

Assessing Library Support for Academic Program Accreditations

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Introduction

In our present environment of reduced purchasing power, increased specialized demands and calls for accountability, library support for academic programs must become more focused to support needs not only within the parameters of institutional mission and core values but within the scope of program accreditation and program review criteria. In balancing available resources against curricular and research needs, we must develop continuous assessment of library support targeted at academic programs. By taking proactive steps for periodic review of library support for these programs, we can become a thriving partner in the academic affairs of our institution.

As a background to this review process, it is important to remember that regional institutional accreditation organizations such as The North Central Association of Colleges and Schools views the institutional self-study as an evaluative tool to guide improvements in the quality of higher learning.¹ In addition, the *ACRL Standards for Libraries in Higher Education* emphasizes libraries' role in increasing institutional effectiveness for meeting the institutional mission.² Thus the focus for assessment has shifted to how well an institution meets its mission, values and goals. For a workable timeline, the library can leverage the institutional schedule for program accreditations and program reviews to examine all related library functions and activities. This framework allows a partitioning of library resources, operations and facilities to be assessed in a timely fashion over a cycle of several years according to academic needs. This presentation uses a

checklist based on close examination of accreditation criteria of various accrediting bodies for programs at Western Illinois University, a Carnegie Master's L institution. The checklist items are then mapped to the nine principles stated in the *ACRL Standards*.³

Literature Review

Although there are many resources on the role of the library in institutional accreditation, only a few items are found on library support for academic programs. Typical is one university library's current Web site that says "supporting documents that can be generated include quantitative library holdings data pertaining to departmental subject interests, budget allocations, historical expenditure data, specialized library resources, services, and facilities."⁴ In another study of six states in the South, the author interviewed library directors and chief academic officers. The author's conclusion was that reporting of library support is often left up to the academic departments. There is no uniformity to library involvement in the review process. When there is library participation, it may be perfunctory in comparing to Research Libraries Group standards or other published lists.⁵ In another ERIC document about the model being used at a state university, although effectiveness in meeting user needs is mentioned, the report is based on comparisons to lists established elsewhere.⁶

Library support is more than quantitative information that may be supplied to an academic department upon request. In addition to books, journals and electronic resources, library support should also include

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instruction, technical services, and other areas such as administrative oversight, physical facilities, space usage and information infrastructure. In considering the library as a gathering space for learning, many of these factors are local in nature and do not lend themselves to comparison across institutions, particularly for those programs that have different academic emphasis or different student demographics. For this presentation, I concentrate on programs that are accredited by professional organizations where common criteria apply across institutions. Although local interpretations of accreditation requirements may differ depending on program emphasis and needs, the starting point is the same for all institutions offering the same programs.

Contextual Issues

At Western Illinois University, dates for program accreditations and program reviews are listed on the Provost Web site.⁷ The period between accreditation may be anywhere from four or five years to ten years depending on whether it is the initial accreditation for new programs, re-accreditation for established programs, or other requirements of accrediting agencies. These accreditation organizations and academic programs are listed in *Table 1*.

One of the core values of Western Illinois University is **Academic Excellence**. This is described as a “commitment to teaching, to the individual learner, and to active involvement in the teaching-learning process.”⁸ In the current university planning document *Higher Values in Higher Education 2012-2022* approved by Western Illinois University’s Board of Trustees in June 2012, one of the action items is to “promote high standards of academic excellence in all phases of instruction, research, service, and support services.”⁹ This item includes factors such as “achieving or maintaining accreditation and certifications” as appropriate to the disciplines and service units.¹⁰ Further into the document, another action item states that the library seeks to “improve the alignment between academic needs for program accreditation/support and offering of library resources and services through outreach and collaboration with other campus entities.”¹¹ So assessment of library support is directly addressing institutional goals as specified in the institutional planning document.

Generating the Checklist

In reviewing academic program accreditation criteria, it becomes apparent that the role of libraries is often

mentioned within the context of total institutional resource base or support, from a few lines to several pages. For example, for counseling programs, the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) specifies that “access to learning resources is appropriate for scholarly inquiry, study, and research by program faculty and students.”¹² For the athletic training program offered by the Department of Kinesiology, the Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education (CAATE) says that “students must have reasonable access to the information resources needed to adequately prepare them for professional practice.”¹³ For National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), the standards simply state that “professional education faculty and candidates have access both to sufficient and current library and curricular resources and electronic information.”¹⁴ For business and accounting programs, the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business standards say: “Does the organization provide services (e.g., library,...) necessary to sustain the activities of the applicant academic unit? Are the costs of those services charged back to the applicant academic unit?”¹⁵

On the other hand, National Association of Schools of Theatre (NAST) and National Association of Schools of Music (NASM), using essentially the same wording, took up several pages in listing standards for library collections, administration and personnel.¹⁶ The resources must be “of sufficient size and scope” and the library should have “qualified personnel sufficient to meet the various needs.” Other needs include “an environment conducive to study.” So some professional organizations do recognize needs other than holdings and quantitative counts of other resources. For the other programs such as dietetics, social work, communication sciences and disorders, and ESL programs, the key phrase is again whether library resources are “appropriate” and “sufficient” to meet program missions and goals. All of these standards still require the library and academic departments to collaboratively reach understandings of these hedge words.

These requirements are then used to generate a checklist for all academic programs so that comparable information can be given to support departmental self-studies. As necessary, the library may wish to re-frame accreditation requirements when the resources and services that we offer are deemed comparable to

TABLE 1
Accredited Academic Programs

Accrediting Body	Degree/Option
AACSB International-The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB)	Bachelor of Business, M.A. in Econ., MBA, Master of Accountancy
American Dietetic Association/Commission on Accreditation for Dietetics Education (CADE)	B.S. in Family and Consumer Sciences—option in Dietetics
American Speech-Language-Hearing Association/Council on Academic Accreditation (ASHA)	M.S. in Communication Sciences and Disorders—option in Speech-Language
Association of Technology, Management, and Applied Engineering (ATMAE)	B.S. in Engineering Technology, B.S. in Construction Management
Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education (CAATE)	B.S. in Athletic Training
Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE)	Bachelor of Science in Nursing
Commission on English Language Program Accreditation (CEA)	WESL Institute
Council for Accreditation of Counseling & Related Educational Programs (CACREP)	M.S.Ed. in Counseling
Council on Social Work/Commission on Accreditation (CSWE)	Bachelor of Social Work
National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD)	B.A. in Art, B.F.A. in Art, M.A. in Museum Studies
National Association of Schools of Music (NASM)	B.A. in Music, B.M. in Music, M.M. in Music
National Association of Schools of Theatre (NAST)	B.A. in Theatre, M.F.A. in Theatre, B.F.A. in Musical Theatre
National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE)	All Teacher Certification Programs
National Recreation and Park Association/Council on Accreditation (COAPRT)	B.S. in Recreation, Park and Tourism Administration
Accrediting Council for Collegiate Graphic Communications (ACCGC)	B.S. in Graphic Communication
ABET Technology Accreditation Commission (ABET)	B.S. in Engineering Technology
—from http://www.wiu.edu/provost/accredit.php [accessed 14 September 2012]. Currently applicable accreditation criteria can be found at each organization's Website.	

what the criteria call for. By interpreting the meaning of our information for academic departments, we can draw the focus to what we do and think are important. Since many outcomes or services cannot be measured directly, we need to identify indicators for supporting evidence. Individual evaluative processes, including identifying progress indicators, will need to be discussed by library personnel in consultation with academic departments. According to some accreditation criteria, the “evidence” called for is simply a statement

in the library's strategic plan that periodic evaluation will take place.

Since program accreditations and reviews occur in cycles, it should be understood that library assessment will also be in cycles.¹⁷ It is important to remember that technical services should be included since they form the infrastructure supporting public services. Obviously, there will be library areas or tasks not covered by library support of academic programs. Among those, for example, is support for

services offered as a Federal Depository or as a Patent and Trademark Resource Center. Similarly, there are services offered as an Illinois Regional Archives Depository housing county and local government records for a sixteen-county area. The effectiveness of those programs will need to be assessed separately as addressing the social responsibility of the university in reaching out to area communities.

Checklist for Library Support

In the ACRL *Standards for Libraries in Higher Education* nine principles are listed that underlie library assessment.¹⁸ In creating the checklist, the focus shifts to user groups involved with specific academic programs instead of the institution as a whole. Each of the nine sections of a report for departments with academic programs under review is described below. After each section heading, the corresponding ACRL principle is listed in parentheses.

Introductory Statement (External Relations)

This is a general introductory statement of library support drawing on the library mission and values, and relating them to the mission and values of the accrediting body or program under review. Most accrediting bodies have statements about library and information resources necessary to support program missions and appropriate for program size and purpose. Other words used in the different criteria include “comprehensive,” “sufficient to ensure quality,” “adequate,” “current,” and “fair and equitable.” The statements here should follow the vocabulary of the accreditation criteria or disciplinary jargon. This sets the context within which to view library support. For example, for teacher education programs, NCATE states that for distance education, students should be able to access resources reliably where confidentiality can be maintained. In our report written in November 2011, we said that as described in the following sections, we believe we can meet those requirements.

Services (Professional Values)

Our professional values form the basis of our services. Many accrediting criteria call for reference and interlibrary loan services, or other “appropriate” services. While those are the components visible to the public, there are also related services and issues that we should take into consideration. These include ar-

eas such as copyright, patron privacy and intellectual freedom that are at the core of our professional values. A central part of this section is not only on the type of user-centered services we offer but how they may be obtained. Included are items such as hours of operation, methods for contacting public services areas, and available computer equipment and support. In reference to distance education, for example, we stress that ILL requests can be made online, progress tracked on an interlibrary loan management system and copies of journal articles are then posted in secure areas on the Web.

Learning Outcome (Educational Role)

The important focus for this section should be learning outcomes. While many accrediting agencies talk about preparing students for appropriate use of library resources, the criteria for the dietetics program state that students are able “to demonstrate how to locate, interpret, evaluate and use professional literature to make ethical evidence-based practice decisions,” and “to use current information technologies to locate and apply evidence-based guidelines and protocols” in classroom-related research.¹⁹ Statements such as these lead directly to stressing our role in promoting information literacy and our library instruction program, particularly skills for lifelong learning that is included in our institutional planning document. While not every academic department will schedule instructional sessions, the library should stress that we offer equitable opportunities. Also to be mentioned are interactions with students at public services desks during regularly scheduled hours and unscheduled informal encounters elsewhere in the libraries or on-campus that fulfill our educational role.

Access (Discovery)

This area includes access to our resources and services. There is physical access to resources that we own and access to materials housed elsewhere, including electronic resources. One accrediting body wants access “appropriate for scholarly inquiry, study, and research by program faculty and students.”²⁰ Others want access regardless of the physical location of students. To these, we can refer to our support for distance education, proxy server, or other specialized information delivery channels. Also to be included are consortial participation and resource-sharing practices that expand the horizons for available materials.

Central to access is the ability to “discover” needed information and resources. The organizational principles, particularly in the technical services areas, may be optimized to facilitate access. Other points to be mentioned are databases, abstracts, indexes and library guides targeted at the academic program under review. Specific examples may include mentions of, for example, the *ACM Digital Library* or the guide prepared by a library liaison for graphic communication resources that support the B.S. in Graphic Communication accredited by the Accrediting Council for Collegiate Graphic Communications (ACCGC).

Collections/Resources (Collections)

Some accrediting bodies call for clearly identifiable collections of “sufficient size and scope” in all applicable formats. Other words used include “adequate,” “current” and “contemporary.” Indicators for these may be title count by classification ranges of Library of Congress or Superintendent of Document numbers applicable to the discipline. We must expand the view of available resources from local collections to also include consortial holdings, interlibrary loan services, and other available electronic resources. We should stress that the time-delay in obtaining off-campus resources is no longer a major factor in judging the availability of relevant resources. At the same time, we need to be more aware of the value of our collections as a qualitative measure, not merely as quantity. Given that our collection development policy guides the acquisition of quality materials, the value is judged as meeting academic program needs at this institution within the context of broader discipline needs.

Facilities (Space)

As described in some accreditation criteria, physical facilities include computer equipment and adequate study space that is “conducive” to studying. ACRL standards refer to spaces as “information commons.” To be listed here are available physical spaces, seating areas, and other facilities conducive to academic pursuits. These include collaborative study areas, computer facilities, or editing facilities for media productions, particularly in our Digital Commons. Also mentioned in our reports are wireless support, computer classrooms, and available hardware and software. For example, the liaison for the School of Agriculture mentioned in her report for program review that all computers in the library classrooms and the Government Information area are equipped with geo-

graphic information system software (ArcGIS) that may be used for example, in mapping cropland usage.

Library Governance, Finance and Administration (Management/Administration)

Several accrediting bodies call for clearly identifiable procedures and services that place library support within the framework of library administration and operations. Budgetary support for the library is mentioned in many sets of criteria. Most say “appropriate” or “sufficient.” But one calls for “equitable,” which we can re-frame as equitable opportunities. All academic departments have the opportunity to work with library liaisons and schedule instructional sessions. But not all academic departments take advantage of the opportunities. The key phrase in the ACRL document is “to meet their [institutional] mission effectively and efficiently.”²¹ Thus the library administration must be attuned to institutional priorities as influenced by state legislative and financial priorities, societal needs, and other stakeholders who seek attention such as alumni and other possible funding sources.

Personnel (Personnel)

There is a call for persons responsible for particular areas. We can make reference to the liaison program. Also to be mentioned are those responsible for instruction and staffing public service areas. With regard to technology, we also offer computer support. Lastly, where applicable, there are branch libraries and staff members targeted at specific disciplines. The liaison librarian, under whose name this report would be submitted, is the main contact person for an academic department for all library-related issues, whether in public services or technical services.

Evaluation (Institutional Effectiveness)

This is the overall evaluative component of the document. Some accreditation criteria call for evidence of continuous evaluation or procedures in the library strategic plan or other planning document. These may include LibQUAL+ surveys and bi-annual statistics that are submitted to various higher education agencies. Another library component would be the plan described here for cyclic assessment. In essence, the evaluation is to carry out assessments against the context established in the introductory statement. And evaluation contributes to improving library resources and services, and thus improving institutional effectiveness.

Conclusion

The institutional plan at Western Illinois University uses the program accreditation and review processes as a way to ensure the quality of academic programs. By leveraging the institutional schedule, the Western Illinois University Libraries can offer self-studies that assess support for academic programs undergoing accreditation and program review to the affected departments in a timely manner. These self-studies, started in the fall of 2011, can then guide improvements.²² In this sense, by placing library assessment within the context of institutional assessment, the library can demonstrate its value and ensure its full participation in academic affairs.

Notes

- Higher Learning Commission. *Handbook of Accreditation*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Higher Learning Commission, 2003). The self-study process is described in chapter 5.2.
- Association of College & Research Libraries. *Standards for Libraries in Higher Education* (Chicago: ACRL, 2011), 5. I said earlier in a presentation at a workshop for the Illinois chapter of ACRL in 2001 that “institutional effectiveness” was the best fit in talking about library assessment. A shorter version of this was published as: “Assessing the Infrastructure: Technical Support for Library Services.” *The Illinois Library Association Reporter* 19(4): 9-11.
- ACRL. *Standards*, 9.
- University of Wisconsin—La Crosse. *Accreditation/Academic Program Review/Self Study Reports*, available online at <http://www.uwlax.edu/murphylibrary/faculty/reports.html> [accessed 21 August 2012].
- Vivki L. Gregory, “The Academic Library in the Program Review Process,” *Collection Management* 12, no.3/4 (1990): 125-134.
- Ming-Ming Shen Kuo, *Library Support for Academic Program Review—From an Evolving Local Model to What’s Beyond*, 1992. ERIC, ED 354886.
- See <http://www.wiu.edu/provost/accredit.php> for program accreditation schedule and <http://www.wiu.edu/provost/aprschd.php> for program review schedule [accessed 20 September 2012].
- http://www.wiu.edu/core_values/ [accessed 14 September 2012].
- http://www.wiu.edu/university_planning/pdfreports/monthlyupdates/2012JuneUpdate.pdf, Goal 2, Action 1 [accessed 14 September 2012].
- Higher Values*, Goal 2, Action 1, Item f [accessed 14 September 2012].
- Higher Values*, Goal 2, Action 5, Item h [accessed 14 September 2012].
- Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs. *2009 Standards*. Section 1.E, available online at <http://67.199.126.156/doc/2009%20Standards%20with%20cover.pdf> [accessed 19 September 2012].
- Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education. *Standards for the Academic Accreditation of Professional Athletic Training Programs*, available online at <http://www.caate.net/imis15/CAATE/Forms/CAATE/Forms/Forms.aspx?hkey=1ec27fcc-9a33-4d74-8660-975d67e610a0> [accessed 19 September 2012].
- National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education. *Professional Standards for the Accreditation of Teacher Preparation Institutions* (Washington, D.C.: NCATE, 2008), 45. These standards were in force at the time of last accreditation site visit November 7, 2011.
- AACSB International. *Eligibility Procedures and Accreditation Standards for Business Accreditation*, available at online <http://www.aacsb.edu/accreditation/standards-busn-jan2012.pdf> [accessed 19 September 2012]; AACSB International. *Eligibility Procedures and Accreditation Standards for Accounting Accreditation*, available online at <http://www.aacsb.edu/accreditation/accounting/standards/Standards-acctg-Jan2012.pdf> [accessed 19 September 2012].
- National Association of Schools of Theatre. *Handbook 2012-13*, 63-65, available online at http://nast.arts-accredit.org/site/docs/HANDBOOK/NAST_Handbook_2012-13.pdf [accessed 19 September 2012]; National Association of Schools of Music. *Handbook 2011-12*, 68-70, available online at http://nasm.arts-accredit.org/site/docs/Handbook/NASM_HANDBOOK_2011-12.pdf [accessed 19 September 2012].
- Program accreditations and program reviews are different in that the former are requirements of academic program accreditation agencies and the latter may be required by governing boards such as the Illinois Board of Higher Education. Only some academic programs receive external accreditation. But program reviews apply to every degree-granting program, including those that are accredited.
- ACRL. *Standards*, 9.
- Commission on Accreditation for Dietetics Education. *Policy & Procedure Handbook* (Chicago: American Dietetics Association, 2009). See Appendix A.
- CACREP. *2009 Standards*.
- ACRL. *Standards*, 9.
- Self-study documents for program accreditation and program review are available at http://www.wiu.edu/libraries/administration/program_review/.