

Ongoing and Multifaceted Assessment of Academic Library Professional Development Programs Enhances Their Efficacy

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Evidence Summary

Ongoing and Multifaceted Assessment of Academic Library Professional Development Programs Enhances Their Efficacy

A Review of:

Harker, K. R., O'Toole, E., & Sassen, C. (2018). Assessing an academic library professional development program. *portal: Libraries and the Academy*, 18(1), 199-223. <https://doi.org/10.1353/pla.2018.0010>

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Abstract

Objective – To analyze various measures of need, participation, satisfaction, and impact of an academic library professional development program.

Design – Multi-modal; surveys, curriculum vitae (CV) analysis, and attendance statistics.

Setting – Academic library in the United States.

Subjects – Library faculty of all ranks.

Methods – Assessment of the Career Development Program began with an interest survey conducted at the beginning of the fiscal year in which participants ranked their interest in professional development topics. Attendance statistics were collected at all program sessions and participants were emailed post-event surveys comprised of three Likert-scale questions and an open-ended question. Participants in the peer-review service were emailed a survey with two Likert-scale questions and an open-ended question. All programs and surveys were voluntary. An “activities survey” attempted to document counts of scholarly publications and

presentations according to geographic scope, format, and peer-review. However, due to low response rates, the activities survey was replaced after two years with an analysis of library faculty member CVs on a publicly-accessible university website. The final assessment was a narrative annual report that drew on and summarized all of the previously conducted assessments.

Main Results – Multi-modal assessment of the professional development program improved its relevance and quality while also documenting its impact.

Conclusion – Continuous and multi-faceted assessment of professional development programs not only leads to improved efficacy, but also provides accountability and details the value of the program to stakeholders. Professional development programs promote scholarly productivity, which has implications for the career satisfaction of academic librarians. Further research should investigate the validity of professional development program assessment instruments and identify which assessment methods are most effective for evaluating professional development programs and measuring the impact of this programming on scholarship.

Commentary

The study opens by acknowledging the increasing demands for faculty librarians to publish and their lack of preparation to do so. These findings—as well as the proposed solution of professional development programs—are well documented in the literature. Vilz and Poremski (2015) surveyed academic librarians regarding their perceptions of and satisfaction with support for tenure requirements and found that librarians were moderately satisfied with support mechanisms that varied considerably. Sullivan et al. (2013) published one of several case studies detailing how an academic

library's professional development program was established or expanded and assessed. The study at hand is unique in its variety of interventions and the agility of the assessment.

The Koufogiannakis, Booth, and Brettle ReLIANT critical appraisal tool (2006) provides a useful framework for investigating the study design, the educational context, results, and relevance. All of these will be briefly considered in the subsequent paragraphs.

The objective and need for the study were clearly stated, however the exact number of participants was not. The data reported was collected over several years; accordingly, the authors did not identify the exact number of subjects or describe them. Instead, “sample” data was provided from an unspecified year. A variety of research methodologies were employed in the study and the entirety of the surveys employed were provided in the article's appendices. Assessment instruments were not validated and the authors identified that as an area for future research.

The academic library setting was similar to large, public academic libraries throughout the United States. The program content was determined in part by participant ranking of their professional development needs. The learning objectives and the amount of instructional contact time for individual programs were not specified. The reported data supported the author's conclusions. “Sample” results are clearly presented in tables and were positive in respect to the intervention, though not significantly so.

The reproducibility of the study as presented is impaired by the small and shifting population and multifaceted methodology. Nonetheless, several aspects of the study could be employed to enhance professional development programming in similar settings. The authors succeeded in opening “a discussion on the value of continuous assessment using multiple measures” (p. 211). Their model of multi-modal, iterative, and responsive professional development program assessment offers a

substantial and practical contribution to the academic library literature.

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