

The ACRL Standards for Proficiencies for Assessment Librarians and Coordinators: A New Document to Support and Strengthen Assessment Efforts in Academic Libraries

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Proficiencies for Assessment Librarians

In a higher education environment that calls for increasing accountability but provides diminishing resources, academic libraries are actively engaged in the assessment of academic library value. To demonstrate library impact, library administrators have tasked librarians with additional assessment duties or created new “assessment librarian” positions. Because these personnel changes require librarians to engage in new duties and responsibilities, many which are largely undefined, ACRL charged a Task Force to develop the *Standards for Proficiencies for Assessment Librarians and Coordinators*. The intent of the *Standards* is to describe the proficiencies assessment librarians need to be successful in their positions and, ultimately, help academic libraries achieve their strategic organizational and institutional goals. At the time of this writing, ACRL is reviewing the submitted *Standards*, and imminent approval is anticipated.

The *Standards* comprise 11 broad categories and 52 specific proficiencies that encompass a variety of expectations for librarians in assessment positions. Categories include (1) knowledge of assessment in libraries and higher education, (2) ethics, (3) assessment methods and strategies, (4) research design, (5) data collection and analysis, (6) communication and reporting, (7) advocacy and marketing, (8) collaboration and partnerships, (9) leadership, (10) management, and (11) mentoring, training, and coaching.

While the *Standards* identify assessment proficiencies, they do not prescribe methods for “defin[ing] and apportion[ing] the range of responsibilities or...emphasiz[ing] select proficiencies” in a local library context. As a result, librarians may consider a number of strategies and methods for utilizing the *Standards* in their own libraries.

Applying the Standards Locally

The *Standards* consist of knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) that include both functional and behavioral proficiencies. The assessment proficiencies are designed to be used within the context of institutional and organizational missions and strategic goals to help (1) craft position descriptions, (2) onboard new employees, (3) guide professional development, and (4) inform performance appraisals.

Consider institutional and organizational missions and strategic goals

To tailor the *Standards* to a local context, librarians can begin by contextualizing their use of the *Standards* within larger frameworks including institutional and organizational missions and strategic goals. These broad frameworks provide “big picture” understanding of assessment needs and reveal the problems and issues that a library organization or its overarching

institution seek to address and remedy through assessment. By conducting a gap analysis, librarians can compare the assessment needs embedded in institutional and organizational documents to the assessment proficiencies listed in the *Standards*. Librarians might, for example, prepare a chart that lists the assessment proficiencies revealed by a gap analysis in one column and provides spaces to identify current and future gaps in two adjacent columns. Once the gaps have been pinpointed, librarians can decide whether to fill them by creating new assessment positions or by assigning assessment duties to librarians already in the organization.

Craft position descriptions

When libraries determine that new “assessment librarian” positions are required, the assessment proficiencies enumerated in the *Standards* can be used to draft position descriptions as well as the required and preferred qualifications. Librarians can use resulting position descriptions to identify appropriate internal staff or to recruit skilled external staff.

It is important to note that the assessment proficiencies do not list separate competencies for assessment generalists, specialists, managers, or leaders. Rather than dividing skills by position type, the *Standards* emphasize detailed assessment proficiencies that might be tailored to delineate KSAs for multiple positions. Therefore, libraries who plan to add assessment librarians will need to decide whether to hire generalists or specialists and customize the proficiencies for each job as necessary. For example, a library might decide to hire a specialist focused on learning who would need learning analytics proficiencies; on collections who would need collection analysis proficiencies; on users who would need user experience proficiencies; or on programs who would need program evaluation proficiencies. In each of these scenarios, the position description might include, exclude, emphasize, or minimize proficiencies to fit the needs of the library. Likewise, the *Standards* do not list separate competencies for managers and leaders. ACRL anticipates that the leadership and management KSAs will be useful to all assessment librarians, whether or not they have formal positional leadership, and that assessment librarians who possess formal positional leadership roles will need to engage in the full range of assessment proficiencies described in the *Standards*.

Onboard new employees

The *Standards* may be used to onboard new employees. In addition to socially integrating new employees and completing the customary new hire checklists, it is critical that the culture around assessment is understood by all employees—those tasked with assessment as their job as well as those for whom assessment forms only a part of their job.

Furthermore, many libraries hiring new assessment librarians may have emergent assessment cultures. When an assessment culture is in its early stages, new assessment hires may need to navigate a complex and perhaps resistant landscape. The assessment proficiencies can help navigate the culture by providing a framework that can be shared across the organization.

Guide professional development

When libraries decide not to create new positions, but rather to build the capacity of librarians already employed, the assessment proficiencies can serve as a model for professional development planning. Individual professional development plans might include self-assessments combined with supervisor needs assessments. Both assessments could be based upon the KSAs itemized in the *Standards*. Library-wide or departmental plans might begin with a survey derived from the same KSAs. Based on staff assessment results, librarians might determine appropriate professional development goals and actions to build upon existing skills and lay foundations in areas where skills are missing. Possibilities for individual professional development include consulting written materials such as books, articles, and websites, taking courses or attending workshops, or formally enrolling in a continuing education or degree program. Coaching and mentoring from supervisors, colleagues, or peers with an assessment background can be particularly useful. Assessment education for staff groups can employ these methods as well as other strategies that maximize social constructivist approaches and resource efficiencies. Ideally, all professional development should embrace active engagement and experiential learning; focus on applicable and important topics that can be immediately converted to useful evidence and information; and start with small, approachable topics then move on to complexities as skills are acquired. Over time, individuals and whole libraries can make progress toward integrating the KSAs identified in the *Standards* until they are ubiquitous in a fully-realized assessment culture.

Inform performance appraisals

The assessment proficiencies provided in the *Standards* may be also used to set goals and conduct performance appraisals. As proficiencies rather than competencies, the *Standards* should be used not to establish a baseline, but instead to set expectations for improved performance. Similarly, they should not be used as measurement criteria. Rather, librarians can use the assessment proficiencies to construct measurable outcomes, and these can be integrated into performance assessments that are focused on management by objectives. Other means of performance appraisal, including self-assessments, supervisor assessments, multi-rater or 360° assessments, or use of checklists or rating scales, can also benefit from the assessment proficiencies. In addition, individual librarians may use the assessment proficiencies for career planning and advancement, as assessment librarianship is one path to library leadership.

Applying the Standards Nationally

In addition to local applications, the assessment proficiencies offer utility at the national level. Nationally, the *Standards* may be used to (1) guide capacity-building offerings provided by professional associations, (2) develop communities of practice, and (3) enhance library and information science curricula.

Guide capacity-building initiatives offered by professional associations

Librarians who have created their own individual development plans will need resources, and associations such as ACRL are well-situated to develop assessment-focused learning programs that operate in cross-institutional, national, and even international arenas. With association backing, professional development might culminate in the construction of assessment toolkits, production of assessment webinars and training series, or development of certification program or assessment academies. Associations might formally dedicate assessment tracks within conferences or other established professional development programs. They might also establish partnerships with other higher education associations that specialize in assessment or in talent development to help build librarian capacity for assessment. Finally, library professional associations could take an active role in fostering communities of practice by arranging for sections devoted to assessment or by linking assessment librarians to coaches and mentors.

Build communities of practice

Librarians who share an interest in assessment could use the *Standards* to build a community of practice around academic library assessment. Currently, many libraries have assigned assessment responsibilities to very limited numbers of librarians—often only one librarian within a library is “in charge of” assessment—and this arrangement may result in a level of isolation. To assuage this professional challenge, the *Standards* can provide a framework to help librarians from different institutions learn together. The resultant community of practice could enable members to engage in professional reflection and collaborate to solve problems, share strategies and tools, and offer advice and support. Such a community of practice could become a powerful professional force. Indeed, in years to come, members of the community of practice could become collectively responsible for updating the *Standards* to reflect the future evolution of assessment work.

Augment library and information science curricula

With assessment proficiencies in growing demand in the library profession, library and information science schools should examine their curricula to determine the degree to which requisite assessment KSAs are introduced, reinforced, and mastered. In fact, one such survey of library and information science curricula is already underway and slated for presentation at the Library Assessment Conference later this year. In addition to providing a framework for reflection and analysis of existing course content, the *Standards* could be employed to develop existing courses, design new offerings, or integrate assessment throughout entire programs. By augmenting existing library and information science education with assessment KSAs, educators can prepare pre-service librarians for their first professional positions. To support practicing librarians and promote lifelong learning, library and information science schools might also partner with associations to develop and distribute continuing education opportunities to build their assessment capacity.

Conclusion

The ACRL *Standards for Proficiencies for Assessment Librarians and Coordinators* provide a framework that can guide librarians in a local context as they write position descriptions, welcome new employees, design professional development, and conduct performance appraisals. The *Standards* also offer an opportunity to inform capacity-building initiatives offered by professional associations, encourage development of communities of practice, and renew library and information science educational programs. At once informative and flexible, the *Standards* provide support to assessment librarians striving to conduct their daily work and offer an opportunity to strengthen the work of the associations, communities, and educators that sustain them.

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