy server ineffectively and inefficiently.

The effort to create the Sawyer Library’s student learning outcomes assessment plan involved library staff, faculty, the reaccreditation committee concerned with library and information resources and services, and the input of anyone willing to review it. It appears as appendix B.

Creating the First Faculty Support Outcomes Assessment Plan for the Sawyer Library

Students are the primary users of the Sawyer Library. However, faculty also use the library’s resources, and efforts to provide them with services and support should also be assessed. Initially, library staff had not intended to develop a faculty support assessment plan; instead they focused their efforts only on students. However, faculty reviewing the student learning outcomes assessment
The first attempt at a faculty support assessment plan employed the same process used to create the initial draft of the student plan and incorporated faculty outcomes with student learning outcomes into one “grand” plan. The resulting document was unwieldy and not as easy to use as the staff wanted for their first, mission-critical assessment effort. Instead, they decided to use the same planning and development process used for the student plan and create a separate faculty support assessment plan.

Fortunately, there are several good articles from which to draw ideas concerning faculty outcomes. The previously mentioned study by Grimes and Boening concerning student use of the Web found that there is a gap “between what instructors expect of their students and what students are actually doing with Web resources.” Those authors suggest that librarians “should direct in-service training, one-on-one collaboration, publicity, Web page design, and other activities toward faculty [and] encourage instructors to invite them to the classrooms and to bring their classes to the campus libraries.” Objectives for both of these suggestions can be planned, measured, and assessed. Pausch and Popp suggest that librarians help develop learning goals and objectives “that teaching faculty themselves can use in providing instruction and evaluating their students’ abilities in finding and using information.” They also recommended Philip Pacey’s suggestions of seven ways in which this specific objective and others may be accomplished: Librarians should:

1. keep a positive attitude toward other faculty who are willing to promote library skills themselves or in close partnership with librarians
2. make informal (and very subtle) efforts to foster, update, and develop library skills in other teaching faculty
3. incorporate library skills in in-house and other professional development programs offered to the faculty
4. continue to provide subject-oriented information skills training (especially true for subject librarians)
5. engage in more or less continuous programs of educating users through the promotion of services, especially new services (based on the commercial idea of selling your products)
6. recognize that students learn from one another often without the help of a professional
7. devote time and effort to the development of a possible common core curriculum unit devoted to various skills—information skills, study skills, etc.

Lindauer identified two faculty-related library and learning resources objectives accompanied by several performance indicators. The objectives relate to “research, scholarly/creative works and community service [and] excellence in teaching and equivalent academic support roles.” ACRL’s Task Force on Academic Library Outcomes Assessment Report includes a chart of selected good-practices outcomes with examples of outcomes, indicators, and data collection methods from a work of Lindauer about assessable changes in the skills and attitudes of faculty incorporating library and learning resources-based learning objectives.

Sawyer Library’s efforts to develop a faculty support outcomes assessment plan was similar to that of developing the student learning outcomes assessment plan. Because students are the primary users, creating the learning
assessments initially received priority over that of the faculty plan (included as appendix C). However, both plans will be continuously developed and improved as the staff of the Sawyer Library learns more about conducting assessment.

## Conclusion

Academic libraries must engage in assessment efforts to demonstrate the value of student learning and faculty support to the university community. Almost any institutional academic or administrative computing center could negotiate contracts with information providers, set up proxy servers to authenticate users, and provide access to electronic information resources. Students often state that everything is free on the Internet; they often do not see an immediate need for libraries and librarians. However, librarians have two important roles unduplicated elsewhere on the campus: They understand quality collection development and can teach about most, if not all, aspects of the information-seeking and evaluation process.

Assessment plans enable libraries to state formally and measure their efforts in supporting learning and research. Because of recent interests expressed by the accrediting bodies and library organizations (e.g., ACRL and ARL), information literacy is an excellent starting place for any student learning outcomes assessment effort. Academic libraries need to

- create a mission statement
- identify learning goals and objectives
- write a strategic plan to quantify and qualify goals and objectives
- advance instructional methods to support the learning objectives
- develop learning modules (offerings) to deliver the methods
- identify and apply outcomes measures
- compile, analyze, and interpret information from application of these measures
- use the evaluative results to revise learning objectives in the effort to improve teaching methods, modules, and student learning

While assessment plans for student learning outcomes should be the priority for the initial assessment effort, academic libraries should also consider developing a faculty assessment plan shortly thereafter.

Creating a library outcomes assessment plan is neither the easiest project a library staff will undertake nor is it the most difficult. There is a body of supportive library and higher education literature as well as library assessment workshops (especially from ACRL) and Web-based information from libraries that have successfully created and implemented plans. However, while the Sawyer Library staff were writing the assessment plan, it became clear that more efforts were needed to increase available library-based information focusing on identifying and applying practical outcomes assessment measures and on the development and application of successful instructional techniques that positively affect student learning.

Library assessment efforts should be integrated into the parent institution’s efforts. What should a library do if the institution is not undertaking
assessment efforts, or if the assessment efforts are not a priority? Librarians should assume a leadership role—develop and conduct an assessment program even if their institution’s efforts are nonexistent or practically so. There is increasing understanding, knowledge, and support within the academic library community concerning student and faculty outcomes assessment—librarians will not be alone in this effort.

The primary change that outcomes assessment has caused, it seems, is to place responsibility on all institutional units for providing evidence of their contributions to desired educational outcomes and to incorporate outcomes assessment into organizational planning and improvement.37

Notes

8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.


28. Pausch and Popp, Assessment of Information Literacy.


30. Smith, New Roles and Responsibilities.


32. Grimes and Boening, “Worries with the Web.”

33. Pausch and Popp, “Assessment of Information Literacy.”


