Toward Total Library Assessment

Michael E. Luther, Kennesaw State University
Total Library Assessment: A Definition

Total Library Assessment directs multiple inquiries (and for each inquiry, multiple methods of inquiry) at each service, collection, initiative, or function within the library, thereby providing a holistic and credible assessment of the organization.

Total Library Assessment: 9 Propositions

1. Libraries are assessed incrementally. One assesses the whole by assessing its parts.
2. Thus, Library Assessment is a composite of many smaller assessments.
3. Every assessment begins with at least one of many possible questions.
4. Questions center on core concerns: need, use, perceived value, benchmarking, efficiency, impact.
5. A question is directed at a target (service, collection, initiative, etc.).
6. Some questions (e.g. Use) are easier to answer than others (e.g. impact).
7. Not all questions make sense for all services, collections, or initiatives.
8. Different methods approach the same question from different angles.
9. A 360 degree view of a question requires multiple methods (i.e. mixed methods; triangulation).

The Three Dimensions of Total Library Assessment:

Organizational Dimension

I. Reference and instructional Services
   A. Reference Services
      1. Chat Reference
      2. In-person Reference
   B. Instructional Services
      1. 20-min Intro. to Library Services
      2. 50-min. Intro. to Research
      3. 50-min. Subject or Resource-Specific
   C. Undergraduate Outreach
      1. UG Liaison Program
      2. Events
   D. Government Documents
      1. Print Govdocs
      2. E-Govdocs

Inquisitive Dimension (Example Inquiries)

- Is there a need for X?
- Is X being used?
- How is X being used?
- What do users think of X?
- Could X be improved and how?
- How does X compare to X at a peer institution?
- Is X having a real impact on the lives of users?

Methodological Dimension

- Interviews
- Surveys
- Focus Groups
- Workflow Analysis
- Usability Studies
- Benchmark Studies
- Pre-test, Post-test
- Observation

All Three Dimensions for a single service: