

ACRL Assessment Discussion Group at ALA Annual : Notes Document

Monday, June 28, 2021

12:00 pm to 1:30 pm (CT)

The ACRL Assessment Discussion Group met via Zoom on Monday, June 28, 2021 as part of ALA's Annual Conference. Over 30 participants engaged in small-group discussions to address these topics. The virtual setting allowed for a bigger group than usual, with representations from libraries of all types and sizes. Based on notes from the groups (thanks to notetakers) , this is a summary of those conversations.

The prompt:

The last year has occupied us all with the many changes to insure ongoing library operations during the COVID pandemic.

- *How are libraries best adapting to these new campus realities, requiring us to reconsider how we provide services, access to resources and manage our physical resources?*
- *What new assessment opportunities does this provide us?*
- *Have circumstances changed our planned assessment projects in terms of method, access or questions to be asked?*
- *Alternatively, has our assessment program had to take a temporary back seat as we deal with other, more immediate concerns?*

In six small groups we first shared with one another the current state of affairs at our libraries. As to be expected, this continues to be a mix, with varying degrees of open or reduced hours, service models for delivery of physical materials, and staffing work-from-home policies. Some libraries continue to enforce a masking policy, others do not. In many libraries, mandates against masking policies are coming externally, often from state or local governments. Many libraries have removed signage, social distancing policies, and physical barriers (like Plexiglass) at service desks. Others continue to provide more limited seating or reservation-only study space, although most with restricted access now anticipate fewer restrictions in the fall.

There are prevalent concerns expressed by our library staff that **any** expectation of a “return to normal” in the fall is unrealistic. Perhaps, at the extreme end of these concerns, is that libraries have “lost” a generation of students - many students have

come to rely on services provided remotely rather than the physical spaces and in-person services provided by the library.

We discussed how the pandemic impacted our organizations and staff. In addition to changes in remote work policies, we reported an increase in early retirements, resignations and hiring freezes brought on by budgetary uncertainty.

Of course, the pandemic has had a significant impact on transaction numbers, sometimes in surprising ways. For instance, not all libraries are seeing the increase in use of electronic resources they might have expected. While it's important that we don't assume all anomalies to be caused by the pandemic, many of us have questions as to how these anomalies will be interpreted in our trend analyses -- how surveys like ACRL and ARL will take this exceptional period into account. Jeannette Pierce, on the editorial board of the ACRL Academic Library Trends and Statistics survey, filled us in on adjustments made to that instrument.

In our second "go round" of small group discussions, we focused on opportunities and challenges for library assessment.

Conducting assessment:

The pandemic has changed some approaches we use to conduct assessment. At the same time that we want to know more about student satisfaction with pandemic-driven changes, we have observed "survey fatigue" in both students and faculty. Our current efforts may need to be focused more on outreach and communication than "true" assessment. We may be seeking user feedback in more ad hoc ways. In practice, Zoom has proved useful for user testing.

The pandemic prompted many libraries to employ counters for space occupancy. Software used for this purpose includes:

- SMS Store Traffic
- SenSource SafeSpace
- Occuspace

These tools also allow for public dashboards that are useful to students in locating available study space. It was noted that requirements for reserving space in advance at the library was a barrier to students, in this case commuter students, who think of the library as community space, a place to "be" in between classes.

We are closely evaluating our collections, considering the impact of shifting dollars spent for print collections into electronic format. In some cases this has led to a push for decreasing our print collection footprint. As noted above, the expected increase in usage of those e-formats has not happened across the board - is this, perhaps, a consequence of “electronic interaction burnout”?

The pandemic has provided multiple opportunities for us to assess the effectiveness of their online instruction as well as the use of online research guides. We are monitoring the use of social media and the web site, but recognize the limitations to these counts as measures of effectiveness.

Staffing continues to be an issue. One library is conducting assessment in the area of assessment, and more noted that keeping staff “calm” was important, especially when there are less staff.

We concluded on a positive note: In many ways, the pandemic allowed libraries to “show their stuff” - re-working service models to accommodate safety protocols in agile ways, digitizing course reserves materials, digitizing special collections materials at a more rapid pace. Many of these adaptations will carry over into our work as we return to a “more like normal” workspace in the fall.