

# **University Libraries Assessment Plan**

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## **University Libraries' Mission**

University Libraries promotes Bowling Green State University's mission to develop engaged citizens who are culturally literate, globally aware, and technologically sophisticated. To advance scholarship and critical thinking, University Libraries engages scholars and the diverse, multicultural communities of northwest Ohio, as well as collaborates with institutions worldwide. As a user-centered institution committed to providing equitable access and services, University Libraries builds, organizes, and maintains focused collections for the academic and research interests of Bowling Green State University students, faculty, and staff while teaching users to identify, locate, assess, and use appropriately a full range of information resources to create new knowledge.

## **Definition of Assessment**

Assessment is the process by which an organization measures specific and established outcomes and then analyzes the results of those measures to make meaningful and informed decisions about and changes to its operations. As a result of ongoing assessment, an organization continuously improves. Given its mission and scope of responsibilities, the UL's assessment includes, but is not limited to the assessment of student learning outcomes.

The assessment process is circular and can be summarized in the following steps:

- Identify outcomes
- Select appropriate assessment tool(s)
- Administer assessment tool(s)
- Analyze and evaluate results
  - If the tool measured what was intended and results are useful
    - Make appropriate changes to service, instruction, program, process, etc.
  - If the tool did not measure what was intended or results are not useful
    - Re-examine outcome and tool. Is the outcome measurable? Change or adjust tool; change outcome
- Communicate results and plans for change
- Repeat process

## **A Call for Accountability**

By using assessment effectively, we can improve our decision making and our programs, services, and work practices. Assessment can also help us to respond to increasing pressures to account for our expenditures and demonstrate our contributions to the University's mission. The pressures for libraries to use assessment as a tool to articulate and demonstrate contributions are now coming from a variety of places, including the library profession.

### BGSU Institutional Priorities

The BGSU *Academic Plan* creates a strategic framework for realizing BGSU's aspirations of becoming a premier university over the next twenty-to-fifty years. The plan, which provides strategies to enhance the University's distinctiveness among institutions of higher education, recognizes that BGSU must become a more learner-centered institution. *Inquiry, engagement, and achievement* are identified as the dimensions defining the University's character. The plan advocates the creation of an educational environment of inquiry for all students along with opportunities for undergraduate research. Five themes are outlined in the *Academic Plan*:

- Leadership in Learning
- Critical Thinking about Values
- Embracing the Arts
- Understanding Cultures and Nations
- New Media and Technologies.

The Academic Plan calls for “supporting and strengthening BGSU programs that: 1) bear the hallmarks of premier universities, 2) give substance to ‘learning,’ and 3) situate ‘learning’ in communities. . . .”<sup>1</sup> It requires explicitly planning, deploying University resources, and then evaluating the returns on those investments.

### Student Achievement Assessment Committee (SAAC)

The SAAC is a BGSU standing committee of representative faculty members from across campus whose goal is to “promote teaching/learning at Bowling Green State University by fostering a variety of effective learning environments.” They accomplish this goal by:

- Assessing Student Learning at the Program and Course Level
- Assessing Student Learning at the University Level
- Assessing Assessment.<sup>2</sup>

Each year, departments and programs, including the UL, must provide the SAAC with a report that describes the learning outcomes studied during the current year, the assessments that were conducted, the findings of those assessments, and the actions that were implemented. Some funding from the SAAC is also available for unit and departmental assessment efforts.

### BGSU Program Review

BGSU is committed to comprehensive periodic review of all units comprising the University. This program review is generally undertaken every five years, and for the UL comprises a self-study and external peer review. The self-study requires the UL to evaluate the quality of our programs, services, and personnel; articulate our relationship to the missions of both our division and the University; and examine the demands on and the comparative advantages of our programs and services and our financial resources.<sup>3</sup>

### North Central Association and Accreditation

The North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (NCA) is the regional agency providing oversight of BGSU's accreditation, guidelines for which are published in NCA's *Handbook for Accreditation*. The UL contributes to at least three "core components" of NCA's Criterion Three: "The organization values and supports effective teaching" (3b); "[t]he organization creates effective learning environments" (3c); and "[t]he organization's learning resources support student learning and effective teaching" (3d).<sup>4</sup>

NCA does not have strict guidelines about the type of evidence institutions must use to prove effectiveness. Rather, it suggests possible types of evidence to consider, though its emphasis is clearly on assessment of student learning outcomes. Hernon and Dugan note that accrediting agencies are purposefully vague "providing higher education institutions with more options to present [evidence of success] in their self-study report."<sup>5</sup>

### Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL)

In response to growing assessment trends related to government funding and accreditation, ACRL has published a number of standards, reports, and guidelines that address assessment in academic libraries. Specifically, *Standards for Libraries in Higher Education* is designed to assist a library in "documenting the library's contribution to institutional effectiveness and student learning outcomes."<sup>6</sup> The standards suggest possible points for peer comparison; emphasize planning, assessment, and outcome assessment; and address specifics related to library services, instruction, resources, access, staff, facilities, communication, cooperation, administration, and budget. The *Task Force on Academic Library Outcomes Assessment Report* outlines principles for applying outcomes assessment to academic libraries and samples of assessment.

### **Purpose of the UL Assessment Plan**

For many years the UL and its units have participated in and conducted a variety of assessment activities. While valuable, these activities have been ad-hoc and uncoordinated and have not stemmed from efforts to build continuous improvement across all areas, programs, services, and decision-making. In order to meet the expectations of our communities, it is clear that we need to focus our efforts in a coordinated and systematic way. One of the strategic directions in the UL *Strategic Plan* calls for us to develop a multi-year plan to regularly examine and evaluate our programs, services and collections.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, the UL information literacy plan includes a goal to regularly assess the impact of the UL's instruction activities on student learning and the UL Department of Library Teaching and Learning has developed student learning outcomes related to information literacy for undergraduate and graduate students.<sup>8</sup>

The purpose of this assessment plan is to begin to institutionalize a successful, sustained assessment process that will demonstrate and improve the UL's contributions to research, learning, and the learning environment. The plan is not a prescriptive checklist; rather, it is a flexible yet defined framework to guide decision-making.

## **Outcomes & Multiple Measures**

### Outcomes

Given current trends in higher education, it is no longer sufficient to report simply on the quantity of the UL's resources (traditionally defined as "inputs") or the use of its resources and services (traditionally defined as "outputs"). It is now necessary to measure and report on the *impact* of those resources and services on the BGSU community, and more specifically how those resources and services support the strategic directions of the University. ACRL defines outcomes as "the ways library users are changed as a result of their contact with the library's resources or programs."<sup>9</sup> Fraser, et al. state, "An outcome is a clearly identified result or end product that occurs as a consequence of individual or combined activities from units at the institution. It is a preferred or desired state . . . and can be defined and measured in such a way that evidence is available to determine the amount or degree to which the outcome does, in fact, occur."

Fraser, et al. also argue that outcomes are meaningful for libraries only if they support institutional outcomes defined in key planning documents.<sup>10</sup> Further, Lindauer contends that libraries must also look to standards and criteria established by regional accrediting bodies.<sup>11</sup> Outcomes assessment that is tied to University goals and accrediting standards can help us demonstrate the effectiveness of our programs and services; communicate their benefits; provide data to justify funding requests; and assist us in determining priorities. Our goal, consequently, is to develop appropriate outcomes-based assessment and integrate that assessment into the routine decision-making practices and annual reporting mechanisms of the UL.

### Multiple Measures

ACRL calls for academic libraries to draw on both quantitative and qualitative measures to assess their effectiveness. More specifically, in its *Standards*, ACRL advocates "the use of input, output, and outcome measures in the context of the institution's mission statement."<sup>12</sup> Along with the results of an outcomes-based assessment process, which includes assessment of student learning outcomes, the UL should continue to incorporate traditional inputs and outputs as appropriate. These traditional measures are valuable for both internal trend analysis and peer comparisons. Results of ongoing outcomes-based assessment, along with traditional input and output measures, will provide a multilayered view of the UL's impact and effectiveness; supply necessary support

documentation for our needs; and contribute to the required SAAC annual reports and BGSU program review.

### **Future Assessment in the UL**

The following four sections contain recommended success measures, action steps, processes, and immediate priorities. While the success measures are ultimately ambitious and will take a number of years to accomplish, they are key to sustainability. The action steps outlined can be relatively easily undertaken in the upcoming year and are the first steps toward success. The recommended process is designed to take advantage of current practices and decision-making bodies in the UL in order to assist in the determination of priorities and outcomes. This method should also increase buy in from UL employees, and therefore increase chances for success. Finally, the priorities outlined for 2006-2007 will jump-start our efforts for the first year of implementation.

### Long-Term Success Measures

The UL's assessment efforts will be successful when the criteria below are met.

- All phases of the assessment cycle are regularly completed.
- Assessment is institutionalized so that thoughtful and meaningful assessment efforts are not afterthoughts but are embedded in UL planning.
- Assessment efforts are ongoing and not periodically driven by accreditation and program review.
- Assessment is manageably integrated into staff workload.
- Assessment by all UL departments is regularly undertaken.
- Assessment will be driven by practical questions: "Is the measure important as opposed to merely interesting?" And, "[w]ill the measure provide information which can be used for improvement? . . ." "How can this information be used to develop improvement strategies?"<sup>13</sup>
- The knowledge gained from assessment will enable us to identify choices and determine work priorities in the UL.
- This document and the UL assessment practices are revisited regularly and revised as necessary to establish ongoing assessment efforts.

### Immediate Action Steps

- The Associate Dean for Assessment and Technology (A. Dean for A & T) will coordinate and provide oversight and support for assessment efforts in the UL departments and units.
- An Assessment Advisory Committee (AAC) will be formed with broad UL representation that assists and advises the A. Dean for A & T in coordination, completion, and communication of issues related to assessment efforts.
- The AAC will work with the A. Dean for A & T to determine the process by which outcomes will be established and priorities set each year.
- Annual outcomes and priorities will be determined by a broad group of UL employees.
- Assessment that is in line with the priorities set by AAC will be undertaken by a variety of the UL units.

- Reporting of assessment efforts will be incorporated into departmental annual reports.
- Reporting of assessment efforts from departments will be incorporated into annual assessment reports for SAAC.
- The A. Dean for A & T will annually produce a comprehensive report of the UL assessment efforts.

#### Process for Determining Outcomes and Priorities

As part of annual strategic planning, the A. Dean for A & T and the AAC will provide an opportunity for a broad group of UL employees to determine the selected outcomes for the upcoming year's assessment efforts. This process will also include a discussion of which units and individuals will be responsible for data collection and what measures and timelines may be used to assess each outcome. The selected outcomes will be tied to unit and departmental goals and to priority areas identified by the committee in consultation with the UL Council and others as appropriate.

Because of the importance of determining the UL's impact on student learning, it is envisioned that student-learning outcomes assessment will be regularly included into the foreseeable future. However, it is important to balance student learning assessment with other forms of outcome-based assessment that examine the equally valuable contributions the UL makes in the areas of services and resources. Additionally, from year-to-year and even within a specific year, care should be taken to ensure that the outcomes selected for assessment involve a variety of UL units, programs, and services. It is essential that, over time, all areas of the UL integrate assessment efforts into their work and decision-making processes.

In determining which outcomes should be priority for assessment efforts, it will be important to take into account a variety of factors, which are cyclical or evolving, such as:

- BGSU program review for supporting units schedules and expectations
- NCA accreditation schedules and expectations
- Strategic priorities of BGSU, the EVP division, and the UL
- Participation in OhioLINK, ACRL, or other professional assessment efforts, such as LIBQUAL+™ or Project SAILS.

#### Priorities for 2006-2007

Because of the UL's upcoming program review, any assessment that is undertaken should contribute to the program review self-study report. Given this, BGSU's institutional priorities, NCA expectations, and current trends in higher education, the UL will begin its assessment efforts with a focus on student- and faculty-related outcomes, specifically in the areas of student learning, faculty research, and the learning environment. These three priority areas are further defined below. We recommend using the upcoming UL annual retreat to begin the work of setting priorities and defining outcomes for 2006-2007 assessment

efforts. We will ask that all of the UL units be prepared to discuss statements that answer, *“What do I want to know about how my unit, department, service, program, etc. contributes to faculty research, student learning, or the learning environment?”* From those discussions, we will develop an assessment strategy for the upcoming year, as well as specific outcome statements. Below, under each of the priority areas, an example of a question from a unit is provided, as well as an example of a corresponding outcome statement.

Student Learning - the contributions the UL makes to student achievement of learning outcomes in information literacy.

Example question from unit:

- Do students who take the GSW Library Tour learn the difference between the catalog and the research databases?

Corresponding example outcome statement:

- *Undergraduate students who have completed the GSW “Library Tour” are significantly more likely to understand the difference between the BGSU Libraries Catalog and the research databases than those who have not.*

Faculty Research - the contributions the UL makes to faculty research, for example adequacy of resources, services, or facilities.

Example question from unit:

- Are our journal and book collections adequate for the needs of our researchers?

Corresponding example outcome statements:

- *Sixty-five percent of the scholarly journal articles used by faculty in the Chemistry Department in their published research over the past five years are available in print or electronically via the BGSU Libraries Catalog.*
- *Ninety percent of the monographs used by faculty in the Math Department in their published research over the past five years are available in the UL or via OhioLINK pcirc.*

Learning Environment - the contributions the UL makes to user-centered outcomes (other than learning outcomes), for example adequacy of the physical learning environment or the virtual learning environment.

Example question from unit:

- Do the UL’s physical environment have any relationship to student learning or success?

Corresponding example outcome statement:

- *Undergraduate students who identify UL facilities as their primary study space average a higher GPA than students who identify alternate study spaces as their first choice to study.*

Example question from unit:

- Do students in ENG 342 who make regular use of the CRC get more out of that course than students who do not?

Corresponding example outcome statement:

- *Undergraduate students in ENG 342 (Literature for Young Children) who regularly use the facilities and/or services of the CRC self-report higher satisfaction rates with their class experience than those ENG 342 students who do not.*

## Conclusion

The UL's mission provides a basis for connecting our work to the University's vision of becoming a premier learning community. The UL is clearly engaged in providing resources, services, instruction and facilities to support a culture of inquiry. Over time, outcome-based assessment, along with systemic analysis of internal trends and peer comparisons, can best inform our decision-making and provide us with a comprehensive and multilayered record of achievement. The UL's Assessment Plan provides a flexible yet defined method to institutionalize a successful, sustained assessment process that demonstrates and improves our contributions to research, learning and the learning environment at BGSU.

## Notes

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