

PERSPECTIVES AND PRACTICE

Reflections on Issues, Efforts, and Experiences from the Association of College and Research Libraries

Exploring the Contributions of the Academic Library to Student Learning

By Joyce L. Ogburn and Kara J. Malenfant

Librarians are increasingly called upon to document and articulate the value of academic libraries and their contribution to institutional mission and goals. The [Association of College and Research Libraries](#) (ACRL) has long understood these demands and has placed considerable focus on assisting academic librarians in contributing to campus efforts to enhance student learning and improve learning outcomes.

Most recently, as part of our multiyear Value of Academic Libraries Initiative, ACRL joined with three partners – the Association for Institutional Research, Association of Public and Land-grant Universities, and the Council of Independent Colleges – to convene two national summits in late 2011. These summits, “Demonstrating Library Value: A National Conversation,” were the basis of a project made possible by a National Leadership Collaborative Planning Grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services. We invited community college, college, and university chief academic officers, senior institutional researchers, and academic librarians to share their best thinking and advice in dialogue with representatives from accreditation commissions and higher education organizations. We learned from participants about the data campus administrators would like librarians to provide and what collaborative assistance is available through institutional research offices in order to determine the professional competencies that librarians need.

The summits were a direct result of the ACRL publication, *The Value of Academic Libraries: A Comprehensive Research Review and Report*, released in fall 2010, which recommended that the association create a professional development program to build the profession’s capacity to document, demonstrate, and communicate library value in alignment with the mission and goals of their colleges and universities. Moreover, ACRL included in its strategic plan both an emphasis on demonstrating the value of academic libraries and on enhancing student learning. The summits, with foci on both library contributions to student learning and faculty research productivity, were only a start toward fulfilling the recommendations of the report and the goals of the plan. ACRL anticipates more work in the months and years ahead as we seek to aid members of the library profession documenting and communicating library value. After the summits, we will issue a white paper that will summarize findings of the summits and set a framework for future action.

While the report and summits are fairly recent, ACRL has long been interested in impact, accountability, and assessment. We currently offer professional development to academic librarians through our information literacy immersion program “Assessment: Demonstrating the Educational Value of the Academic Library.” This program approaches assessment from a learning-centered perspective; participants emerge with a broader understanding of assessment and how to use assessment as an important tool to guide evidence-based classroom, curriculum and program development.

As an association representing multiple types of academic libraries, ACRL recognizes individual institutions have defined their values, and they must set goals, define outcomes, and assess them as is appropriate within local

contexts. Given the evidence we see in today's external policy and funding climate, we believe that it is imperative for higher education associations and libraries, along with the institutions they serve, to assess efforts to improve student learning, collaborate on achieving greater understanding, and communicate broadly on this essential academic issue.

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