A report to ACRL VAL Committee from the Gap Analysis Subcommittee, presented for ALA Midwinter 2015

Prepared by Debbie Malone (co-chair), Alan Carbery (co-chair), Shawn P. Calhoun, Jamie Hammond, Douglas Hasty, Lorelei Tanji, Susan Barnes Whyte, with consultation by Kara Malenfant.

Process
To complete this gap analysis, the subcommittee referred to the 2010 Value of Academic Libraries Report by Megan Oakleaf, as well as the subsequent 2012 Connect, Collaborate and Communicate report from the VAL Summits. Taking cues from recommendations of the Connect, Collaborate and Communicate document, the Gap Analysis subcommittee investigated the work done to date by ACRL in these areas. This report outlines the outstanding work left that needs to be carried out, and the recommendations of the subcommittee to address these. These recommendations are listed in order of priority of the sub-committee.

Priorities:

1. Q1.1 Develop a research agenda that considers key questions raised by Megan Oakleaf at the summits” How can we increase library impact? How can we document this impact? How can we partner to increase and document impact?

The Gap Analysis committee recommends seeking a consultant to lead a research agenda development process with the assistance of a committee with members from the VAL Committee as well as other ACRL individuals and representatives from interested groups/sections/committees.

Background:

ACRL conducted an invitational research agenda workshop prior to ALA Annual in 2012. The group included 45 Participants (Librarians, Researchers, LIS Faculty, IMLS Staff, ACRL Staff), and the purpose was to identify research questions, suggest methodologies, and prioritize research needs. A comprehensive research agenda did not develop out of this workshop.

The steps towards a research agenda that were outlined at that workshop and include:

• Determine profession’s major needs
• Develop a consensus on the parameters & specifics of “academic library value/impact”
• Identify key authors in the field
• Develop a literature review
• Describe strengths/weaknesses of existing research
• Identify key research questions
• Determine how they can be answered
• Identify issues related to study design, methodology, potential data sources, and study sites
• Identify venues for dissemination of future research, including journals & conferences
• Recruit partners/collaborators for future research
• Secure funding
• Determine priorities for research
• Determine how to involve stakeholders in identifying & using research findings
• Draft an agenda, solicit comments, revise agenda


We consulted with Lynn Connaway for her thoughts on new ways of creating a research agenda, and she outlined the following:

1) Begin with a review of the literature on the subject of the future of libraries, technology, and higher education to identify the common themes. This will help you to articulate what we need to know as librarians to meet future needs. An example for libraries is the book by Joe Janes, Libraries 2020, which includes chapters authored by individuals from different backgrounds and representing different perspectives.

2) Look for other research agendas developed by other professional associations and societies in LIS and higher education. MLA and SLA used to develop research agendas.

3) Once an agenda is drafted, ask individuals (maybe some of the people who wrote chapters in Joe Jane’s book and people who have written articles and given talks about the future of libraries, technology, and higher education) to privately comment on the agenda.

4) Document and discuss the suggested additions and revisions

5) Attend some conferences attended by policy makers in higher education, libraries, and technology companies and ask them to read the agenda. Conduct focus group/interviews to discuss the agenda.
6) After this feedback is received, could describe the process involved in developing the research agenda and solicit input from ACRL members through blog posts, discussion sessions, webinars, etc."

The Gap Analysis committee recommends including research agenda items emerging from the implementation of the new Frameworks of Information Literacy in Higher Education.

2. Q1.4 Identify common data sources on campuses  
Q1.5 Identify, describe and publicize data collection and management tools & systems.  
Q1.6 Develop strategies to advance library participation in learning analytics initiatives  
Q5.3 Investigate the potential incorporation and application of learning analytics practices in conjunction with ACRL Resources

We view these 4 recommendations as related and would like to treat them as a whole.

Although not widely discussed in the literature to date, we think learning analytics have great potential to assist libraries in using data to demonstrate library value. There are certainly privacy issues to consider in gathering and using this data, but with care and education on best practices for handling student data, the work can go forward.

We recommend that the ACRL VAL committee track this issue and incorporate it into the proposed webinar series on professional development programs in Objective 10 for the VAL committee this year.

Background:

At the beginning of our work, we did not have an intelligent and clear definition for learning analytics. We liked two definitions:

1) Steven Bell in “Keeping up with...learning analytics.” Available at http://www.ala.org/acrl/publications/keeping_up_with/learning_analytics

“Learning analytics refers to technologies, usually software tools, that enable the analysis of student data in order to identify learning weaknesses so that faculty, advisers and even librarians could intervene with corrective action.”

“Analytics is the use of data, statistical analysis, and explanatory and predictive methods to gain insights and act on complex issues.”

We consulted with Kara on Q1.4 and this was her response:

Basically, these are predictive, early intervention systems at the individual level. Learning analytics tie to online data dashboards in real time showing individual student progress. So if a students hasn’t logged into the Blackboard in 10 days, or they show up on a faculty/advisor dashboard as yellow, we can assume they might be trouble because we know that students who don’t log in for 2 weeks are more likely to drop a class (I’m making this up, but you get the idea).

In the white paper, Karen and I reflected what we heard at the Summit where folks were just hearing of this and wondered if/how library data and student interactions could feed into those initiatives, i.e. database logins, circulation etc. It helps faculty and advisors know which students need help RIGHT NOW. (email message from Kara Dec. 3)

Kara asked Karen Brown to help us with Q1.5:

This is really prompting librarians to ask: What data about student learning and success are being collected on my campus? Which campus departments/units have what type of data?

Would it be useful to the library in its assessment activities to have access to these sources of data? Are other campus departments/units aware of the data that the library collects that might contribute to their assessment activities? In other words, the library should be in communication with other departments/units about sources of data related to student learning and success.

Whether the campus defines the data as “big data” probably varies from campus to campus. This type of data source identification should be done by individual librarians but any help they might get from an ACRL (or related) committee/task force about where the librarian may find different sources of data on his/her campus would probably be helpful.
As we wrote the report and reviewed discussions at the summits, it was clear the learner analytics is likely to become more prominent on campuses. The recommended action brings that topic to the table (i.e., academic library profession) for discussion. As Kara suggests, it could mean lots of things – maybe academic librarians reporting on the use of learner analytics on their campus; Or encouraging academic librarians to participate in higher education meetings, etc. related to learner analytics; Or working with ACRL to explore training / professional development options.

It may be that this type of data would be used in conjunction with ACRL Metrics (email message from Karen Brown, Dec. 9)

Q1.6 Encourages librarians to be aware of the trend toward learner analytics in higher education in general, and the need for the profession and individual librarians to develop strategies for making sure that the library is part of learner analytics initiatives that may be occurring at their college/university  (email message from Karen Brown Dec. 9)

Q5.3 Investigate the potential incorporation of and application of learning analytics practices in conjunction with ACRL Resources

We did find four articles describing individual libraries’ work with learning analytics:

1) Portal article on learning analytics using GPAs and library usage at 13 service areas to show higher retention rates - http://muse.jhu.edu/login?auth=0&type=summary&url=/journals/portal_libraries_and_the_academy/v013/13.2.soria.html

2) The EDUCAUSE article quoted above notes the “distinctive use of analytics at the University of Wollongong whose library cube uses library usage data to predict student grades” That article is available at http://www.educause.edu/ero/article/discovering-impact-library-use-and-student-performance

3) Scott Walter published a paper in October 2014 that outlines the assessment efforts on his campus. These include details of collaborative assessment initiatives and learning analytics http://crln.acrl.org/content/75/9/502.full

4) Analytics and Privacy: A Proposed Framework for Negotiating Service and Value Boundaries
   Lisa Janicke Hinchliffe & Andrew Asher Fall Meeting 2014 – CNI
3. Q3.1 Create **professional development** opportunities that bring together librarians with representatives from their institutions to develop library value and assessment plans and activities

Q3.2 Develop multiple replicable approaches for documenting and demonstrating library impact on student learning and success

We consider these two recommendation to be related and will treat them together. We think the work of the Assessment in Action initiative is directly addressing aspects of these recommendations.

**Recommendation:** continue the development of this area, and consider CPD programs that offer greater flexibility in terms of scope, intended audience, delivery, content and format.

**Background:**

As a committee, we may wish to ask ourselves how impactful the AiA program has been. It appears that the VAL committee has shown great progress in this area (largely due to AiA), and we wonder whether continued efforts should be placed here? What other types of programs (outside of the three year AiA program) can be designed, developed and offered that would speak to this? What about shorter form programs (aimed at practitioners who cannot commit to a long-term project, or travel to multiple events).

4. Q3.3 Build a **community of practice** to engage and sustain professional dialogue about library value

With AiA specially building communities of practice with practitioners in the area of library value, does VAL have an interest in further incentivising and supporting these (and other) CoPs? What might that look like? Should VAL identify further opportunities to build and develop a community of practice, particularly in aspects of Value not yet developed? What about a COP for Learning Analytics specifically?

3. Q2.4 Include library value competencies in professional development programs and resources as appropriate.

Objective 11 on the VAL multiyear plan deals with “developing and delivering professional development programs that build the skills and capacity for leadership and local data-informed and evidence based literacy.”
We recommend that library value proficiencies as defined by the new Standards for Proficiencies for Assessment Librarians and Coordinators be included in the ACRL professional development series.

4. Q2.3 Encourage the integration of assessment competencies in graduate library and information science curricula.

We recommend that when the new Standards for Proficiencies for Assessment Librarians and Coordinators are approved, we promote them to LIS schools. Megan Oakleaf, who is on that taskforce, has agreed to promote these Standards to LIS programs.

Background:

We consulted Megan Oakleaf on this issue and she told us how difficult it is to get this information from LIS programs nationally. Here is her response:

“I don’t have any insider information on this, but I would say that while most LIS programs have something on the books that could loosely be described as assessment-related, a lot of it is actually more evaluation or research methods, and not much related to impact/value type assessment. That might be different at a few places because of the faculty teaching the courses (John Bertot, Chuck McClure, Peter Hernon, Joe Matthews (adjunct), Karen Brown, Laura Saunders, me, Larry Nash White, for example...these are the people that might be inclined to teach impact/value assessment, but I’m not sure they are). And many of the classes are electives. I actually only know of one program (ours) that has assessment included in a core class (for us, it’s IST 613, Planning Marketing and Assessing Library Services...which is a very jam-packed course). I also taught an elective last spring on value, but it was a small enrollment class.

One of the difficulties in trying to get a sense of what’s going on is that faculty members do not like to share their syllabi and/or the syllabi aren’t very revealing. Faculty can be competitive and they also don’t want to give away what many see as their IP for free...for fear others will take credit for their work, copy it, etc., which is actually not a far-fetched fear.

Should ACRL/VAL pursue this? Well, yes of course. But we all know how hard it is to get LIS educators to take stock of what’s really happening in the profession and adjusting to it. The best way to get their attention is through ALA Accreditation, but that’s a tough (and slow) nut to crack. “
7. Q5.1 Review ACRL resources to identify complementary content about how the library contributes to institutional mission.

We recommend that the VAL Committee appoint a member to monitor ACRL and ALA publications, ACRL Committees and groups for activities related to library value initiatives, and solicit individuals responsible for these initiatives to write a VAL post or ACRL Insider about their work. Perhaps this could be the VAL committee member who is charged with updating the Valueography?

Background:

ACRL has a new (2012) Student Retention Discussion Group that has produced a bibliography which is meant to serve as a collaborative piece for members to share resources related to student retention. Available at http://connect.ala.org/node/216586. They are also doing a survey to “better connect librarians who are interested in retention” which was open until Dec. 8, 2014.

Bob Dugan is chairing ACRL stats committee that is working on this and has blogged about it; there is a webcast and info session at ALA MW. More at http://www.acrl.ala.org/acrlinsider/?s=ALS+IPEDS

Peter Hernon, Robert E. Dugan and Joseph R. Matthews’ “Managing with Data: UsingACRLMetrics and PLAmetrics,” published by ALA Editions,

The VAL Committee work plan, Objective 1: Leverage existing research that will articulate and promote the value of academic and research libraries has appointed a committee member to update the Valueography.

8. Q4.1 Build on partnerships with established external higher education stakeholders to develop assessment initiatives and embed library outcomes.

Q4.2 Identify higher education organizations and accreditation groups to collaborate on library impact activities and explore potential partnerships.

We consider these two recommendations related. We recommend that the VAL committee continue the work with ACRL liaisons.

ACRL has appointed liaisons to 16 professional institutes (details here: http://www.ala.org/acrl/aboutacrl/directoryofleadership/committees/acrl-lclias)

Terry Taylor and Debbie Malone are working on a subcommittee of VAL on working with ACRL Liaisons. They have collaborated with liaisons on a big issues
talking point document, which will be discussed again at midwinter 2015. For a more on this work see http://www.acrl.ala.org/value/ They will be discussing Liaisons’ plans to introduce the new Frameworks for Information Literacy in Higher Education to their target organizations.

The VAL Committee Multiyear Work Plan Objective 7, developing a plan for proposing sessions for the annul conferences of each regional accreditation, group addresses the second initiative in Q4.2

9. Q4.3 Articulate strategies for librarians to initiate, partner in (for example, by working with IR staff), and facilitate campus conversations about institutional assessment.

The Gap Analysis committee recognizes the importance of a continuing conversation about libraries’ role in institutional assessment.

We recommend that the VAL Committee consider developing or sponsoring webinar courses that highlight successful models of library partnerships with constituent groups on their campuses that advance the goals of their institutions.

Background:

We think the AiA Initiative has played an important role in addressing the issue.

ACRL offered an online course in November, 2014 “Preparing for accreditation: An introduction for librarians.”
http://www.ala.org/acrl/preparingforaccreditation

10. Q4.4 Develop guidelines and promote models that expand and integrate multiple academic and student service units in library spaces

ACRL’s guideline for University Library Services to UG students, originally created in 2005, was updated in 2013. These guidelines, however, do not necessarily address other academic and student service units. Some members of the Subcommittee have expressed great interest and willingness to work on this going forward.