Standardizing the Assessment Cycle: The Development of an Assessment Rubric for Effective Project Planning and Data Reporting

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I. Introduction

Funding agencies that support research and instruction want to know: does the research have an impact within the supported field, and are students learning? In direct to response these types of accountability questions, higher education administrators require their colleges, departments, centers, and libraries to quantify their value. LibQUAL+® and Association of Research Libraries (ARL) statistics provide libraries with benchmark data. In addition to ARL surveys, libraries individualize assessments to measure service quality.   In the area of teaching and learning, information literacy assessment remains a key performance indicator within libraries.

This research examined 124 of the 126 ARL members' websites to ascertain the quantity and quality of the publicly available assessment information. This research looked at in-house service quality assessments and in-house information literacy assessments.   Additionally the research identified assessment personnel within the ARL libraries.

The relevance of research libraries would be more apparent if library administrators could describe their value to the parent institutions. Public

reporting of assessment illustrates the value of the library. The impact of assessment depends on the quality and comprehensibility of the data presented.

At conferences, new assessment librarians often ask for a template to utilize in conducting assessment. Communication would be enhanced if professional guidelines were developed for addressing assessment issues: design of assessment tools, thoughtful analysis of data, consistent reporting of results, and clear statements of actions to be implemented. ARL libraries need to standardize assessment activities and describe assessment results when appropriate within a value-added framework.   To accomplish this, the researchers created an assessment rubric to guide the creation of quality assessments.

II. Literature Review

A review of professional activities and literature illustrates the importance of the value-added metaphor for libraries. For example, when Syracuse University threatened to remove research collections, the value of academic libraries became quickly apparent. After the faculty's fury regarding the possible removal of some research collections reached Suzanne E. Thorin, the dean of Syracuse University libraries, she said, "It means there's a lot of burning passion on this. Humanities faculty members have made it clear they consider the library their

central laboratory" (Howard, 2009, p. 1).   Conversely, Housewright and Schonfeld

(2008, p. 5) wrote:

> while [faculty] value the library, they perceive themselves to be decreasingly dependent on the library for their research and teaching and they anticipate that dependence to continue to decline in the future. There appears to be growing ambivalence about the campus library.

Faced with perceived campus ambivalence, libraries must emphasize the value of

library services and resources to various constituents -- constituents who are not

homogeneous and who often have divergent but essential needs related to

research and scholarship.

Mays, Tenopir, and Kaufman (2010, p. 38), touched on this very point when

they wrote that the grant-supported Lib-Value: Measuring Value and Return on

Investment of Academic Libraries intends to examine how the value of a library

varies for diverse stakeholders. Megan Oakleaf's report (2010, pp. 19-22),

supported by The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), described

how libraries might assess the impact resources and services have on faculty

research success and on student retention. The ACRL's Assessment Committee,

(2010) activities included the creation and maintenance of the ACRL Value of Academic Libraries Toolkit.

Not all assessment activities are based on the value-added framework. The professional group, Library Leadership and Management Association: Measurement, Assessment, and Evaluation Section (2009) developed a toolkit that links to various assessment models. The researchers would argue while many library assessment toolkits do not describe libraries through the lens of the value-added phrase, most library data can be framed within the value-added model.

Library literature describing the implementation of information literacy rubrics for student learning is extensive. Oakleaf (2006, p. 40), identified three useful characteristics of a rubric:

- Formatted on a grid or table
- Employed to judge quality
- Used to translate difficult, unwieldy data into
  a form that can be used for decision-making

As libraries moved from bibliographic instruction to information literacy learning, instructors developed rubrics as a means to authentically assess learning performance (Knight, 2006, p. 45). Oakleaf, Millet, and Kraus (2011, pp. 833-34)

described how librarians at a workshop engaged administrators and faculty in the development of an information literacy rubric; the successful development and implementation of an authentic information literacy rubric hinged on librarians' and stakeholders' collaboration.   Choinski, Mark, and Murphey (2003, p. 572) emphasized the importance of rubrics as tools to facilitate objective assessment of learning. Rubrics can provide a means of building stakeholder buy-in, of objectively assessing processes, and of describing value-added outcomes.

III. Methodology

The researchers reviewed the 124 ARL members' websites available in English for publicly accessible assessment data. The researchers focused on in-house Information Literacy (IL) assessment, in-house service quality assessment, and assessment personnel, including positions and committees.
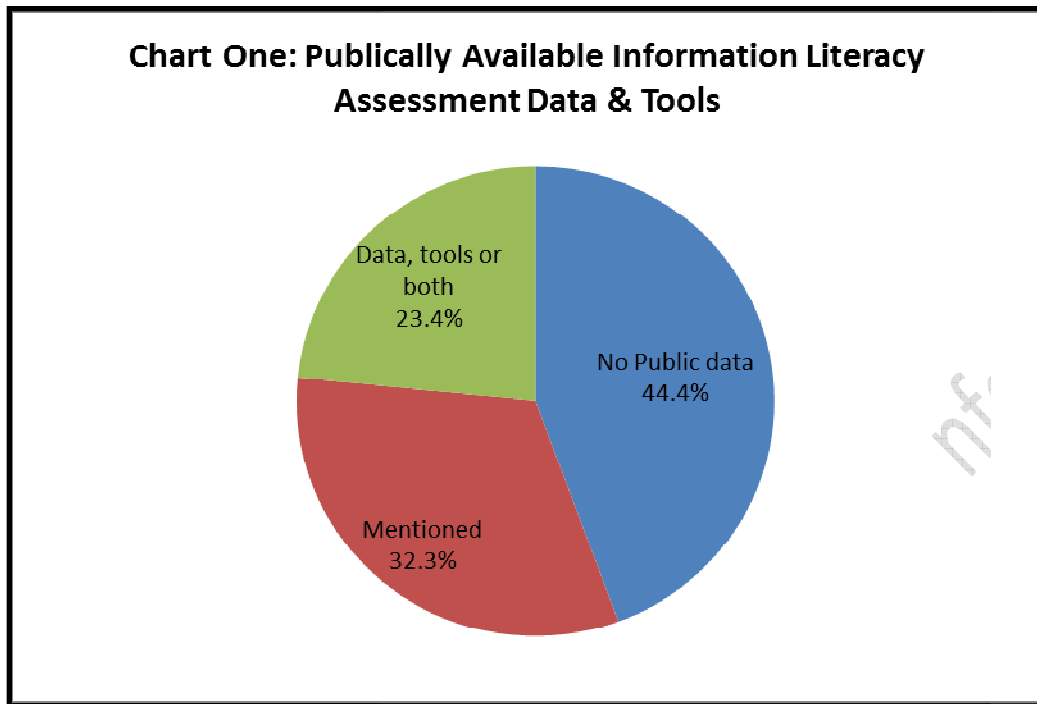
The researchers selected search strategies to optimize locating data points because the websites under review were not similar in design or content. The strategies used included site search, Google site search, and extensive browsing within each library site. Search terms and phrases, including but not limited to "return on investment," "LibQUAL," "information literacy," and "assessment," were explicitly defined and parameters developed to normalize results.

IV. Results

The researchers gathered and analyzed data for each of the three categories of interest: in-house information literacy (IL) assessment, in-house service quality assessment, and assessment personnel.
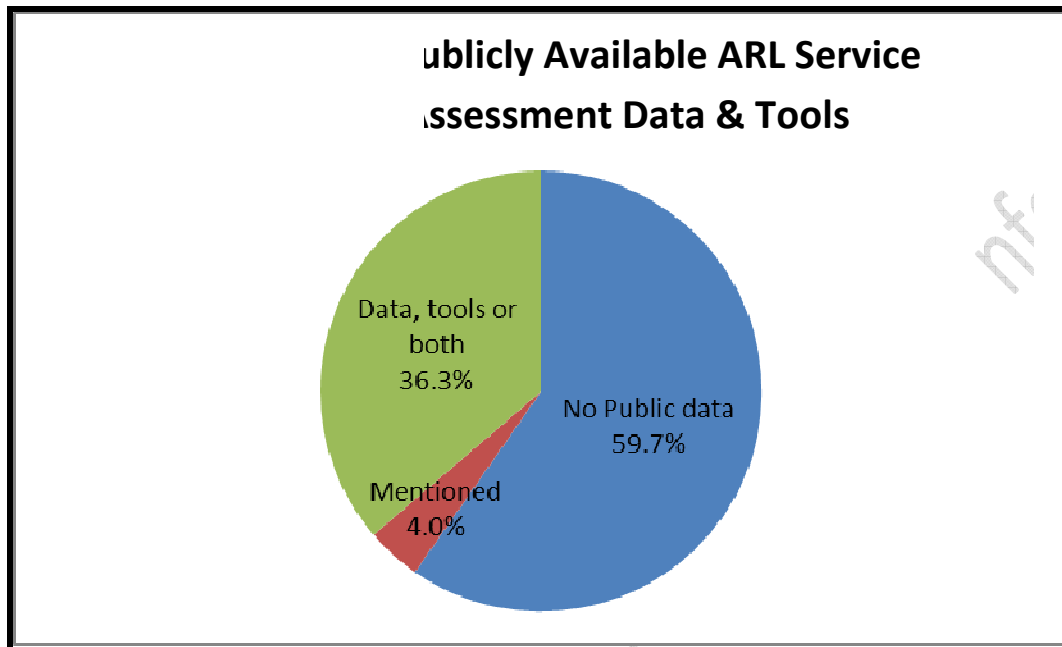
In-house Information Literacy

IL assessment tools or measures were generally created in-house and were activity specific; therefore these assessments could not be used for benchmarking without analysis and discussion with the relevant parties. Chart one illustrates the percentage of ARL members that have IL assessments. The data are broken down into three major categories: No public data-meaning no IL assessment can be found, Mentioned-meaning IL assessment is mentioned but not reported with data or a context, and Data, tools or both-meaning IL assessment is reported with data, or with the assessment tool, or with both the data and the tool publicly searchable on the website.

Chart One: Publically Available Information Literacy Assessment Data & Tools

Data, tools or both
23.4%

No Public data
44.4%

Mentioned
32.3%

In-house Service Quality

This paper focuses on in-house service quality assessment. Many libraries had

multiple types of assessment; the researchers identified over 200 assessment

data points related to service quality. These assessments included qualitative and

quantitative methods and ranged from, but were not limited to, the

implementation of surveys, focus groups, ethnographic studies, grounded theory,

statistical analysis, or large-scale longitudinal data analyses. Despite the larger
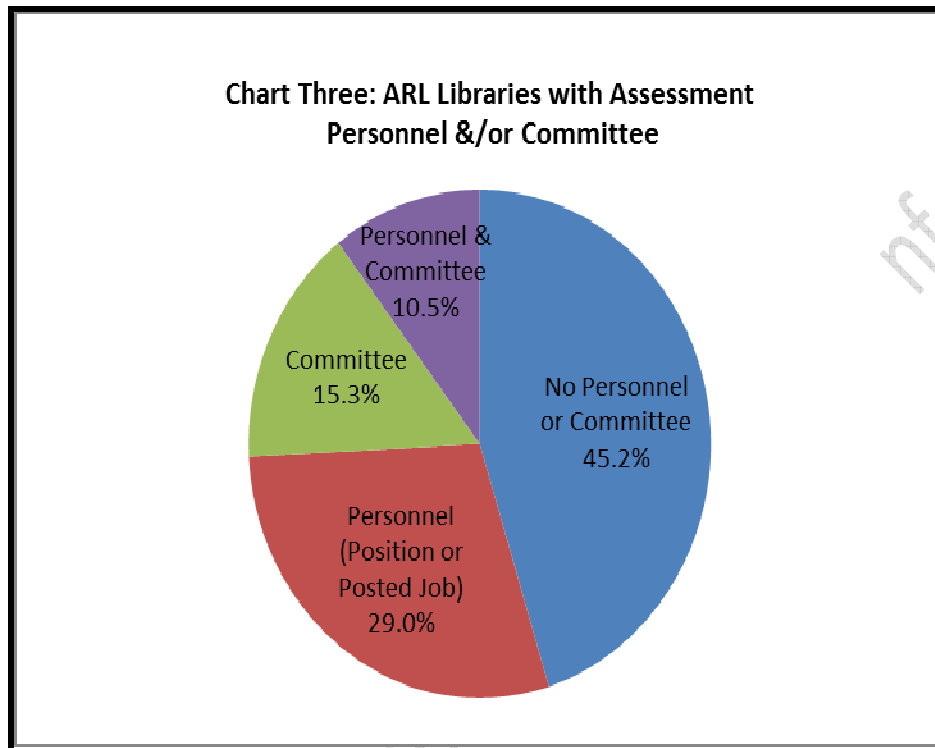
number of assessments present, nearly 60 percent of ARL libraries provided no

service quality assessment.

ublicly Available ARL Service
ssessment Data & Tools

Data, tools or both
36.3%

No Public data
59.7%

Mentioned
4.0%

Personnel Assessment Data

The researchers searched for data about assessment committees and

personnel.   Personnel included both current positions and posted jobs. The ARL

libraries were then placed into one of four groups: no personnel or committee,

personnel only, committee only, or both personnel & committee (See chart

three). Almost 40 percent (49 of 124) of ARL libraries had personnel dedicated to

assessment. This number bodes well for the library assessment profession. At the

same time, more than 45 percent (56 of 124) had no public mention of a

dedicated assessment librarian, of an assessment committee or of a job posted.

Chart Three: ARL Libraries with Assessment Personnel &/or Committee

Personnel & Committee 10.5%

Committee 15.3%

No Personnel or Committee 45.2%

Personnel (Position or Posted Job) 29.0%

V. Discussion and Implications

Preliminary results show that assessment reporting is not systematic.   Lewin

and Passonneau (in-press) found that ARL member institutions do not

consistently use assessment results to inform strategic documents such as library

annual reports and strategic plans. This study can only draw broad conclusions

regarding the correlation among assessment activities, strategic planning, and program improvement since only publicly available data and documents were analyzed. The results from this research show that across ARL member institutions there is no consistency in assessment activities or in reporting practices.

The researchers identified three main issues regarding assessment activities for ARL members. First, there is a wide variety of assessment data types and activities found on ARL member websites. Secondly, only 62 percent of ARL members had any publicly available assessment data, including both in-house and benchmarking assessments in service quality and information literacy (Lewin and Passoneau, in-press). Lastly, assessment personnel, though growing more prevalent, are often not provided with the same type of support and guidance as other library professionals.

The results of this study confirm a disconnect between the libraries' public assessment data and the stakeholders' desires to understand the value of the library within the context of institutional strategic goals or foci. Libraries must collect and report data to demonstrate and prove the vital roles they play within the university.

It is vital that libraries collect relevant data and report assessment results. Shared data allows stakeholders to understand the library enterprise in relation to the parent institution.   Publicly available assessment data and resultant actions provide a glimpse into the triumphs, struggles, and future plans of a library. It is important to demystify "what we do" and solidify the libraries' role within their parent institutions.

At this time, the ARL strategic plan (2010, p. 5) underscores the library's role in developing assessments that demonstrate added value. However, ARL members' activities diverge from this professional organization's recommendations. The DUI, (doing, using, and interacting) model can explain the lag between professional recommendations and professionals' implementation of the recommendations. The DUI model facilitates knowledge creation and innovation but it takes time for communities of practice to synthesize and adopt new models (Chatterjee and Chatterjee, 2010, p. 50). No matter the reason for the disconnect, it is evident that across ARL libraries there is no standard for developing assessment tools, analyzing assessment results, or reporting assessment finding.

Higher education's focus on accountability and higher education's need for data to support accreditation have impacted the assessment field within librarianship. However, many of the personnel are new to the field and have been provided with little guidance. Our research shows while over 50 percent of ARL libraries have assessment personnel or committees, the public reporting of assessment on websites is still minimal.

VI. Rubric

Assessment data on ARL websites was difficult to find and often minimal if present at all. Due to the obvious gaps in libraries' presentations of their stories, the authors created a rubric to facilitate assessment procedures and reporting practices based on their professional observations. The rubric was designed with four considerations in mind:

1. Facilitate assessment librarians' implementation and management of projects.

2. Facilitate a professional discussion within the library assessment community regarding useful, flexible standards for reporting assessment activities.

3. Facilitate the understanding of the workflows and processes involved in conducting effective sustainable assessments.

4. Encourage assessment reporting and creation of resultant action plans.

Oakleaf (2007, p. 28) states, "Librarians require tools that facilitate the translation of unmanageable facts and figures into data that can be used to support decision-making. One such tool is a rubric." Wessels and Birkholz (2010) note, "Rubrics are both a tool and a method for communicating expectations. A rubric describes exactly what is expected in completing a task or producing a product." A rubric facilitates the description of the parts and levels of performance of a particular task, product, or service (Hafner, 2003, p. 1518).

The assessment rubric produced could be used to develop workflow processes, measureable outcomes, and sound reporting practices. The rubric is an attempt to negotiate best practices and encourage some consistency regarding assessment activities within the library community.

Rubric Format

The assessment rubric uses the format found at the Rubric Assessment of Information Literacy Skills (RAILS) website (2010) and the terminology of the

Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) Value project (2010).

Table one is a blank Rubric template found at the RAILS website (Oakleaf, 2010).

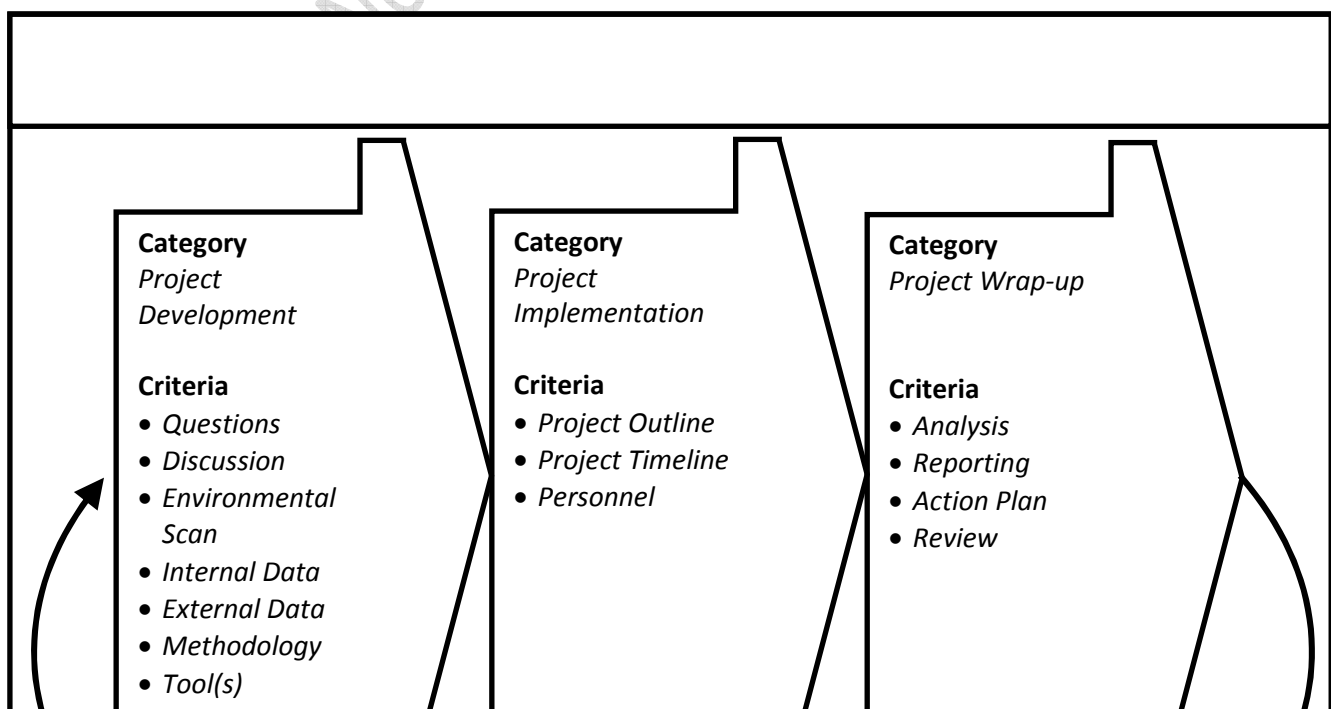| Table One: Example of a Blank Rubric found at the RAILS website (Oakleaf, 2010)—Blank Rubric: 4 Levels				
	Performance Level Label	**Performance Level Label**	**Performance Level Label**	**Performance Level Label**
Criteria	Performance description	Performance description	Performance description	Performance description

One way the assessment rubric differs in format from other rubrics is the use of

the term "category." The assessment rubric covers the entire assessment cycle,

therefore three categories were added to reflect major stages of the assessment

process. The sub-categories are the various criteria. The target indicators are

labeled from left to right and are scored from 1-4. Within the assessment rubric,

all the criteria clarified the scoring for each step in the process.   Table two depicts

the first category in the process by illustrating the organizational elements of the

assessment rubric.

Table Two: Elements of Assessment Rubric Using the First Category of the Process						
Rubric Elements	**Categories**	**Performance Indicator**				**Rubric Elements**
Category Heading →	**Category 1:** Project Development	**Benchmark** 1	**Milestones** 2	3	Capstone ← 4 ←	**Indicators** **Score**
		⬚ Creates a vague	⬚ Begins to	⬚ Adequately	⬚ Thoroughly	**Performance**

Criterion →	Question	question. AND/OR ⬚ Doesn't have well defined assessment need.	define assessment question or need. ⬚ Identifies library need.	defines the scope of assessment question or need. ⬚ Correlates question to library need.	defines the scope of the assessment question or need. ⬚ Ties question to direct need in the library; to library strategic plan; to university strategic plan and goals.	Indicator: Describes the Criterion

Library Assessment Rubric Described

The three categories, which are *project development*, *project implementation,* and *project wrap-up*, encompass the totality of the assessment process.   Within a category, the specific criteria address different elements of the assessment process. Table four illustrates how all the criteria fit within a category.

Category
Project Development

Criteria
- *Questions*
- *Discussion*
- *Environmental Scan*
- *Internal Data*
- *External Data*
- *Methodology*
- *Tool(s)*

Category
Project Implementation

Criteria
- *Project Outline*
- *Project Timeline*
- *Personnel*

Category
Project Wrap-up

Criteria
- *Analysis*
- *Reporting*
- *Action Plan*
- *Review*

Academic libraries' processes mirror the collaborative aspects of research, learning, and teaching activities occurring throughout the parent university or college. Therefore, all the criteria of the assessment rubric either explicitly or implicitly underscore the need for teamwork during the project cycle. The researchers understand that the assessment process is not linear. There will be times when one criterion will overlap with another criterion within a category. However, the rubric delineates each activity to clarify the process (see appendix A.)

Project Development

During the *project development* phase of an assessment, the project leader will directly ask for input from stakeholders, as indicated by the criterion *Focused Discussion*. Under the criterion *Environmental Scan* the project leader would be wise to ask for input from individuals working in the area related to the assessment activity.   Under the two criteria *Internal Data* and *External Data* the project leader should meet with appropriate personnel to conduct an audit of existing data. The final criterion *Tool(s)* can be blended with the criterion *Methodology*. The project manager can receive feedback (if any) from stakeholders about chosen method and tool.

Project Implementation

Kaske (2007, pp. 7-9) provided flow charts and work processes that detail best practices for project implementation. Measures to ensure validity and reliability should be addressed while outlining the project. The criterion *Project Outline* delineates this process. The criterion *Timeline* helps the project leader to indicate adequate progress. Under the criterion *Personnel,* all impacted library personnel should be identified and informed about the project.

Project Wrap-up

Under the criterion *Analysis,* results should be forwarded to staff and administration asking for input. The criterion *Reporting* outlines best practice for sharing results*.* Reporting should be precise. Time should be taken in choosing graphs, photos, or other images to effectively relay results as visuals can make or break a presentation. As Tufte (1983, p. 51) eloquently wrote, graphical excellence "consists of complex ideas communicated with clarity, precision, and efficiency," . . . [and] . . . "requires telling the truth about the data." Under the criterion *Action Plan* the data must inform the outcomes. Actions resulting from the assessment could be anything from major improvements or minor tweaks. The criterion *Review* prompts the project manager to reflect upon and learn from the activity.

Conclusion

The development of this rubric is meant to launch a professional conversation among colleagues regarding assessment practices and standards. As one respected leader (Hiller, 2011) in the assessment community stated, "The activity should drive the metric. The metric should not drive the activity." The proposed rubric is intended to demystify the assessment process. The assessment rubric is

not meant to be an inflexible protocol but rather a prompt to place the process within the larger context of the parent institution. Additionally, the rubric provides a process for self-evaluation for both new and experienced assessment librarians.

The results from this research illustrate the need to develop professional learning networks to complement the growth of assessment within libraries.   The current state of assessment does not parallel ARL's and ACRL's support of assessment or these organizations' strategic plans to demonstrate value. By consistently posting data and resulting actions libraries will be taking the first steps to develop a robust and mature assessment culture that can respond to the demands of parent institutions and stakeholders.

Only through conversation and collaboration with professional groups can a substantive matrix be useful.   The rubric we are presenting is a "first pass" at developing a self-evaluative assessment rubric. Professional conversations and group work are needed to refine the rubric. This process will develop professional networks, address ARL's and ACRL's strategic plans, and assist in the consistent posting of data, with the end result being the development of a culture of

continuous improvement. In this way libraries will be able to easily declare their value.

THE END

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Appendix A: Rubric

Self-Evaluation Assessment Rubric				
Categories	**Target Indicators**			
Category 1: Project Development	**Benchmark** 1	**Milestones** 2	3	**Capstone** 4
Question	⬚ Creates a vague question. AND/OR ⬚ Doesn't have well defined assessment need.	⬚ Begins to define assessment question or need. ⬚ Identifies library need.	⬚ Adequately defines the scope of assessment question or need. ⬚ Correlates question to library need.	⬚ Thoroughly defines the scope of the assessment question or need. ⬚ Ties question to direct need in the library; to library strategic plan; to university strategic plan and goals.
Focused discussion	⬚ No outreach to library members and other stakeholders regarding assessment question.	⬚ Begins to elicit library members and other stakeholders' feedback regarding assessment question.	⬚ Elicits library members and other stakeholders' feedback regarding assessment question. ⬚ Provides opportunities to review project.	⬚ Elicits and incorporates appropriate library and community stakeholders' feedback. ⬚ Provides opportunities to review project, provides feedback through formal and informal channels.
Internal Data source	⬚ No investigation of internal data sources that address assessment question.	⬚ Begins to identify whether there is an internal data source that addresses assessment questions by identifying existing data sources.	⬚ Identifies whether there is an internal data source that addresses assessment questions by identifying, accessing and analyzing existing data sources.	⬚ Identifies whether there is an internal data source that addresses assessment questions by identifying, accessing, analyzing and eliciting appropriate expert opinions regarding existing data sources.
Environmental Scan	⬚ Does not investigate whether an environmental scan will complement assessment question.	⬚ Begins to investigate whether an environmental scan will complement assessment question.	⬚ Investigates whether an environmental scan will complement assessment question. ⬚ If an environmental scan is appropriate the purpose of the environmental scan is clearly related to the assessment question.	⬚ Investigates whether an environmental scan will complement assessment question by speaking with appropriate individuals. ⬚ If an environmental scan is appropriate the purpose and scope of the environmental scan is clearly related to the assessment question.

External Data	⊡ Does not investigate whether there is an external data source that addresses assessment question.	⊡ Begins to identify whether there is an external data source that addresses assessment questions by identifying existing data sources.	⊡ Identifies whether there is an external data source that addresses assessment questions by identifying, accessing and analyzing existing data sources.	⊡ Thoroughly identifies whether there is an external data source that addresses assessment questions by identifying, accessing, analyzing and eliciting appropriate expert opinions regarding existing data sources.
Methodology	⊡ Does not examine different methodologies to identify the best framework for addressing the assessment question.	⊡ Begins to examine different methodologies to identify a framework for addressing the assessment question.	⊡ Examines different methodologies and identifies a framework to apply to the assessment question.	⊡ Thoroughly examines different methodologies and identifies the best framework to apply to the assessment question by reviewing when appropriate stakeholders input, data sources, and environmental scan.
Tool	⊡ Does not select or create a tool.	⊡ Begins to select or create a tool.	⊡ Selects or creates a tool informed by the assessment question.	⊡ Appropriately incorporates existing data sources, results from environmental scan, stakeholder feedback into the selection or creation of tool.

Category 2: Project Implementation	**Benchmark** 1	**Milestones** 2	3	**Capstone** 4
Project Outline	⊡ Does not create a project outline.	⊡ Begins to create project outline.	⊡ Creates a tool or project outline that is informed by the assessment question.	⊡ Appropriately incorporates existing data sources, results from environmental scan, stakeholder feedback, and best methodology.
Project Timeline	⊡ Does not create a timeline for assessment project.	⊡ Begins to create a timeline for assessment project.	⊡ Creates timeline and incorporates contingency plans that build flexibility into the assessment project.	⊡ Creates timeline and incorporates contingency plans that build flexibility and adaptability into the assessment project.
Personnel	⊡ Does not consult individual impacted by assessment project.	⊡Begins to consult individual impacted by assessment project.	⊡ Consults individual impacted by assessment project and asks for their input.	⊡ Consults individual impacted by assessment project and when appropriate incorporates for their input.

Category 3: Project Wrap-up	**Benchmark** 1	**Milestones** 2	3	**Capstone** 4
Analysis	⊡ Does not analyze the results from the assessment project.	⊡ Begins to analyze the results from the assessment project.	⊡ Analyzes the results and develops an appropriate scope for reporting the results and analysis.	⊡ Analyzes the results and develops an appropriate scope and for reporting the results and analysis in a timely manner.

Reporting	▢ Does not report out the results and/or analysis of assessment project.	▢ Begins to create preliminary report regarding the results and/or analysis of assessment project.	▢ Creates a report regarding the results and/or analysis of assessment project.	▢ Creates a complete report regarding the results and/or analysis of assessment project and considers the audience for the report.
Action plan	▢ Does not develop an action plan from the assessment project results or analysis.	▢ Begins to develop an action plan from the assessment project results or analysis.	▢ Develops an action plan from the assessment project results or analysis by consulting with appropriate stakeholders.	▢ Develops an action plan from the assessment project results or analysis by consulting with appropriate stakeholders and developing a reasonable timeline to complete the action plan.
Review	▢ Does not review the effectiveness of the assessment project or resulting action plan.	▢ Begins to review the effectiveness of the assessment project or resulting action plan.	▢ Reviews the effectiveness of the assessment project or resulting action plan and considers successes and challenges to address for next assessment project.	▢ Reviews the effectiveness of the assessment project or resulting action plan and considers successes and challenges to address for next assessment project and reports success and challenges to stakeholders.