Faculty and Staff Publications By Year   Faculty and Staff Publications

2015

The Library Self-Study Process

Eleanor Mitchell
Dickinson College

Peggy Seiden

Recommended Citation

Mitchell, Eleanor, and Peggy Seiden. "The Library Self-Study Process." In *Reviewing the Academic Library: A Guide To Self-Study and External Review*, edited by Eleanor Mitchell and Peggy Seiden, 95-121. Chicago: ACRL, 2015.

5

The Library Self-Study Process
Eleanor Mitchell and Peggy Seiden

In this chapter, we bring together the various thematic strands from the previous chapters—those that focus on the impetus for self-studies and reviews and those that discuss the value of different types of data and assessment frameworks. We hope that this pragmatic approach provides a blueprint to allow you to apply the theoretical and practical lessons of the surrounding chapters.

A constant thread throughout these chapters is that of assessment, and more specifically, the culture of assessment:

> A Culture of Assessment is an organizational environment in which decisions are based on facts, research, and analysis, and where services are planned and delivered in ways that maximize positive outcomes and impacts for customers and stakeholders. A Culture of Assessment exists in organizations where staff care to know what results they produce and how those results relate to customers' expectations. Organizational mission, values, structures, and systems support behavior that is performance and learning focused.[1]

A cursory look at the standards of various accreditation agencies provides ample evidence of the importance of a culture of assessment. For example, NWCCU (Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities) standard 3.A.1 states, "The institution engages in *ongoing*, purposeful, systematic, integrated, and comprehensive planning that leads to fulfillment of its mission [emphasis added]."[2] SACS (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools), in its document *The Principles of Accreditation: Foundations*

for Quality Enhancement, states, "At the heart of the Commission's philosophy of accreditation, the concept of quality enhancement presumes each member institution to be engaged in an *ongoing* program of improvement [emphasis added]."[3]

From the initial impetus for the study to the follow-up assessment after implementation of recommendations, this chapter considers decisions about process, timing, participation, documentation, communication, and response to findings.

SHAPING AND STRUCTURING THE PROCESS: A BLUEPRINT FOR THE LIBRARY'S SELF–STUDY

The self-study, the story it tells, will be shaped by its ultimate purpose, which may be accreditation, advocacy, program improvement, or any combination of these. In this volume, Baird and Fogarty (chapter 1) and Gilchrist (chapter 2) discuss how the self-study can be used in preparation for a regional accreditation process; Thibodeau and Melamut (chapter 3) describe its use in program or school evaluation and improvement; in these types of reviews, the self-study responds to external standards. In a non-accreditation-based or internal review (see Lucia and Gremmels, chapter 4), there may be institutional or internal imperatives that impact the design of the self-study. This type of review can be holistic review or can look at a library program such as information literacy. It may also present a particular position on a controversial topic, for example, advocating for the inclusion of student support services within the library building.

The rationale for a self-study for regional or program or school accreditation is self-evident. However, there are many reasons why a library may initiate a self-study outside of these required periodic reviews. These kinds of reviews are generally catalyzed by a sense that there is a problem or that the library has a specific agenda that requires either an external perspective or in-depth exploration. This type of self-study may take place at a moment of change or decision, such as the departure of a director or the funding of a new facility. The following are examples of drivers that may prompt such an internally focused self-study and review. They generally focus on organizational issues or improvement:

- *Organizational dynamics*. How effectively does the library leverage its human resources? How does the environment support a learning organization? How responsive is the library to changing institutional priorities and environmental factors? How well does the library organize itself to be nimble? How does it grow its staff? A key related question for many libraries is how they are developing succession plans. Are there partnerships with other campus entities, or even colocation within the library building, that will impact library planning and facilities?

- *User experience*. Are there indicators that users are highly dissatisfied with library resources, services, or facilities? Are they having difficulty navigating the physical and digital spaces? What is it that our users want, need, expect, value? How do we improve upon their experiences?

- *Changes in leadership.* Sometimes a self-study is prompted by a change in leadership at the institution. Has a key administrator posed questions for the library to explore? Is there a vacancy at a director or collegial level that leads you to reexamine existing structures? Is there pressure to respond to a larger reorganization? Is there an impetus to consider mergers with other units or other libraries?

- *Financial pressures*. Is there a need to reconsider the library's financial model because of decreased enrollment, endowment losses, or shifting institutional priorities? Has the library's steady-state budget been challenged by increasing materials costs and new programs in the library and across the college?

- *Changes to the academic program*. A self-study might be triggered by the library's effort to adapt to new curricular and research areas and changing pedagogical approaches such as online and blended learning. Liberal arts institutions are increasingly adding professional programs in business or allied health. As disciplines evolve, there is a growing need to support emerging areas of scholarship and interdisciplinary subjects. Many institutions have made forays into online learning in order to generate new revenues or to reach a nonlocal audience. Is the library positioned in terms of resources

to support new curricular or research areas? How does the library develop programs to reach those who may rarely come to campus?

- *Technological infrastructure*. Changes in campus technological infrastructure may also provide a reason for a library review of major programs, policies, and services. For example, implementation of a new ERP (enterprise resource planning) system may have a major impact on acquisitions processing, circulation policies, identity management, and other library operations. The implementation of or change in a learning management system could also affect the way the library interacts with courses in information literacy or other programs. It goes without saying that obsolescence of core library systems may prompt not only a systems review but a broader review.
- *Future-proofing*. Libraries are highly influenced by external factors, and increasingly those related to technology create opportunities for rethinking critical operations and identifying new programmatic directions. In 2014, the New Media Consortium, which annually publishes predictions concerning information technologies on campuses, focused for the first time on libraries. The international panel of experts identified six trends for the near and midterm futures.[4] ACRL also does a trend report annually that is broader in scope. While it is unlikely that such reports alone would provide sufficient rationale for a protracted self-study, combined with some of the internal factors mentioned above, these reports can provide an interesting approach to the study. In some senses they can serve as a benchmark for comparison for your library, albeit a future-looking set of measures.

Whatever the impetus of the self-study, it must consider how the library aligns with regional standards, institutional mission, program and curricular goals, or best practices in the profession.

IDENTIFYING THE STAKEHOLDERS

There are two kinds of stakeholders to consider. The first is the ultimate audience for your findings; the second is the participants in the self-study

process, though there may be overlap between these two groups. The makeup of the ultimate audience is likely to vary, depending upon the purpose of the self-study. At the highest level, trustees or board members have an interest in knowing that the institution is meeting its core mission and is doing it effectively and responsibly. At an operational level, library users are interested in whether services and resources meet their needs appropriately. If the self-study is part of an overall institutional accreditation review, the key stakeholders are likely to be the steering committee for that process and the visiting team. It follows that for programmatic or school reviews, those in positions of leadership are most heavily invested in the outcomes. For other types of reviews, there may be a host of different stakeholders, but the senior academic officer to whom the library dean or director reports is certainly key. Others may include the chief financial officer, the director of institutional research, or faculty and students on the library committee.

It may be difficult to anticipate the range of people both on and off campus who might be interested in all or pieces of the self-study. Campus committees, including faculty committees, particular academic departments, and librarians at peer institutions who are seeking either models for doing their own self-study or comparative data may all eventually be interested in the outcomes of your work.

The other set of stakeholders is the participants. How are they included in the process; what are their roles? The self-study process by its very nature must be collaborative. The collaboration starts with the self-study team. The self-study team may be one group or may consist of a steering committee and subgroups that might focus on different aspects of the study. At the core of a great self-study is a strong and diverse committee. You should put considerable thought into assembling this team. While you might be tempted to use your existing leadership team, the self-study presents an opportunity to build leadership skills in other staff and provides you with new and refreshing perspectives. In some cases you may require participants with particular knowledge bases and skill sets. Ensure that people representing key functional areas with expertise in processes or services under review are well represented on the team, but also think about including those who have some distance from the immediate area under study. Staff with responsibility for assessment are key. Bring in your thought

leaders to shape the overarching themes. In order to develop persuasive and readable reports, involve people with good analytical skills and good writers. The latter can craft a cogent narrative and can develop a succinct executive summary. People with skills at depicting data and creating visually compelling reports will be essential to convey complex topics in an easily understandable way.

While library staff will form the core of the committee, you will also want to include library constituents. For example, a student on the committee can serve as liaison to both gather input from students about their needs and concerns and communicate findings to his or her peers. Faculty are essential members to lend legitimacy to the team. Depending upon what you are studying, you may identify experts in other university departments or people external to your institution as team members or resources. For example, if you are focusing on the discoverability of your collections, you will want people who can speak with authority and experience about the usability of your systems. Or you might invite experts from your education department or teaching and learning center to participate with the committee in shaping an assessment at the beginning or analyzing data at the end of a study of library instruction. You may also consider hiring a consultant to assist with facilitation of focus groups or survey development in order not to prejudice the responses that you seek.

The structure of the committees or task forces that will do the actual work will vary depending upon the focus and purpose of the self-study. Because the information-gathering activities may require significant investments of time, it may be prudent to assign teams or subgroups rather than individuals to work on various aspects of the process. For example, if your self-study focuses on the physical library, a small team might be charged with identifying ways to assess usage and user preferences. Another team might look at other library facilities to provide benchmarks and inspiration. It's imperative to communicate the value of the self-study endeavor to those involved in order to prepare and organize library staff and others to play an appropriate part in the process.

Everyone on staff should be well aware of the self-study and have a sense of ownership over the development of the library's strategic direction. Even if they do not directly participate in the self-study, they may provide essential

data that informs the final documents. The work of the self-study should not be viewed as exclusionary or limited to the library's management team. Try to find opportunities for those who wish to contribute to do so meaningfully. As Mosley, Goodwin, and Maciel say repeatedly, buy-in from the beginning is essential to creating a sense of ownership over not only the process, but the outcomes as well.[5]

One way to develop a shared understanding and commitment to the self-study is to initiate the process with an all-staff event. At Dickinson and at Swarthmore, the self-study processes were preceded by all-staff retreats. At Swarthmore, the retreat served to frame the key issues; at Dickinson, the staff learned basic approaches to assessment and how to take a critical view of their daily activities.

DEVELOPING THE FRAMEWORK OF THE SELF-STUDY

The framework of the self-study—meaning the approach you will take, the questions you will seek to answer—will be determined in large part by the type of review and the issues you wish to focus on. In this section, we discuss five different types of reviews: (1) a study defined by regional accreditation standards; (2) a study defined by program standards (e.g., law or engineering); (3) a study defined by the institution's mission and strategic plan; (4) a study to demonstrate the value of the library; and (5) a study that is focused on a single issue or set of issues that are internal to the library or internal to the institution.

Regional Accreditation Standards

For regional accreditation, for example, the topics we need to address are often prescribed. The SACS includes the following standards in section 3.8, "Library and Other Learning Resources":

> 3.8.1 The institution provides facilities and learning/information resources that are appropriate to support its teaching, research, and service mission. **(Learning/information resources)**

> 3.8.2 The institution ensures that users have access to regular and timely instruction in the use of the library and other learning/information resources. **(Instruction of library use)**

> 3.8.3 The institution provides a sufficient number of qualified staff—with appropriate education or experiences in library and/or other learning/information resources—to accomplish the mission of the institution. **(Qualified staff)**[6]

This structure would suggest committee members assigned to gather, analyze, and present data on space and facilities, resources and collections, instruction and reference, and administration and human resources. It is important to note and respond to the specific requirements of each standard as articulated by the accrediting agency. For example, standard 3.8.2 specifies "access to regular and timely instruction," which suggests that the library demonstrate that it has an information literacy plan rather than just responding episodically to instructional requests.

Increasingly, the regional accreditation agencies are moving away from explicit library or information resource standards. In certain instances, the library may find itself implicitly embedded in other standards such as general education (Middle States).[7] In SACS, the library's program may be the focus of a QEP (quality enhancement plan).[8] These organizations are asking for evidence on how the library supports institutional mission and student learning outcomes. In these cases, the college or university is often developing its own educational goals and the library needs to structure its self-study around these goals; this approach may present more challenges than simply responding to stated standards.

Program Standards

Similarly, standards for the accreditation of programs or schools may specifically require a response by the library. For example, the American Bar Association stipulates *ABA Standards and Rules of Procedure for Approval of Law Schools*. Chapter 6, "Library and Information Resources," provides three general provisions:

> **Standard 601. GENERAL PROVISIONS**
>
> (a) A law school shall maintain a law library that is an active and responsive force in the educational life of the law school. A law library's effective support of the school's teaching, scholarship, research and service programs requires a direct, continuing and

informed relationship with the faculty, students and administration of the law school.

(b)   A law library shall have sufficient financial resources to support the law school's teaching, scholarship, research, and service programs. These resources shall be supplied on a consistent basis.

(c)   A law school shall keep its library abreast of contemporary technology and adopt it when appropriate.[9]

The library's self-study must necessarily demonstrate "effective support," sufficient financial resources, and so on. One could use surveys and other user assessments to demonstrate effective support, benchmarks and user feedback regarding staffing and collections, and budgetary data to demonstrate a consistent and sufficient financial approach.

Nevertheless, sometimes the language of the standards may not allow for direct measurements. As one can see by the standard above, the library is very much on its own in interpreting or responding to ambiguous and abstract language such as being "an active and responsive force in the educational life of the law school."

Institutional Mission and Strategic Plan

In structuring the self-study around the institution's mission and strategic plan, the library is often asked to provide evidence of support for paracurricular areas and programs that may not seem to be directly related to core library functions. Many institutions now embrace concerns for diversity, community building, or globalism as central foci of their strategic directions. Ferreting out what's relevant to these areas is more difficult, more oblique than just providing counts of items or visits or activities. It's not enough to simply say what programs you have implemented or resources you have purchased; one needs to clearly demonstrate that a plan is in place with measurable goals. For example, in support of the campus global mission, a library might develop a plan for outreach and services, to provide liaisons to foreign study or international student offices, to develop relevant collections, and so on, with specific goals and methods of assessing effectiveness. Achievement of these goals may take the library into new areas, new types of assessment it has not typically confronted in the past.

Value of the Library

It is no secret that many legislators, boards, and even administrators question the value of the library. The library is a major cost center for institutions of higher education, and the return on investment is not always obvious when it seems that all information is freely available via Google. A critical and emerging issue for many libraries is how to demonstrate the value of libraries in contributing to student success, faculty productivity, and any other dimensions of importance to the institution. Thus, this approach requires that the library structure the self-study around appropriate value propositions.

Single Issue or Set of Issues

The self-study may be organized around the library's functional or operational needs and priorities in response to an internal or institutional driver. For example, if the review is largely driven by major changes to the academic program such as a new school or venture into online learning, the library may perform a self-study to assess its readiness to participate in terms of resources and services. If a library suspected that its integrated library system did not accommodate students' research habits well, it might undertake a self-study to persuade the institution's administration to finance the acquisition of a new system. Such a self-study might include examining students' research behavior, eliciting faculty expectations, testing system performance, investigating existing systems at peer institutions, and looking at the capabilities of available systems.

Overall, there are a number of different approaches to framing the self-study: one can use a retrospective, prospective, combination of retrospective and prospective, or comparative approach. A library might employ certain techniques to inform each approach. If the self-study is to be retrospective, or reflective of changes since a previous review, or purports to analyze progress towards goals, it will be essential to gather and present data from the past to demonstrate the impact of change over time. Another fruitful method is to develop alternative scenarios or futures for the library. In *The Art of the Long View,* Peter Schwartz discusses scenario development. In this process, one invents and considers "several stories

of equally plausible futures." The scenario development process helps one focus on the key or strategic decisions and driving forces that are most likely to have a bearing on any of these possible futures or what-ifs.[10] What-ifs can be positive or negative—the impact of an economic downturn or difficulty in recruiting students—or the most desired future—a new building, funds for new staff. For example, if the library has been asked to cut its budget to respond to financial pressures, it might develop a series of scenarios describing the impact of various levels of reductions to services, resources, and staff. If the library is advocating for a renovation or expansion, the library might take a combined approach—both retrospective and prospective. The library would want to talk about collection space needs and user behavior, but also about projections for growth and how the changing nature of the curriculum might impact future behaviors. In thinking about the future, one might develop several scenarios. In such a case, a library might envision a variety of possible libraries—each one with a different combination of collections and services in order to give the reader a sense of what could be.

Yet another approach to framing a self-study might involve comparing your library to peer institutions. This comparison can take into consideration various dimensions of library services, resources, or programs or take a more holistic approach. One should also examine the library's progress in comparison to its peers with regard to its response to emerging trends.

FOLLOWING A TIMELINE

Ideally, as noted at the beginning of this chapter, the library operates in a continuing cycle of assessment and adaptation, review and response; thus, a review, whether periodic or ad hoc, holistic or limited, will intersect with the existing timeline under which the library regularly gathers data, evaluates, introduces change, observes, and analyzes results. Clearly, much about the timing will depend upon the type of review.

Institution-wide or comprehensive reviews, such as those under the purview of a regional accrediting organization, are periodic. The library director should become familiar with the schedule for the institution and the type of review. For example, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education's

Handbook for Periodic Review Reports states, "The Periodic Review Report ordinarily is submitted five years after an institution's decennial self-study and evaluation team visit."[11] If the library was highlighted or cited for shortcomings in the decennial review, it is likely that it will be called upon to provide additional data for the periodic review.

An institution may well begin the formal preparation process two years in advance of a review by establishing a team, determining areas of focus, and outlining the process. For the academic library, having a structure in place for organizing relevant data and a regular (perhaps annual) report process to populate that structure will enhance the ability to contribute effectively to the institutional review.

The timeline for completing a full self-study will be driven by the due date for the report. If the self-study is part of a campus-wide assessment, this will be externally established and known well in advance. If, however, the self-study is driven by a situation internal to the library—change in leadership, budget justification, restructuring, and so on—the timeline may be a compromise between optimal and available time.

The library will have ample information and a history of systematically collecting it to bolster the review process and demonstrate that it operates within a culture of assessment. Realistically, however, the call for a review, whether externally mandated or arising from internal strategic or other needs, may well find the library a few data points short of conclusive evidence. For example, a data-driven library would have a plan for the regular, ongoing, and systematic gathering of information on user behavior and satisfaction with library services and resources; if this plan is not in place well before a review is scheduled, any data hastily mustered by survey or focus group will not provide more than a snapshot. Note that additional data collection, contracting with external facilitators for activities like focus groups, and doing a comprehensive environmental scan are not trivial tasks and may well require significant lead times.

COLLECTING EVIDENCE AND DOCUMENTATION

Where a culture of assessment exists, the process of gathering supporting evidence to inform your self-study is made simpler because much of the data is already in hand. The self-study may require further analysis of the

data in order to tell the story or develop the narrative. For example, if you were asked to provide data for an external review of an academic department, you might offer information related to collection expenditures and use, subject guide use, consultations, or courses taught as a means of demonstrating the students' engagement with research in the department. In a campus-wide accreditation review, you might inform a section on assessment of learning outcomes by providing the library's data on student attainment of information literacy skills. In both of these cases, you will call upon existing data to support the argument.

A number of chapters in this work discuss at length the types of data libraries routinely collect and the merits of that data. There are multiple survey instruments available that are well vetted and standard in librarianship and can provide good comparison data. Yet they may present problems in that they can be costly, too lengthy, or poorly suited to your particular library or institution. Depending upon the focus of your self-study, you may want to consider many types of data as evidence.

Data about Satisfaction and the User Experience

In chapter 11 of this volume, Kyrillidou and Consiglio discuss the two major instruments, LibQUAL+ and MISO, that measure user satisfaction. But there may also be value in doing local studies, particularly if you want deeper qualitative input that may be discovered only through interviews or focus groups. In some cases, the services or circumstances you wish to measure are unique to your library and not included in those instruments. For example, if your library offers multiple service desks to support a variety of functions, these standard instruments may not provide a means to assess these different functions either alone or in comparison with each other.

One can also study the user experience (UX) and the way that the user engages with the library as a whole. For example, Steven Bell, Brian Mathews and Paul Zenke have both done considerable work in applying UX theory to how their users navigate their libraries and access resources and support.[12] One can also study the user experience with particular services or systems, such as the interlibrary loan system (where one can study the ease with which the user can make an interlibrary loan request and the time to fulfillment) or one's website (and the way that users can locate critical information).

Data Focusing on User Research Behavior

While user experience studies provide a portrait of what our patrons encounter in using our libraries—in other words, the interface between the user and the library—user research behavior studies are broader and are not limited to the user's interaction with the "library" but seek to capture all of the ways that users go about their research process. It is often helpful to present an understanding of user research and information seeking and library use patterns in addition to or in place of asking your clientele about their level of satisfaction with existing collections, programs, services, or facilities. User behavior data allows one to determine how a library's priorities align with the way our patrons actually do their work. Such information can provide broad overviews of either faculty or students' changing information-use patterns. Instruments like the Ithaka S+R faculty survey track aggregated faculty behavior over time at a national level. A local version of the survey is now available and allows one to compare findings about one's faculty to national findings. These kinds of studies might provide excellent descriptive data regarding different clientele's acceptance of e-books or the role the library plays in their research lives. Information about user research behavior may also be gathered through observation and focus groups. A facilitator of a focus group with students or faculty might ask the participants to think back on a recent research paper and discuss how they went about finding sources. Detailed data depicting reference transactions over time may also provide a window into changing student behavior and utility of library services. In the past ten years, largely due to the research at the University of Rochester, libraries have begun to employ ethnographic research methodologies to better understand the user experience and research behavior.[13] While not every library may have access to trained anthropologists, training in the methodologies is frequently offered.

Data about Collections and Their Use

Information about one's collections represents decisions and priorities regarding resource allocation. This data may include counts of physical and digital items, in some cases broken down by subject or format; circulation or downloads; changes over time; and comparisons with aspirant or peer

institutions. In the past, the number of physical items in the library represented some measure of institutional quality. Today, this number has decreasing relevance since so much of what is purchased is no longer in physical form. However, if one is doing a self-study that includes an analysis of the use of library space, these numbers and the growth rate of the collection are highly relevant. Though you may not be able to depend upon consistent definitions of data types across institutions, you should try to be as consistent as possible within your own library. The definitions of data types are widely open to disagreements. For example, how do we define *database*, or how do we count journals when they may be available through multiple providers and platforms?

One burgeoning area of assessment is collection analysis. Firms like Sustainable Collections Services and ProQuest conduct deep analysis of individual and multi-institutional collections and their use, often as a prelude to the development of shared archiving programs or shared collection development programs.

Data on collection usage is more accessible and granular than in the past. Usage data provides a window into understanding the value of your collections to your users. Through usage data, one can determine what parts of existing collections are being used, how that usage aligns with known areas of research and the curriculum, and where the library may need to alter its collection development emphasis to better respond to students and faculty.

Data about Resources and Their Allocation

Libraries will generally have ready access to multiple years' worth of materials expenditure data. However, it is sometimes difficult to evaluate data over time because of the fluidity within categories of expenditures. For example, something that once was clearly a reference work and might have been categorized as a continuation or serial may now include full text of the journals that it indexes or abstracts. Definitions are not consistent over time within the same library either, much less among many libraries, which makes comparison difficult or unreliable. Beyond simply reporting your own data over time or juxtaposed with data from peer or aspirant

institutions, it is important to contextualize that data within the overall economics of scholarly publication.

Data on staffing might begin with the number of professionals and support staff and proceed to changes in these numbers over time. As staff roles evolve, the traditional categories of MLS staff and paraprofessional or support staff may be insufficient to capture the complexity of the library organization. For example, there are whole new categories of professional staff—HR, legal, technology, marketing, or communications personnel—who now are regularly hired by libraries, the so-called "feral librarians." And there are many non-MLS staff whose work once required a graduate library degree. Comparisons of staffing across institutions become increasingly difficult when one considers specific positions and roles. Job titles vary from library to library, as do job assignments; a reference librarian may also be a bibliographer at one library; a cataloger may also be working on digital initiatives at another. In discussions of staffing levels, one can also consider the number of staff per student, course, or academic department as a means for situating one's own library among its peers.

The library structure can be depicted through organization charts, which capture the job titles as well as the reporting relationships. To present comparative data, bar charts can show numbers and types of staff in comparison to the averages at peer or aspirant libraries and can depict the ratios of librarians to users or departments.

ALA, ACRL, CUPA-HR, and the Oberlin Group all regularly collect salary data on library staff. The same issues about categories of staff are exacerbated when looking at salary data across libraries. Location, years of service, level of experience, and additional degrees may all impact the bottom line on salary expenditures. One comparator that may be useful is data on starting salaries for entry-level positions from nearby peer institutions.

Library space is a key resource that should not be overlooked in the self-study. The level of detail provided in this section will be greater if the focus of your self-study is on a renovation, expansion, or other building project. You should readily have at hand basic data on square footage and comparison data with other libraries serving similarly sized populations. You may also want to provide information on how space is allocated in the library. For example, how much of your space is for staff office and work, versus for

the use of the public or for materials shelving and storage? What types of study environments are offered—group, individual, carrels, tables? How is technology distributed throughout the library; how does the library provide for different types of technology-based activities? Are there nonlibrary functions or spaces in the building, such as registrar-scheduled classrooms, writing or tutoring centers, and other academic support services?

Focusing in on people spaces, how do patrons utilize these spaces? The gate count alone does not adequately represent the variety of visitors and uses in the building. It's not easy to collect this data; while there are apps that have been developed that may assist in capturing where people are seated in the library, often one wants to know what users are doing, the extent to which they are engaging with library resources—materials or technology; whether any group of students is working on a single project together or simply engaging in parallel play. An additional complication is trying to gather data at all days and times when library staff may not be available to observe the use patterns. As noted above, ethnographic analysis can be applied in a library setting to obtain a more granular sense of user behavior with respect to facilities, services and resources. The classic work on utilizing these methods is *Studying Students*, which provides numerous methods of gathering data about the use of library space.[14] The Ithaka student survey includes a module on space utilization that was developed with input from Nancy Fried Foster and could provide a broader view of both users and nonusers of library space.[15] Ithaka is now offering a workshop entitled Evidence-Driven Decisions on Library Space in the Digital Age, on precisely this topic.

Data about Student Learning

Educators, administrators, and assessors are increasingly absorbed in capturing data on student learning. Librarians are challenged to tease out the elusive piece of that learning to which the library can lay claim and to demonstrate how its programs and practices impacted the learning. A number of standard assessment tools can provide a means of testing student information competency, such as the HEDS Research Practices Survey, which collects information on students' research experiences and assesses information literacy skills, and Project SAILS, which is a multiple-choice

instrument targeting information literacy skills and mapping to the ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education. The HEDS survey provides the library with information on its students' scores and shares student- and institution-level data with other participating institutions. SAILS provides individual results and summary information, as well as comparative information about the performance of students at peer institutions.

Beyond large-scale standardized assessments, there are locally developed approaches for assessing student information skills, many of which are reported in the conference literature (see, for example, LOEX, Library Instruction West, and ACRL), and in journals such as *Reference Services Review* and *Communications in Information Literacy*. These range from multiple-choice tests to performance-based assessment (where students are asked to perform a research task or respond to a research prompt with an action or answer) to authentic assessment, where the artifacts of student work (research papers, annotated bibliographies, etc.) are evaluated, based upon a rubric, for evidence of information literacy skills.

It has been challenging enough for libraries to prove the impact of their information literacy programming on the improvement of student information literacy skills. More recently, a growing body of research focuses on demonstrating the relationship between library use and student success. One study, by Krista M. Soria, Jan Fransen, and Shane Nackerud, found that first-time, first-year undergraduate students who use the library have a higher GPA for their first semester and higher retention from fall to spring than nonusers of the library.[16] Such data, if available, is strongly persuasive of the value of the library to the academic mission of the institution.

Data about Operational Efficiencies, Staff Satisfaction, and Other Issues Internal to the Library

Although we tend to focus on externally verifiable data noted above, in some cases data about the immediate internal situation may be critical to the framework of the self-study. Libraries may be concerned about functional aspects of the organization, such as the ability of staff to adapt to technological changes, the implementation of new services or products, the need to re-engineer processes or workflows, or levels of staff satisfaction.

Data one needs may be found through systems analysis of current practices, measures of productivity, climate surveys, and assessments of external environmental factors that may have an impact on library services and staff. Taken together these data points may reveal significant stresses as well as solutions.

External consultants can assist with analysis of operations and identify ways to document processes and capture data on effectiveness and efficiency. Nevertheless, libraries that cannot hire consultants can still do small studies on their own. For example, if faculty have raised concerns about the rate of fulfillment of interlibrary loan requests, the library can collect data on average time to fill and what causal factors might influence the rate.

Many institutions have implemented college- or university-wide climate surveys, particularly where there has been a sense of change in the culture or where there is a major diversity initiative. Climate surveys gather data from employees about their satisfaction and engagement within their institutions. ARL's ClimateQUAL is an instrument especially useful in assisting larger academic library organizations in surfacing staff perceptions about the environment in which they work, particularly issues around satisfaction with current services and policies. An institutional human resources department or your own library may also employ locally devised instruments to assess the organizational climate as seen through the perspective of library staff.

In the following section we will discuss the importance of conducting a wider environmental scan that will provide information that will help contextualize the various types of data and evidence discussed in the preceding section.

Contextualizing Your Data—The Environmental Scan

While these various data sources provide evidence related directly to library services, collections, and facilities, one needs to understand external forces that are likely to impact the library on the immediate and longer-term horizon. Developments in K–12 education; publishing, particularly scholarly publishing; the political and governmental environment; and relevant technology provide the context within which the library operates. A scan of trends, activities, and developments within your library sector—for

example, among other liberal arts college libraries—may expose practices and priorities against which you can measure your own. An environmental scan assists the library in identifying opportunities and threats that may impact its strategic direction.

In order to get a detailed picture of the library's environment, one can consult a myriad of sources. In addition to exploring institutional research data, one probably will do in-depth literature reviews and may choose to visit other institutions or consult with colleagues.

You will want to consider many sources and types of salient institutional data in developing your self-study: budgetary data, enrollment data by major, number of courses, any existing surveys like the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) that one can mine for relevant data, and curricular, research, and broader disciplinary directions, to name just a few.

The external factors that you may want to bring to bear on your narrative will ultimately be dependent upon the focus of the self-study. If you are looking at the future of the library's collections and budget to support emerging disciplines, information on the scholarly journal and monograph publishing industry will be highly relevant. If you are focused on the development of the information literacy program, having an understanding of trends in the K–12 sector is critical.

Putting Your Data to Work

Together the sources of data and the environmental scan discussed above provide the heart of the evidence for the self-study. Let's take a look at how one could bring various pieces of evidence to bear on one or two particular foci of a self-study.

If you are looking at developing a self-study around the need for facility renovations, multiple data sources could be relevant. Certain quantitative data is critical to inform the program or make one's case: current capacity of shelving in the libraries, projected growth rates for different categories of materials, usage data for different materials. One might also examine trends in library design and pay attention to possible partnerships with information technology organizations or student services within your institution to determine whether there might be synergies that could be addressed by renovations or expansions. Finally, one should have a good understanding

of how both students and faculty use the existing library spaces and also how nonusers of the library do their research. Relevant data and sources might include the following:

- current library facility design trends (*Library Journal* or *American Libraries*, design consultants)
- peer institution comparison with regard to collections and square footage (internally collected by institutions, NCES and ACRL)
- campus needs and potential partnerships (local information)
- data on use of in-house collections, satisfaction with existing library spaces (MISO or LibQUAL+, focus groups or interviews)
- data on research behavior (Ithaka or MISO)
- data on how space is currently utilized (ethnographic studies)

The process is multidimensional, and it is the intersection of these data elements that allows one to begin to craft a compelling narrative.

As a second example, let's look at how one might respond to a regional accreditation standard. We'll use the example of New England Association of Schools and Colleges to illustrate how to parse a standard and identify needed data. Standard 7 broadly addresses library and information resources. The specific standard, 7.5, reads

> Through ownership or guaranteed access, the institution makes available the library and information resources necessary for the fulfillment of its mission and purposes. These resources are sufficient in quality, level, diversity, quantity, and currency to support and enrich the institution's academic offerings. They support the academic and research program and the intellectual and cultural development of students, faculty, and staff.[17]

At first it might seem difficult to determine what data would adequately document the achievement of this standard. How does one know that the library's collections are effectively meeting the research needs of students, faculty, and staff or supporting their intellectual and cultural development? As in the previous example, one needs to consider both quantitative and qualitative sources of information. Descriptions of how the library selects materials are just as important as the data on expenditures or usage. Certainly, one will want to provide evidence not just of use of collections, but

also of satisfaction with the collections (by format or subject). Below are some of the types of data and their sources that can be helpful in illustrating that the library is effectively meeting this standard:

- *Description of the library's structure for collection development and assessment*. Organizational charts, liaison responsibilities, processes for building the collection such as vendor profiles, core collections, collection development statements, any arrangements through which the library's collection is linked to curricular approval process.
- *Collection analysis*. These studies examine overall circulation patterns in the collection, date analysis of the collection, peer comparisons. (OCLC, In Toto, Sustainable Collection Services all provide this type of data.)
- *Data that documents the adequacy of financial resources*. Collection dollars per student, per faculty member, per course, monographic budget, and trends in acquisitions (in house, and IPEDS or ACRL).
- *Data that documents the adequacy of local collections and access arrangements.* Analysis of ILL data and evidence of connection between ILL data and collection decisions, documentation of consortial arrangements, trend analysis of circulation and usage, including usage data as a factor of the population, comparative data on peer institutions' collections and expenditures.
- *Data on satisfaction with the collections.* LibQUAL+ and MISO focus groups, departmental assessments of external evaluators in various disciplines may note strengths and weaknesses of the library's collection to support research in their areas.

CRAFTING A COMPELLING NARRATIVE

The self-study document will have an evident organizational schema depending upon the type of review or framework or to adhere to a campus-mandated format. Below we provide one possible way to organize the document that could work well regardless of the focus of your self-study.

It is essential to include an executive summary. Few readers will want to wade through 250 pages of narrative and charts. The summary needs to be

able to stand on its own; think of it as the "elevator speech"—what do you want people to know in five minutes? What are the highlights and essential facts?

The second chapter provides the foundational information about the library: mission, values, and vision statements (including how these statements reflect the culture of the organization and how the library's mission relates to the institutional mission); the strategic plan and current initiatives or goals; the organizational structure; and any historical context or additional background information that can help ground the reader. The relevant foundational documents can be included in the appendices.

Early on in the document, the self-study should provide an overview of the key driving forces that are currently affecting the library or likely to have a significant impact in the near term. This chapter should address both local factors such as impending changes in the curriculum or budgetary constraints and external factors such as emerging technologies or escalating costs for library materials. It is particularly important that this chapter be written for an audience perhaps unfamiliar with these issues and with local circumstances. This will enable those not from your own campus as well as those not in the library profession to situate the library within the institutional and information environments.

One of the initial chapters should include a review of current staffing and financial resources, as well as historical trends in both areas. It may be useful to include comparisons with peers or aspirant schools on both topics. You may also decide to use other staffing data relevant to your narrative, such as current entry-level salaries, faculty and student FTE or number of courses per library staff member. Potentially useful budget data might be information on the rate of growth of your collections budget as compared to the rate of inflation for library materials, comparative information on the budgets of peer libraries, your library budget as a percentage of the total institutional budget, and data on your collection dollars per user.

The organization of the heart of the document will reflect the major purpose of the self-study. If you are writing as part of an accreditation process, the chapters are likely to follow the specific standards. If this is a functional assessment, then the chapters will logically follow from those particular activities or services that are under review. Within each topical chapter,

you will want to include key accomplishments over a designated period of time (probably no more than the most recent accreditation or ten years), challenges identified through data gathering and analysis, opportunities to respond to these challenges or improve operations and services, and future directions suggested by your analyses.

In order to keep the reader engaged, it is essential to develop a narrative that is straightforward and avoids digression and eliminates the need for extensive documentation within the text. It is good practice to refer the reader to that documentation in various appendices. The arrangement of these appendices may follow the structure of the self-study document, with the supporting materials for each chapter provided in similarly labelled sections. One can place the relevant appendix at the end of the chapter and place other more general appendices at the end of the document or put all the material at the end of the study. Some material included in appendices may have informed the self-study; other material may be supplementary and provide additional background. The substance of these appendices can include findings from qualitative studies such as focus groups; historical information; documents on subsidiary or related collections; background on collaborations and key consortia; examples of library-produced instructional or marketing materials, newsletters, and policies; and the library's strategic plan and organizational chart.

Once you have completed the document, it should be subject to review and revision. You may want to share it with key internal staff, your library advisory group, and, if appropriate, the administrator to whom you report. Their responses will help you improve readability and clarify the message.

Depending upon the driver for the self-study, the review team may be designated by the accrediting agency or may be a group suggested by the library director. Even in institutional accreditation, a librarian may be on the team, although this historical practice is less and less common today. (There is more information on the role and itinerary of the review team in chapter 7, by Malenfant and Deiss, in this volume). If the self-study was conducted as part of a periodic accreditation process, it is likely that you would be asked to provide a digest of your document or that you would adapt sections of your self-study to be incorporated where appropriate within a campus-wide document. In a stand-alone self-study, the library may help focus the review team's

work by including questions for their feedback. For example, one library may ask, "We have the goal of assessing our collections, and a pilot underway to begin with the literature sections. How much effort and how many resources should we apply to this activity—is assessment of the monograph collection relevant in this age of diminishing dollar power and expanded resource-sharing capabilities?" Sometimes the questions can be framed to elicit a particular response that can focus on an agenda or issue that the library wishes to promote (e.g., the need for a renovation or increased budgetary support).

If the self-study is not associated with accreditation, the resources may not be available to sponsor an external review team. Even in this case, one can share the self-study with internal advisory groups or with selected peers who may be willing to read the document and provide advice. The purpose may not be to inform an external review, but can assist the library with setting strategic priorities.

RESPONDING TO AND LEARNING FROM THE REVIEW: THE INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE

So, what next? If your self-study has culminated in an external review, then it is likely that the review team will provide a written commentary to you or a senior administrator or campus committee member. That report might start with a review of strengths and go on to address areas for development and make specific recommendations. It will certainly evoke both justifiable pride and some amount of defensiveness on the part of the library staff, but, more importantly, it will provide concrete suggestions for improvements or changes. The library administration or the self-study team should review the recommendations and respond to the reviewers' comments. This activity may well set the library's planning agenda for the coming period. A formal response to the campus administration that systematically addresses the suggestions and comments of the review team may also be required.

In the case of an independent self-study, once the review team has submitted its report, there may not be any ongoing dialogue or further relationship with that team. However, if the self-study is part of the larger institutional or program accreditation process, there is likely to be some sort of mid-term periodic review. For example, in the Middle States region, a small

review team is appointed to assess the progress made towards suggestions included in the ten-year review. At that time, the library may be requested to formally address the specific recommendations of the decennial review.

As changes are implemented following the self-study and review process, these should be documented and thoroughly assessed.

CONCLUSION

Whatever the rationale for the self-study, whether it is part of a mandated accreditation of an institution or program or is internal to the institution, it can be a valuable learning experience for the library. The work to articulate the questions one seeks to answer and the evidence that the library collects in order to answer those questions are as important as the final document. The self-study process requires a great deal of time and effort on the part of the library staff; what is learned from the introspection, data gathering and analysis, and external perspective is an unanticipated benefit for the library staff. It also serves to educate the stakeholders and broader community about the library and to present the library's story in its all its complexity.

NOTES

1. Amos Lakos and Shelley E. Phipps, "Creating a Culture of Assessment: A Catalyst for Organizational Change," *portal: libraries and the Academy* 4, no. 3 (July 2004): 352-353, doi:10.1353/pla.2004.0052.
2. Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, "Standard Three: Planning and Implementation," adopted 2010, www.nwccu.org/Standards%2and%20Policies/Standard%203/NWCCU_Standard_Three.htm.
3. Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), Commission on Colleges, *The Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement*, 5th ed. (Decatur, GA: SACS, 2001, rev. 2006, 2007, 2009, 2011), 2, www.sacscoc.org/pdf/2012PrinciplesOfAcreditation.pdf.
4. Larry Johnson, Samantha Adams Becker, Victoria Estrada, and Alex Freeman, *NMC Horizon Report: 2014 Library Edition* (Austin, TX: New Media Consortium, 2014), http://cdn.nmc.org/media/2014-nmc-horizon-report-library-EN.pdf.
5. See Mosley, Goodwin, and Maciel, "Building an Organizational Culture of

Assessment," chapter 8 in this volume.

6. SACS *Principles of Accreditation*, 31.

7. Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE), *Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education: Requirements of Affiliation and Standards for Accreditation,* 12th ed. (Philadelphia: MSCHE, 2006), 47-50, www.msche.org/publications/RevisedStandardsFINAL-2.pdf.

8. SACS, *Principles of Accreditation*, 21.

9. ABA Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar, "Chapter 6, Library and Information Resources," in *ABA Standards and Rules of Procedure for Approval of Law Schools 2013–2014,* (Chicago: American Bar Association, 2013), 45, www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/publications/misc/legal_education/Standards/2013_2014_standards_chapter6.authcheckdam.pdf

10. Peter Schwartz, *The Art of the Long View: Paths to Strategic Insight for Yourself and Your Company* (New York: Currency Doubleday, 1996), xiii–xv.

11. Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE), *Handbook for Periodic Review Reports*, 12th ed. (Philadelphia: MSCHE, 2011), 1.

12. Steven Bell, Brian Mathews, and Paul Zenke, "Experience Is Everything: Making the Case for Moving from Usability to Totality" (panel session, ACRL 2013 conference, Indianapolis, IN, April 11–12, 2013).

13. Nancy Fried Foster and Susan Gibbons, eds., *Studying Students: The Undergraduate Research Project at the University of Rochester* (Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2007); Nancy Fried Foster, ed., *Studying Students: A Second Look* (Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2013).

14. Ibid.

15. Roger Schonfeld, discussion with Peggy Seiden, October 28, 2014.

16. Krista M. Soria, Jan Fransen, and Shane Nackerud, "Library Use and Undergraduate Student Outcomes: New Evidence for Students' Retention and Academic Success," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 13, no. 2 (April 2013): 147–64, doi:10.1353/pla.2013.0010.

17. Commission on Institutions of Higher Education (CIHE), New England Association of Schools and Colleges, *Standards for Accreditation* (Burlington, MA: CIHE, January 12, 2005, rev. June 2, 2011), 20, https://cihe.neasc.org/sites/cihe.neasc.org/files/downloads/Standards/Standards_for_Accreditation.pdf.