

## **The Library Assessment Conference – Past, Present, and Near Future!**

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The Library Assessment Conference (<http://libraryassessment.org/>) is a bellwether of the library assessment movement/community. Every two years, the conference hosts a growing community of practitioners, primarily academic, interested in improving libraries based on sound evidence-based decision making. The conference organized by the Association of Research Libraries with two member library partners—the University of Virginia and the University of Washington—has brought an increasing awareness that business as usual is not the mode of operation that will help libraries thrive in the future.

The goal of the conference is to build and nurture a vibrant library assessment community by bringing together interested practitioners and researchers who have responsibility or interest in the broad field of library assessment.<sup>i</sup> The conference provides a mix of invited speakers, contributed papers and posters, and workshops that stimulate discussion and provide workable ideas for effective, practical and sustainable library assessment. This biennial conference builds on the success of the first four conferences held in Charlottesville (2006), Seattle (2008), Baltimore (2010), and Charlottesville (2012).

### *Getting Started*

The Library Assessment Conference has its roots in Jim Self and Steve Hiller's efforts as ARL Visiting Program Officers to capture best practices and strengthen ARL libraries' capacity for assessment. The sponsored program, Making Library Assessment Work<sup>ii</sup>, began in 2005<sup>iii</sup> with a primary goal of evaluating assessment programs in individual libraries and suggesting ways to further assessment in that library. The evaluation consisted of a visit to each of the 42 libraries that participated between 2005 and 2010, meetings with administrators, librarians, library staff and stakeholders outside the library, followed by a short report with recommendations for establishing or strengthening assessment efforts. While the visits and recommendations heightened awareness of the value of assessment, the sustainability of such a program was uncertain. It became clear that a one-stop approach would not suffice; rather, there was a need to bring those interested in assessment together to network, exchange ideas, and be part of a community of practice. This "sustainability" idea was the catalyst for the first Library Assessment Conference that took place in Charlottesville, Virginia in September 2006.<sup>iv</sup>

The articulated conference goals of this initial conference were to:

- Nurture an active learning community for library assessment
- Focus on practitioners

- Provide a forum for high quality presentations on effective, practical and sustainable assessment
- Encourage informal interaction among participants,
- Build the knowledge base of participants
- Make it fun!

The enthusiastic response to this initial 2006 conference and subsequent ones reflect the growing library and institutional importance of assessment as well as the increased assessment activities taking place in libraries and institutions. The conference has evolved over the years from an initial gathering of about 200 registrants in 2006 to an anticipated 600 in 2014. The participants' stemmed from a variety of cross functional information science areas including but not limited to service unit silos, and operational boundaries.

#### *Growth over Time*

The growth of library assessment during the past ten to fifteen years has been nothing short of phenomenal. The tables below illustrate this growth and provide some of the basic information on registrants, presentations and themes of past conferences.

	<b>2006</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2012</b>
Registrants	215	375	460	560
ARL institutions	70%	45%	47%	41%
North America libraries and organizations	97%	92%	95%	97%
Registrants with "assessment" in job title	15	31	62	82
Registration fee	\$375	\$390	\$390	\$425
Papers presented	44	60	66	38
Posters	20	40	82	84
Workshops	3	6	6	5

Figure 1. Library Assessment Conference Basic Facts

The number of presentation sessions (each session is usually comprised of three papers) reflects the diverse range of assessment as well as change over time. The conference organizers have endeavored to provide a balanced program that can respond to different needs of practitioners.

	<b>2006</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2012</b>
Collections		1	1	2
Data/statistics		2	1	2
Digital library	1	1	1	1
Effective library assessment program	3	3	3	1
Evaluation and assessment methods	1	1		1
Information services		1	1	1

LibQUAL+®	2	2	1	1
Organizational climate/culture	2	2	1	1
Organizational planning/performance	2	1	3	1
Qualitative studies	2	2	2	1
Space	1	1	2	1
Teaching and learning	2	4	2	3
Value and impact	1	2	3	2

Figure 2. Number of Presentation Sessions by Theme

In addition to presentations, all conferences have had three to four keynote speakers, at least one of whom was not from a library. All keynoters have delivered engaging speeches noting the importance of the library role in the academy and in society, a role that transcends the compartmentalization of universities and aligns strongly with the global mission of the research and academic institutions represented at the conference. The conferences have captured the “state of the art” of library assessment practice and theory in the voluminous proceedings, presentations, and posters which are available on the website. Furthermore, conference authors are encouraged to publish their work in professional journals. Conference organizers have published select papers in special volumes, for example, the keynote speeches from the 2010 Baltimore conference appeared as the special issue of *Library Quarterly* January 2011.<sup>v</sup> A selection of papers also appeared in *Evidence Based Library and Information Practice* in volume 8 (2) in 2013.<sup>vi</sup>

#### *2014 Library Assessment Conference*

In a few short months, the 2014 Library Assessment Conference will take place again in Seattle, Washington. The conference program has been developed, and once again, it’s a line-up of the “latest and greatest” library assessment efforts, nationally and internationally. The keynote speakers, Lorcan Dempsey, David Kay, and Margie Jantti, will provide different perspectives on how libraries can better align themselves within their institutions and demonstrate their contributions to the success of researchers, teachers, and learners.

After a rigorous proposal review process, the acceptances have gone out and the rest of the program is taking shape. Two hundred fifty-four proposals were received, 10% more than in 2012. The Conference Planning Committee as well as additional reviewers evaluated proposals based on:

- Relevance to effective, sustainable, and practical library assessment
- Significance of their contribution to the body of work associated with library assessment
- Clarity of expression
- Completed status of research
- Results/findings can be used to enact change

Only 29% of paper proposals were accepted, in part due to the reduction in the number of paper presentations from 66 to 38 in order to make room for new session formats<sup>vii</sup>--lightning talks and panels in addition to papers and posters. The Conference Planning Committee especially encouraged proposals in the following areas:

- Collaborative assessment
- Digital libraries
- Information resources, collections and e-metrics
- Learning outcomes
- Management information
- Methods and tools
- Organizational issues and assessment capacity
- Performance measurement and measures
- Services
- Space planning and use
- Special Collections
- User needs
- Value and impact

There will also be six half-day workshops and one full-day workshop that will take place on August 3 or August 7. These workshops will focus on such areas as assessing value, collections, organizational capacity and development, scholarly communications, data mining for value, and using LibQUAL+®.

#### *If One is Good, Many are Better*

Those interested in library assessment and related areas may wish to attend other similarly-focused assessment events and conferences as well. For example, the biennial Northumbria International Conference on Performance Measurement in Libraries and Information Centers began in 1997 and meets in odd-numbered years, usually in the UK. Similarly, the biennial Evidence Based Library and Information Science gathering with its roots in evidence based medicine has a good history moving around continents (Europe, America, Australia). The annual QQML (Quantitative and Qualitative Methods for Libraries) began in Greece and in more recent years has been located in other countries in Europe (Ireland, Italy, the upcoming one will take place in Turkey end of May 2014) and has attracted attendees from all over the world. Librarians may have also noticed an increase in assessment events in 2013-2014 in North America. Many are locally focused, but they emphasize the importance of data and evidence. To name a few that took place last fall: the Southeastern Library Assessment Conference, the Canadian Library Assessment Workshop. There are even more events coming up later this year at CUNY, Drexel, iSchool in Toronto, the UC Berkeley branch of the Librarians Association of the University of California, and the Library Research Seminar at UIUC.

Finally, ARL also offers a reunion event for the community for a brief hour and an half on Friday before ALA Annual and Midwinter meetings for those who want to start their ALA with a refresher on the latest activities of interest to ARL and its evolving and emerging strategies. Following the Library Assessment Forum, ARL usually organizes a more targeted meeting of the ARL Survey Coordinators and SPEC Liaisons.

We hope that many of our fellow librarians will join us at the Library Assessment Conference taking place in just a few months! Register soon—the conference has “sold-out” at least a month in advance in past years, so those interested in attending should register soon.

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<sup>i</sup> Steve Hiller, Martha Kyrillidou, and Jim Self. “Building and sustaining a community of assessment practice: the role of the library assessment conference.” *Proceedings of the 9<sup>th</sup> Northumbria International Conference on Performance Measurement in Libraries and Information Services* (York, England, 2012): pp. 155-164

<sup>ii</sup> Steve Hiller, Martha Kyrillidou and Jim Self. “Assessment in North American research libraries: a preliminary report card” *Performance Measurement and Metrics: The International Journal for Library and Information Services* 7 (2) (2006): 100-106.

<sup>iii</sup> Steve Hiller, Martha Kyrillidou, and Jim Self. “When the evidence is not enough: organizational factors that influence effective and successful library assessment.” *Performance Measurement and Metrics*, 9 (3) (2008): 223-230.

<sup>iv</sup> Steve Hiller, Martha Kyrillidou and Jim Self. “Keys to Effective, Sustainable and Practical Library Assessment” *Proceedings of the Library Assessment Conference: Building Effective, Sustainable and Practical Assessment* (Washington DC: Association of Research Libraries, 2007): 171-176.

<sup>v</sup> Martha Kyrillidou, Steve Hiller and Jim Self. “2010 Library Assessment Conference: Reflections from the conference co-chairs.” *The Library Quarterly*, 81 (1): 3-5.

<sup>vi</sup> Martha Kyrillidou and Damon Jaggars. “Current Themes in Academic Library Assessment: Select Papers from the 2010 Library Assessment Conference.” *Evidence Based Library and Information Practice*, 8 (2) (2013): 4-8.

<sup>vii</sup> Some of our inspiration came from the American Evaluation Association conference session descriptions. See description of conference session types for 2013: <  
<http://www.eval.org/p/cm/ld/fid=170>>