10-2003

Review of An Action Plan for Outcomes Assessment in Your Library, by Peter Hernon and Robert E. Dugan

Fred W. Jenkins
University of Dayton, fjenkins1@udayton.edu

An Action Plan for Outcomes Assessment in Your Library (review)

Fred W. Jenkins
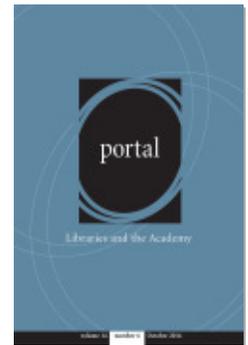
➡ For additional information about this article

While standardized models, best-practices, ranking indices, and benchmarks continually defy consensus and remain controversial, the efforts described in this collection go a long way toward their creation and this is a unique and highly valuable tome for those working in the area of continuous improvement in information services. The reader may come away with the feeling, however, that much more experimentation is needed before any dramatic new national or international standards of measure are adopted. But if we are to demonstrate a commitment to service excellence and sound decision-making, we must continue to substantiate the quality of our work and build a foundation for our management decisions and service policies. This collection highlights the increasingly sophisticated performance techniques, measures, and indicators that support information services in libraries.

Ken Kempcke
Montana State University
<*kempcke@montana.edu*>

An Action Plan for Outcomes Assessment in Your Library, Peter Hernon and Robert E. Dugan. Chicago: American Library Association, 2002. 192 p. $49 softcover (ISBN 0-8389-0813-6)

Academic librarians have been struggling with outcomes assessment for several years. Many are still confused about what outcome measures are and why they are necessary, much less how to implement them. Authors Hernon and Dugan, who have both done extensive work on library evaluation and assessment, intend this book to provide practical help to librarians creating and implementing outcomes-based assessment plans.

Hernon and Dugan begin with the basics, clarifying the difference between evaluation and assessment and among inputs, outputs, and outcomes. They define learning outcomes (the primary focus of much of the book) as measurable changes in student attributes and abilities resulting from the educational process. The authors emphasize that assessment focuses on reviewing and improving institutional effectiveness, although external agencies may use the results for accountability. Their introductory overview of assessment is set in the context of new accreditation requirements, and they briefly summarize the stance of each of the major regional accrediting bodies for higher education. Subsequent chapters cover assessment plans at the institutional level, the development of a separate library assessment plan, and assessment of information literacy efforts. These include numerous examples from existing plans, with references to documents on the Web pages of various institutions. Dugan describes the assessment planning process at his own library (Sawyer Library, Suffolk University) at length throughout the book and includes several relevant planning documents in the appendices. As a whole the first four chapters offer a brief but sound introduction to compiling an outcomes assessment plan.

The fifth chapter, "Moving Public Libraries toward Outcomes Assessment," momentarily shifts the focus from academic to public libraries. Hernon and Dugan argue that public libraries should also undertake outcomes assessment, and they adumbrate some possible approaches to this. The remainder of the book focuses predominantly on academic libraries. Whatever the merits of outcomes assessment for public libraries, the primary locus of this process to date has been in the academic setting and nearly all of the docu-

mentation and examples provided in the volume relates to academic libraries. The treatment of public libraries might well have been saved for a separate monograph.

The remainder of the work deals largely with assessment methodologies. Hernon and Dugan offer numerous examples of outcomes assessment methods used in various libraries, such as portfolios, testing, interviews, focus groups, and surveys. They do a good job of briefly describing each method, presenting advantages and drawbacks, and supplying references to more detailed treatments. A number of sample surveys and tests are included in the appendices. Anyone in need of ideas for assessment techniques will find this a good starting place. In addition to covering some of the easier, less rigorous methodologies, the authors offer a relatively long chapter on "The Research Process," that discusses undertaking more rigorous measures from a theoretical viewpoint. Readers with formal training in social science research methods may either skip it or use it for a quick review. Those without such training may find it rough going, and possibly more confusing than helpful.

The penultimate chapter covers service quality and satisfaction. Although the authors note that these are not really outcomes measures, they emphasize both as important to a library's overall assessment plan. Much of this chapter revolves around Hernon's experiences in adapting the SERVQUAL methodology to library services at Yale. The treatment is clear and useful, but mention of the major implementation of this methodology in academic libraries, LibQUAL+, is relegated to a single footnote. One can only assume the manuscript was completed too early to take full account of this development. Readers will need to supplement this chapter with the rapidly growing literature on LibQUAL+.

The final chapter offers caveats, perspectives on likely future developments in assessment, and encouragement to those undertaking assessment planning and implementation. Overall, Hernon and Dugan have provided a sound introduction to assessment in academic libraries; their book is an excellent starting place for any librarian charged with developing an assessment plan.

Fred W. Jenkins
University of Dayton
<fred.jenkins@udayton.edu>

Patricia Durisin (Instruction Coordinator at Massachusetts Institute of Technology Humanities Library) has gathered a collection of articles written by authors who have first-hand experience crafting information literacy initiatives. Simultaneously co-published by Haworth as a double issue of *Journal of Library Administration*, these articles cover common themes in information literacy including collaboration, assessment, learning styles, and the evolving roles of academic librarians.

Most discussions and publications on information literacy emphasize the importance of collaboration within the institution for successful implementation. Durisin continues that focus and provides different models for collaboration with faculty, librarians, administrators, and students in these selections. However, she has taken collaboration a step further by in-