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The Quality Infrastructure: Measuring, Analyzing, and Improving Library Services

Kelli Johnson
Marshall University, johnson28@marshall.edu

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Book Reviews

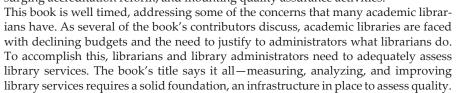*The Quality Infrastructure: Measuring, Analyzing, and Improving Library Services.* Edited by Sarah Anne Murphy. Chicago: American Library Association, 2014. 200p. Paper, $60.00 (ISBN 978-0-8389-1173-0). LC 2013-5034.

Higher education has been hard hit over the last few years dealing with declining budgets and rising costs, growing accreditation standards and surging accreditation reform, and mounting quality assurance activities. This book is well timed, addressing some of the concerns that many academic librarians have. As several of the book's contributors discuss, academic libraries are faced with declining budgets and the need to justify to administrators what librarians do. To accomplish this, librarians and library administrators need to adequately assess library services. The book's title says it all—measuring, analyzing, and improving library services requires a solid foundation, an infrastructure in place to assess quality.

The term infrastructure refers to the foundational elements that contribute to economic success. For a city, that means roads, water and sewer systems, and schools. In a library's assessment paradigm, it means, as Murphy states, dedicated "human, financial, and capital resources" (viii). Effective assessment, leading to change, is accomplished through the careful combination of choosing the right tool, implementing the right procedures, and using the right personnel.

Eleven case studies make up the eleven chapters of this book, nine of which are about assessment initiatives in academic libraries; the other two case studies detail the experiences of librarians in the Information Services Office of the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) and the Ontario Council of University Libraries (OCUL), a consortium of 21 academic libraries in Ontario, Canada. Each chapter offers a brief history of the library or organization as well as the way that assessment has been approached. The case study authors also review and detail the means and methods they developed to cultivate an effective assessment framework for their organization. Chapters conclude with a summary of the library's journey; successes and failures, advantages and concerns are addressed.

The book begins with a report from the University of Washington, where librarians have been assessing library programming since the early 1990s beginning with a task force appointed by the library director in 1991. The libraries collected data on library usage but did not use those data to plan or implement change. For the next two decades, the University of Washington Libraries system continued to develop and expand to create their quality framework, creating new surveys and establishing first the Library Assessment Group and then the Libraries Assessment and Metrics Team and becoming "a multifaceted assessment program that is centered on customer-centered organizational performance within an integrated planning and assessment framework" (22).

The history of assessment activity at the University of Virginia Library is explored in another case. Their process was improved with the implementation of the Management Information Services department and the institution of a Balanced Scorecard. This approach involves weighing four aspects of customer service: customer, internal processes, finance, and learning and growth. In another case, the University of Arizona Libraries found that embracing aspects of Total Quality Management helped them develop their quality infrastructure. Syracuse University Library benefitted from the development of a specialized office, the Program Management Center, which allowed for a more proactive assessment concept that continues to evolve to meet changing needs.

Another approach to assessment involved the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence. Both NIST's Information Services Office and the Emory University Libraries opted to employ the Baldrige Criteria. Developed through a public-private partnership in the 1980s, the Baldrige Criteria have provided a "continuous improvement framework that is focused on the customer, led by management, based on facts and data, and directed towards results" (95). Challenges and successes experienced by both of these institutions are detailed with respect to their use of the Baldrige Criteria.

The Canadian consortium OCUL also embarked on an assessment journey that included identifying necessary staffing and the review and use of several different tools. Through analyzing feedback, OCUL has been able to continue to adapt and improve their assessment efforts.

Another approach to building the assessment schema is detailed in the narratives by librarians from two large library systems. Both the University of California at San Diego system and the Kansas State University system found that dedicated assessment and analyst positions were the best response to the changing financial and organizational needs of academic libraries. These cases explore how having a full-time position committed to gathering and analyzing data helps a library administration make well-informed decisions regarding library programming and increases library credibility and authority campuswide.

Smaller libraries can also benefit from coordinated assessment planning, albeit on a different scale and with different challenges. The case at Boatwright Library at the University of Richmond is similar to the Washington University Library system. Each instituted teams to oversee assessment initiatives in their libraries. At the University of Richmond, administrative support and careful realistic planning proved most conducive to success. Washington University's Assessment Team has undergone shifting focus and changing subgroups, allowing for continued growth and opportunity.

As editor Murphy states in her introduction, the purpose of the book "is to expand librarians' conversations on assessment beyond specific tools" (vii). She has brought together eleven case studies that examine the various approaches libraries have taken as they tackled assessment. In this way, she attempts to provide a well-rounded discussion of assessment in libraries, not limited to one paradigm, by exploring a variety of academic and special libraries with varying requirements and resources, and the means and methods they used to establish assessment frameworks significant and unique to their needs.

This concise, practical text would be a valuable addition to a library collection or to the personal bookshelf of a librarian interested in planning and building a quality infrastructure at her or his institution.—*Kelli Johnson, Marshall University.*