In our Future’s Project Self Study, the Preface states: “The library is and is not an ‘academic department.’ It is both under and along side of the academic departments of the college, as a supporting part of the academic program. The library serves the entire college. . . .

“Unlike academic departments, most library work does not take place in the classroom.”

Hence, assessment of our program must give due emphasis to the “input” side in order to understand the “outcome” side of our activity. Our hope is that we would show direct connection between these areas. Some of the data we have been collecting, and will continue to collect, points us to how our collection, resources, and services are being used and accessed. That, in turn, will help us determine the types of surveys and studies that will be most helpful in understanding how we fit in our academic environment.

Our most direct connection to the “outcomes” of the college program is particularly seen in pursuing as we focus on the Research and Technology Standard among the six Learning Standards. This is not because the other standards are irrelevant to us—indeed that is not so—but because this standard directly challenges us to find ways to demonstrate the outcomes: “discernment,” “research and documentation,” “organization and communication,” “integrity,” “ethical issues,” and clarity surrounding the “limitations and possibilities of technology for human well-being.”

**Recent Approaches to Assessment.**

1) Focus groups with faculty: RS, E&B, Political Science. Student Focus Group.

2) Fieldwork. Determined from syllabi whether courses offered required research, and to what extent did the library’s course-related program participate in fulfilling that need.

3) Web pages. An assessment was made of the use of the library web pages, along with specifically prepared web pages.

4) Web tutorial. An assessment was made of enrollments in this on-line course. (APP001W)

**Looking Ahead: Approaches for Study ending in 2007-08.**

Our expectation is that we will use a combination of focus groups and survey sampling as we did in our earlier assessments, but since we have a period of time during which we can develop some additional approaches, we plan to put some additional attention on one “captive” group, our student assistants, who number between 40 and 60 in a year, and cubicle users, who number between 20 and 30 students per year.
Perhaps the most interesting of our efforts will be to monitor a partnership effort we will pursue with the athletic program. We are keenly aware of the intense pressure under which our student athletes labor, both in pre-season preparation, and during the course of their sport activity. We are aware of the severe time limitations, as well. This group makes up approximately 15% of our student body (around 180 students). Our desire is to find ways to make the library inviting to these students, to make our staff known to them, and to help them find efficient ways to use our collections print and media, and especially the on-line collections which are still available to students when they are away from campus.

Athletes major in all the majors which are available in the curriculum. Thus, this will challenge our ability to work effectively with this group. Athletes will be at all grade levels, as well. Our intention is not to be tutors, or to provide learning skills, but to help students to focus during stressful times in their college experience. We will monitor the progress of this program to see if it is useful in providing helpful outcomes. Beginning this spring (2004) and continuing through 2008, we should adduce some useful longitudinal data.

Our plan is to use some of the techniques of study of outcomes that were used in previous assessments. But especially, we are concerned about the questions we put forward in our Futures assessment:

1) Is the library helping move students towards being life-long learners? And towards independent learning?
2) Is the library faculty teaching and modeling interdisciplinary research skills?
3) Do the materials and resources of the library collection (print, media, on-line, etc.) represent a diversity of materials and perspectives?

In summary, we will use a variety of surveys and focus groups and collections of information to develop an assessment of our program. We look forward to this with some excitement, knowing that the longer period of assessment will allow us to adjust our sights, so that our assessment can be more thorough.

John Murray, Director, Library & Information Services

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