Review of Academic Libraries and the Academy: Strategies and Approaches to Demonstrate Your Value, Impact, and Return on Investment

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Abstract: Review of Britto, M. & Kinsley, K. (Eds.) (2018). *Academic libraries and the academy:*

strategies and approaches to demonstrate Your value, impact, and return on investment. (2 Vols).

Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries.

Communicating the value of the academic library to campus and community stakeholders is a

key challenge for library administrators. In the contemporary data-driven higher education institution,

assessment becomes a vital means for deriving evidence of the value of the academic library. How,

then, can libraries enact assessment that demonstrates the impact and the return on investment of the

significant resources required for today's academic library? This highly structured collection of case

studies in academic library assessment offers examples of reflective assessment in action over a wide

range of types of academic libraries.

Well-organized into four major sections of related chapters, the two-volume *Academic*

Libraries and the Academy follows a formulaic presentation that lends itself well to browsing. The

foreword by Megan Oakleaf and introductory chapter by the volume editors set the parameters of the

collection as well as depict current conversations on the value of academic libraries. Preceding each

chapter is a summary page containing the abstract, keywords, project focus, purpose for results,

methodology, project duration, cost estimate, tools utilized, and type of institution and enrollment.

The four sections are arranged according to the stage in the assessment process and/or the predicted

difficulty and resource expense of the assessment methods in practice. Volume One includes the first

two sections. Section One, "Seeding the Initiative," presents eight projects in the beginning stages of

assessment that have few available results to report. In Section Two, "Low-Hanging Fruit," eleven case

studies demonstrate easy to implement, lower-cost assessment projects already in place that require

limited financial and external resources to enact. Each chapter throughout the collection concludes

with a reflective section that allows the authors not only to present the current project's status, but

also to consider the direction of the project and possible changes for future implementation.

Volume Two continues with the third and fourth sections. Section Three's "Reachable Fruit"

offers by far the most examples of assessment: sixteen examples of projects that are manageable but

require significantly greater resources and time commitment in order to measure their results. Finally, Section Four includes the "Hard-to-Reach Fruit": seven more case studies with yet more resource-intensive requirements but potentially highly rewarding results, ending with a chapter encouraging assessment to move beyond the mere collection of statistics to a more valuable and systematic method of program evaluation based on outputs.

Because of the arrangement of the chapters into sections that depict projects of increasing difficulty, the chapters at first glance defy a more obvious grouping into subjects such as information literacy, space utilization, services, collection, or program assessments, or qualitative vs. quantitative. A reader seeking a group of information literacy assessment projects, for example, will need to move about among the sections. The representation of types of projects is broad-ranging, including examples from archives, library hours and head counts, staffing, web-scale discovery, instruction, faculty-librarian collaboration, and a variety of programs. In many cases the actual instruments, such as survey questions, scorecards, or coding patterns, demonstrate how to apply the assessments, helping to increase the opportunity for readers to replicate projects at their own institutions. Not only are the practical applications of these projects available; discussions of literature on and theory about assessment appear in the introduction and context chapter as well as within a number of chapters.

Just as it is impossible to create a one-size-fits-all assessment plan, selecting the most successful examples here might unjustly distract from the overall value of the collection: its diversity of assessment options. For instance, Chapter 40 presents the University of North Texas Libraries' unique and complex Collection Map for reassessing interdisciplinarity and other qualities in collections. Chapter 20 describes an LMS-based tutorial for assessing information literacy in Marquette University's first-year English program. Rowan University's head-counting study in Chapter 10 shows a method for collecting statistics to make space and hours decisions for the library. A highly valuable aspect to the

collection is that the chapters offer means for sharing and making decisions based on results, as when

the authors in Chapter 39 link data on student success and library use at the University of Minnesota to

reach out to higher education professionals, including academic advisors. The case studies are not

unrealistically positive, either; almost every chapter includes some mention of "what we'd do

differently next time." Related issues such as privacy, high impact practices, learning analytics, and

strategic planning reappear throughout the volumes. Almost every chapter could claim that "For each

discovery we make through the data, ten more questions come with it" (p. 629).

Some publication choices may be up for question. At first glance it seems odd that the

foreword and introduction appear in both volumes in their entirety; however, with each volume

available for purchase individually, this repetition makes sense. An occasional chapter might

unnecessarily repeat literature covered earlier, though it is understandable for authors to wish to

spend time placing chapter content within the larger context. While an index would be formidable in a

collection of this length, perhaps a list that thematically groups the chapters, or an overall summation

chapter, would help readers interested in particular themes to navigate the volumes. The timing of the

collection means that some of the information literacy assessment work done in this volume predates

the 2015 ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education. Because the collection does

not focus primarily on collections or instruction or another specific area, in its entirety it is probably

most valuable for assessment librarians and library administrators.

Altogether, the collection presents a useful and practical range of assessment projects geared

toward various levels and sizes of libraries. Institutions represented in these volumes include several

community colleges, several international universities, a number of smaller (fewer than 10,000

students) private and public colleges, and the expected larger research-oriented libraries. Not all of the

more difficult or expensive assessments were at larger universities, however, nor all of the "seed" or

"low-hanging" projects at smaller schools. Academic libraries looking for varied ways to conduct

assessments for results that can communicate positive value will be able to find helpful examples here.