

Strategic Planning and Assessment

WANDA V. DOLE, Column Editor

Emeritus Dean of the Library, University of Arkansas at Little Rock, Little Rock, AR, USA

Column Editor's Note. *This new column focuses on the closely related topics of strategic planning and assessment in all types of libraries. The column will examine all aspects of planning and assessment including (but not limited to) components, methods, approaches, trends, tools and training. The column will appear in even-numbered issues of the journal. Interested authors are invited to submit articles to the editor at wvdole@ualr.edu. Articles on both theory and practice and examples of both successful and unsuccessful attempts in all types of libraries are invited.*

WHAT'S ALL THIS I HEAR ABOUT CORE COMPETENCIES FOR LIBRARY PLANNING AND ASSESSMENT?

INTRODUCTION

Library strategic planning and assessment are closely related activities. They form a “culture of assessment” in which planning and policy are based on facts, research and analysis of users’ needs (Lakos & Phipps, 2004). Assessment precedes and provides the basis for planning. Both require core competencies (specialized skills, knowledge, and abilities) that may not be part of every librarian’s portfolio or professional education. The literature contains many lists of core competencies for librarians and information specialists, but few references to those needed by administrators and practitioners for planning and assessment. This column discusses these core competencies and how they may be acquired.

CORE COMPETENCIES

Competencies may be defined as a specific range of skills, knowledge and abilities that enable or qualify someone to perform a particular function or

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Address correspondence to Wanda V. Dole, Emeritus Dean of the Library, University of Arkansas at Little Rock, 918 Gillette Dr., Little Rock, AR 72205, USA. E-mail: wvdole@ualr.edu

to carry out selected responsibilities (Dole, Hurych, & Liebst, 2005). C. K. Prahalad and Gary Hamel introduced the concept of core competencies in a 1990 article in the *Harvard Business Review* (Prahalad & Hamel, 1990). Their work inspired the development of core competencies by professions, organizations and business. Competencies form the very foundation of a profession. Competencies are also the basis for professional growth and performance measures. Prahalad and Hamel suggested that successful organizations understood and exploited their core competencies or capabilities not only to solve current problems, but also to plan for the future. They offered three tests to identify a core competency:

- 1) It should provide a long-term strategic advantage.
- 2) It should contribute to the perceived customer benefits.
- 3) It should be difficult for competitors to imitate.

CORE COMPETENCIES IN LIBRARIES

Prahalad and Hamel also inspired an outpouring of articles in the library literature on core competencies for librarians in general and on competencies for specific library jobs or for specific types of libraries. There is no standard, universally accepted definition of core competencies in libraries. A literature review reveals ambiguity and confusion over the definition and nature of “competencies” (Ammons-Stephens, Cole, Jenkins-Gibbs, Riehle, & Weare, 2009; Dole, Hurych, & Liebst, 2005). Some authors confuse “competencies” (skills and knowledge) with behavioral characteristics or personality traits. For example, Fisher (2001) suggested there are “professional competencies” (skills and knowledge), “personal competencies” (traits, attitudes and behaviors), and “educational competencies” (obtained by the study of a body of knowledge).

Giesecke and McNeil (Giesecke & McNeil, 1999; McNeil & Giesecke, 2001) and others (Greal & Greenman, 1998; Dole, Hurych, & Liebst, 2005) have reviewed the literature on core competencies for academic librarians. Giesecke and McNeil described the process used by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Libraries to develop a list of 12 library-wide competencies expected of all library staff. They included “personal attributes” in their definition of core competencies and suggested that competencies must relate to the goals, objectives and strategies of the organization.

American Library Association (ALA) Library Leadership Administration and Management Association (LLAMA) enlisted librarians from the 2008 class of Emerging Leaders as project teams to develop a model of core competencies for library leaders (Ammons-Stephens et al., 2009). The teams built on the work of previous efforts by Herson, Powell and Young (Herson, Powell, & Young, 2001, 2002, 2003; Young, Powell, & Herson, 2003; Young, Herson,

& Powell, 2004) and others (Dole, Hurych, & Liebst, 2005) to create a model of core competencies of library leaders. The LLAMA model identified four central leadership competencies: cognitive ability, vision, interpersonal effectiveness, and managerial effectiveness. Managerial effectiveness included the skills, knowledge, and abilities needed for change management, resource management, and strategic planning. The following specific competencies were identified for strategic planning:

- Identifies clear, well-defined outcomes
- Exhibits short-term and long-term planning capabilities
- Able to drive results.

ALA, its divisions, and other library associations have developed core competency documents. Work on ALA's document, *Core Competencies of Librarianship*, began in 1999. The final document was approved by the ALA Executive Board in 2008 and approved and adopted as policy by the ALA Council at the 2009 Midwinter Meeting in Denver (American Library Association, n.d.).

The document lists 41 competencies that all graduates from ALA-accredited master's programs in library and information studies should have. The broad competencies, with those related to planning and assessment highlighted, include:

1. Foundations of the profession
2. Information resources
3. Organization of recorded knowledge and information
4. Technological knowledge and skills
5. Reference and user services
6. Research
7. Continuing education and lifelong learning
8. Administration and management

Several competencies are specifically related to planning and assessment as sub elements of the above:

- 1H. The techniques used to analyze complex problems and create appropriate solutions.
- 4C. The methods of assessing and evaluating the specifications, efficacy, and cost efficiency of technology-based products and services.
- 5F. The principles of assessment and response to diversity in user needs, user communities and user preferences.
- 5G. The principles and methods used to assess the impact of current and emerging situations or circumstances on the design and implementation of appropriate services or resource development.
- 6A. The fundamentals of quantitative and qualitative research methods.
- 6B. The central research findings and research literature of the field.

6C. The principles and methods used to assess the actual and potential value of new research.

7C. Learning theories, instructional methods, and achievement measures; and their application in libraries and other information agencies.

8A. The principles of planning and budgeting in libraries and other information agencies.

8C. The concepts behind and methods for assessment and evaluation of library services and their outcomes.

8E. The concepts behind, issues relating to, and methods for, principled, transformational leadership.

Lester and Van Fleet (2008) found that ALA-accredited Library and Information Science (LIS) schools do use the Association's Core Competences of Librarianship list in curriculum development. They concluded this after examining program presentation documents submitted to the ALA Committee on Accreditation (COA) and conducting a survey of U.S. and Canadian LIS schools. Some LIS schools have developed statements of core competencies based on ALA's list. The School of Library and Information Science at San Jose State University includes the following competencies related to planning and assessment (Hirsh, 2012):

- Apply the fundamental principles of planning, management and marketing/advocacy.
- Understand the nature of research, research methods and research findings; retrieve, evaluate and synthesize scholarly and professional literature for informed decision-making by specific client groups.
- Demonstrate oral and written communication skills necessary for group work, collaborations and professional level presentations.
- Evaluate programs and services on specified criteria.

In addition to the Association's Core Competences of Librarianship for all library practitioners, ALA divisions and other professional associations have developed competencies for specific functions or types of libraries. These competences, listed at ALA's Core Competences site <http://www.ala.org/educationcareers/careers/corecomp/corecompspecial/knowledgecompetencies> include:

American Association of Law Libraries (AALL)

AALL Guidelines for Graduate Programs in Law Librarianship

American Association of School Librarians (AASL)

ALA/AASL Standards for Initial Programs for School Library Media Specialists 2003 (pdf)

ALA/AASL Standards for Initial Preparation of School Librarians 2010
(pdf)

American Library Association (ALA)
Core Competences of Librarianship

American Society for Information Science and Technology (ASIST)
ASIST Educational Guidelines

Art Libraries Society of North America (ARLIS/NA)
ARLIS/NA Core Competencies for Art Information Professionals (pdf)

Association for Library and Information Science Education (ALISE)
Information Ethics in Library and Information Studies Education

Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC)
Competencies for Librarians Serving Children in Public Libraries

Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL)
Competencies for Special Collections Professionals

Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL)
“Education for professional academic librarianship.” *C&RL News*, October 1992, 590–591.

See also: ACRL Standards and Guidelines for various competencies statements

Association of Vision Science Librarians (AVSL)
Vision Librarian Core Competencies

Federal Library and Information Center Committee (FLICC)
Federal Librarian Competencies (pdf)

Map and Geography Round Table (MAGERT)
Map, GIS and Cataloging / Metadata Librarian Core Competencies (pdf)

Medical Library Association (MLA)
Competencies for Lifelong Learning and Professional Success: The Educational Policy Statement of the MLA

Music Library Association
Core Competencies and Music Librarians (pdf)

North American Serials Interest Group (NASIG)
Core Competencies for Electronic Resources Librarians 2013 (Word)

Society of American Archivists
Guidelines for a Graduate Program in Archival Studies

Special Libraries Association (SLA)
Competencies for Information Professionals

WebJunction (compiled by)
Competency Index for the Library Field (pdf)
Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA)
Young Adults Deserve the Best: Competencies for Librarians Serving
Youth

SPECIFIC CORE COMPETENCIES FOR LIBRARY PLANNING & ASSESSMENT

As can be seen from above, there is no specific set of competencies identified for library planning and assessment. What are the core competencies for planning and assessment and how are they acquired? What competencies are needed by library administrators who initiate and guide planning and assessment? What competencies are needed by library professionals and staff who perform hands-on tasks involved in planning and assessment? Where can a new assessment librarian receive training in the competencies required for the job? What have librarians done to “build a community of professionals . . . with the knowledge, skills, and abilities required to design, implement, and report the results of assessment activities that can inform decision making at the strategic and operational levels?” (Walter & Oakleaf, 2011).

Attempts to answer these questions include exchanges on library blogs and listservs (Herzog, 2013; Chu, 2013), examinations of required qualifications for specific library positions (Walter & Oakleaf, 2011), and studies of training for planning and assessment in library and information science (LIS) programs (Ward, 2003; Park, 2003; Lester & Van Fleet, 2008; Mackenzie & Smith, 2009; Hirsh, 2012).

The announcement of a March 2014 Association of Research Libraries (ARL) seminar for recently appointed assessment professionals included a list of learning outcomes that could be considered core competencies. They are:

- Understanding the scope of library assessment in academic and research libraries
- Becoming familiar with the rationale for library assessment activities
- Increasing knowledge of a variety of library assessment methodologies, tools, and techniques
- Considering effective uses of metrics and data for planning, decision making, and policy setting
- Being prepared to think through approaches to institution-specific library assessment
- Developing and acting on a personal plan for defining your individual role and responsibilities and maximizing your effectiveness and value to the organization

<http://www.arl.org/news/arl-news/3069-leading-a-strategic-assessment-program-in-a-research-library-arl-to-offer-seminar-for-new-assessment-professionals>

Walter and Oakleaf (2011) analyzed assessment librarian position descriptions posted in *College and Research Library News* between 2004–2009 and found that few contained specific and detailed assessment skills. They compared the vague definitions of skills required for library assessment positions with the more explicit definitions of skills required for other positions in higher education advertised in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* in 2010. They suggested that well-defined assessment skills required for higher education positions could be applied to library assessment positions. These skills included the ability to:

- Define and refine outcomes
- Create an assessment plan
- Identify data needs
- Develop studies to respond to data needs
- Select appropriate assessment measures
- Analyze and interpret assessment results
- Communicate and report assessment results
- Demonstrate skills in data analysis, presentation, and organization
- Prepare data for decision-making processes

ACQUIRING CORE COMPETENCIES FOR PLANNING AND ASSESSMENT

Library educators and professional associations have long recognized the need for formal and post-MLS training for planning and assessment. Courses in statistics and research methods are frequently cited as important components of the curriculum. Patricia Layzell Ward (2003) concluded that it was essential that [library] practitioners have a sound grounding in statistics. In 2000 Ward conducted a study of the teaching of statistics and research methods in 78 Library and Information Science (LIS) programs in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States. The study was sponsored by the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) Statistics and Evaluation Section and Management and Marketing Section. Ward examined library school Web sites, the requirements of accrediting bodies, the syllabi for core or required courses in statistics, and the frequency of occurrence of statistics topics in core and optional courses in research methods. She found that a number of LIS programs taught statistics as an element of research methods, but none offered a course focused solely on statistics.

Park (2003) conducted a similar study of the catalogs, curricula and Web sites of 52 of the 56 accredited LIS programs in the United States and Canada

to determine if courses in research methods were required within MLS programs. The study compared the frequency of required research methods courses in MLS programs to that in master's programs in the sciences, social sciences and professional programs (business, social work). Park found that fewer of the MLS programs required competency in research methods. Only half of the programs required a research methods course. Park suggested that the lack of a set of national core competencies across ALA-accredited LIS programs created issues for educators and practitioners alike and that MLS graduates should be expected to be competent in research methods at two levels: the consumer level and the contributor level. At the consumer level, they should be able to keep up with published research and to evaluate the adequacy of the method used and the applicability of the research to practice and theory. At the contributor level, they should be "competent contributors to the research base in LIS."

Mackenzie and Smith (2009) reviewed the curricula of 48 ALA-accredited library schools to learn whether MLS programs provided training in core competencies for library leaders. They examined the syllabi of required courses in management and found that 58.3% included modules on strategic planning, but only 8.3% on evaluation and assessment.

CONCLUSIONS

This column raised questions about core competencies for library planning and assessment and how they may be acquired. Although librarians and library educators have attempted to define these competencies and advocate for training in them, more work needs to be done. Perhaps the most important core competency is the skill that A. E. Housman, in his 1921 lecture on "The Application of Thought to Textual Criticism," recognized as a requirement for textual critics. "To be a textual critic requires aptitude for thinking and willingness to think; and though it also requires other things, those things are supplements and cannot be substitutes. Knowledge is good, method is good, but one thing beyond all others is necessary; and that is to have a head, not a pumpkin, on your shoulders and brains, not pudding, in your head."

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