

Thursday, March 12, 2015
4:00-5:00PM

Naomi Steinberger, Jewish Theological Seminary of America

Christa Williford, CLIR

[LINK TO CLIR CONNECT DISCUSSION THREAD](#)

Assessment and Evaluation of Projects

(1) Why do we assess cataloging and processing projects, and how does this relate to other kinds of assessment of collections and services?

Planning: resource allocation
Understanding how to improve practice
Identify areas of improvement

Assessment happens both during and after completion of a project

Center for the History of Medicine, Countway Library, Harvard Medical School: Tracking tool for processing, digitization, etc. MD=Metrics Database

How do staff feel about being assessed? Need for a nuanced approach to take into account all the factors that can affect productivity in sp coll&arch processing.

Staff may be concerned about how data will be used. Are you evaluating individual performance; the project; the program?

Staff may be worried that the data collected won't actually be used. What's the ROI?

Need to be aware of the time consuming nature of data collection. Is there a danger in being too granular? Are you giving an impression of consistency that doesn't actually reflect actual experience?

Challenge of comparing across projects--different staffing models, very different approaches can cost the same in terms of funds but can cost much more time.

How much data is enough? Can a short-term assessment inform long-term planning? 6 months? 2 years?

Importance of timing assessments near moments of change.

(2) Quantitative assessment (hours per linear foot; numbers of web hits; numbers of reading room requests, reproduction requests, etc.): What data do we need in order to fulfill the purposes of our assessments, and what are the quickest, easiest, and most reliable methods of tracking those data? How consistent are metrics across institutions? Is greater consistency desirable? If so, how could we achieve it?

Web traffic metrics can offer very different perspective on interest/use of a collection than reading room requests. Does web traffic (e.g. links from Wikipedia) actually increase foot traffic? Might an effective finding aid actually decrease in-person use, by helping people find out just enough, or enough that they know that what you have isn't what they actually need?

Any citation studies? Working with library informationists has been helpful at JHU.

2014 SAA Research Forum BYU Gordon Danes--possible white paper forthcoming

(3) Qualitative assessment (quality of use of collections, user studies of online catalogs and finding aids, etc.): When is the extra effort to conduct qualitative assessments warranted? What examples of successful incorporation of qualitative assessment into special collections and archives do we have that go beyond collecting anecdotes?

FSU trying to use qualitative assessment methods to set digitization priorities, processing priorities, collection development priorities. What collections are most valuable to scholars (as opposed to what might be most visually appealing)--looking for way to define research personas that can help in making these decisions.

Countway talked to scholarly users about “descriptive gaps” within finding aids. Collected initial data through a survey then interviewed people using the collections, out at conferences.

Overlay “heat map” for finding aids

Content analysis of search terms

How is data collection affecting services? JHU study found that integrating processing into accessioning is more efficient. So changed workflow for smaller (less than 1 cubic foot) purchased collections to process on acquisition.

CHM calibrates levels of description by series depending upon perceived demand

Danger of emphasis on quantitative assessment having a negative impact on quality

Problem of lack of consistency between data collected by multiple agencies, professional organizations, programs--maybe we could get better about the way we use our language.

Lack of awareness of existing data that can be helpful in decision-making.

(4) What resources are available to help cultural heritage professionals with assessment that are appropriate for rare and unique collections? How could these resources be improved?

SAA joint task force on public services metrics

Holdings count and measures--project to establish consistent practice in metrics keeping

Identifying and incorporating project outcomes that haven't been predicted but are still valuable. Without cataloging, nothing can be done.

Problem of long-term tracking of impact on scholarship and teaching--is there a way to measure this?

Importance of incorporating formative/simultaneous/dynamic assessment--not in the interest of "grading" performance but instead in promoting/encouraging engagement with users.

Assessing quality of finding aids--what tools could you use? Exit interviews with researchers. User studies in which you give researchers pre-defined tasks and assess how well they do them.