



Assessing Access Services: Building a 5-year Plan for Sustainable Assessment

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4 **Assessment**
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Assessing Access Services: Building a 5-year Plan for Sustainable Assessment

Langsdale Library underwent its five-year review in FY2016 (July 1, 2015 – June 30, 2016). A basic, integral and necessary element of this process was the development of an assessment plan. Langsdale Library developed a five-year assessment plan based on the five-year review. The plan aligns the library's collections and services to the library's mission and strategic goals as well as linking to the University of Baltimore strategic plan which provides the foundation and direction for the University. At its core, the assessment plan helps to monitor strategic goals; in short, it answers the question, "Are we doing what we say we're doing?"

Key Words: Access Services, Assessment, Total Library Assessment, Library Administration, Resource Sharing, Interlibrary Loan, Reserves, Circulation

Subject Classification Code: Z675

Introduction

The University of Baltimore (UB) will celebrate its centennial in the year 2025 and is one of the anchor institutions of higher education in the city of Baltimore serving as a catalyst for attracting residents, creating jobs, and driving economic growth. UB is a public institution, part of the University System of Maryland which comprises 12 institutions across the state. The University's four divisions - the College of Arts & Sciences, the College of Public Affairs, the School of Business, and the School of Law – offer 21 undergraduate programs, 21 graduate programs, 3 doctoral programs, and 19 certificates. Enrollment in these programs for Fall 2017 is 2,101 undergraduate, 946 graduate, and 781 law students FTE (full-time equivalent). There are two libraries on the campus and while they collaborate in certain areas, they operate independently. The Law Library serves the university's law school and Langsdale Library serves the rest of the campus. Langsdale Library is the focus of this paper.

Langsdale Library's staff of 27 full-time employees perform essential functions in the areas of access services, achievement and learning services, acquisition and discovery services, digital services, library administration, reference and special collections. The Access Services department currently has four full-time staff and approximately twelve student employees during the 84 open hours in a typical week. In FY2017 the department processed 7930 ILL transactions, 2,475 USMAI and UB transactions, and 1,418 course reserves requests.

In 2015, as part of its ongoing progress in institutional effectiveness and the assessment of student learning, UB implemented a five-year effectiveness review process. While annual reviews have always been a part of the culture at UB, the five-year review enhances how the university evaluates and improves institutional activities,

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3 planning, and resource allocation. It provides a structure for analysis of outcomes,
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5 development of recommendations, and budgets that are clearly linked to the university's
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7 strategic plan. The five-year review is an opportunity for reflection on the successes,
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9 changes and challenges of the recent past and, most importantly, an opportunity to plan
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11 for the future with a focus on continuous improvement.
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14 Langsdale Library underwent its five-year review in FY2016 (July 1, 2015 –
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16 June 30, 2016). A basic, integral and necessary element of this process was the
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18 development of an assessment plan. Langsdale Library developed a five-year
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20 assessment plan based on the five-year review. The plan aligns the library's collections
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26 the University. At its core, the assessment plan helps to monitor strategic goals; in
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28 short, it answers the question, "Are we doing what we say we're doing?"
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31 This article will discuss the process and formation of Access Services' section in
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33 the library's five-year assessment plan.
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36 37 ***Literature Review*** 38

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41 Most assessment literature focusses on learning outcomes, information literacy
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43 and space. The *Journal of Access Services* dedicated an issue to assessing Access
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45 Services in 2014 and there was a chapter on assessment in 2013's *Twenty-First-Century*
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47 *Access Services: On the front line of academic librarianship*, but aside from these two
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49 fleeting works, there is not much literature on assessment of Access Services. We won't
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51 review the entire issue, but touch on a few articles of import. We will also review
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3 concepts from Dole, Rodriguez, Town and Oakleaf that we used to craft our assessment
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5 plan.

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7 In *Twenty-First-Century Access Services: On the front line of academic*
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9 *librarianship* Larsen discusses the importance of establishing data and/or process
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11 benchmarks to improve efficiencies, determining user needs to demonstrating value and
12
13 impact, and touching on assessment as a cycle (Larsen 2013).
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16 In the *Journal of Access Services* Long also discusses benchmarking as an
17
18 important aspect of quantitative assessment in addition to discussing the importance of
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20 qualitative assessment (Long 2014). Huff-Eibl, Miller-Wells and Begay discuss the
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22 importance of using data that is already being gathered as well as analyzing and
23
24 interpreting the data in order to provide direction and guidance with decision making
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26 (Huff-Eibl 2014).
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29 Dole discusses the importance of linking strategic plans and assessment with a
30
31 focus on individual specific goals (Dole 2017). Rodriguez discusses the importance of
32
33 collaborating with other departments when proactively anticipating user needs to
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35 improve service (Rodriguez 2017). Town discusses how assessment can aid libraries in
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37 determining value and impact of services and the values both staff and users have in
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39 mind for libraries (Town 2011). Oakleaf advises to have a clear purpose, link to the
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41 institutional strategic plan, have clear goals and protect privacy when working with
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43 personal information (Oakleaf 2009).
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48 ***Link to institutional missions & plans***

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53 As you begin to envision a strategic plan it is important to consider your
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55 stakeholders. Identify who cares about your strategic plan. Kerby and Weber advise that
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2 linking to the institution's mission or purpose with objectives that should be operational
3 and specific. A good place to begin is your institution's strategic plan. Identify a few
4 lines in your institution's strategic plan and use them to shape your performance targets.
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6 At the University of Baltimore our library's mission and strategic plan point directly to
7 the university's strategic plan. It was easy to identify three goals on the library's
8 strategic plan to shape the performance targets for the assessment plan. The 3 goals we
9 identified for Access Services:
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20 1. *use existing and new user research data and explore initiatives in the literature*
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22 *in order to find and implement cost effective solutions that address concrete*
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24 *needs in the library*
- 25
26 2. *carefully analyze usage of resources in order to make data-driven decisions*
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28 *about purchases and subscriptions and to identify*
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30 3. *increase access to collections and awareness of their availability to faculty, staff*
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32 *and students*

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35 Goal number 1 stood out for Access Services. We consider the true stakeholders,
36 especially when working in a service environment such as Access Services. We
37 immediately considered the patrons we serve, our students, faculty and staff. Leykam
38 studied the data from resource sharing of individual user patterns in 2013 (Leykam
39 2013). The idea of examining individual user behavior to develop strategies for
40 improving service excited us and provided an opportunity to improve service cost
41 effectively.
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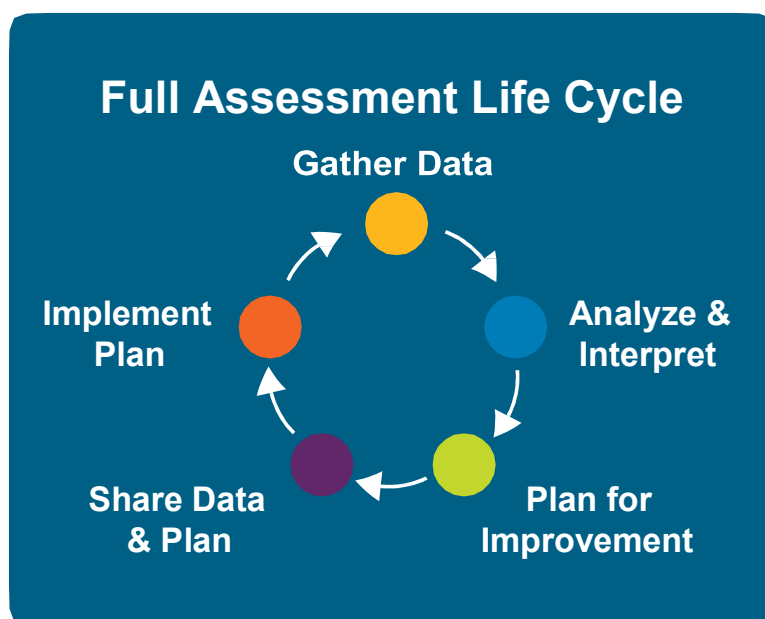
50 The library's strategic goal number 2 raised some eyebrows in Access Services
51 when we wondered just how much does resource sharing cost? The stakeholder in this
52 instance is the library's bottom line. Expenditures include easy to point to costs such as
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3 postage and consortial memberships. But what about abstract or unknown costs like the
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5 amount of staff time spent on fixing citations or unfilled requests? Examining all of the
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7 costs related to resource sharing could identify areas for cost savings in addition to
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9 informing policies and workflows.

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11 The library's goal #3 caught Access Services attention as well. The library's course
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13 reserves service allows dozens of faculty to utilize course reserves every semester. They
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15 are satisfied returning users. But anecdotal evidence from dialog with new or returning
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17 faculty, even some that have worked at UB for years are shocked to learn of our
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19 reserves service, or a particular component of it such as streaming media in Sakai.
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21 Access Services would like to identify this gap in service and develop strategies for
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23 improvement and marketing.
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28 ***Crafting the plan***

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33 At UB the charge for department heads was to craft a 5 year plan. We decided to
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35 create our assessment life cycle based on five stages. In stage one we want to gather
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37 data. In the next stage we want to analyze and interpret the data. Our third stage would
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39 be spent planning for improvement. During the fourth stage we would share our data
40
41 and plans for improvement. And lastly we will implement the plans for improvement.
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43 After stage five we return to stage one as seen in figure 1.1. So to call our assessment
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45 plan a five year plan is a little misleading. We're implementing a life cycle that will
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47 continue after five years.
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Gather Data

Libraries gather immense amounts of data daily. When considering which data to gather it is a good idea to consider data that is already stored and not being utilized. You may already have at your fingertips a rich set of data without having to build a set. Consider your ILS or resource sharing software. For example, ILLiad captures 215 data points for every transaction. The canned web reports from ILLiad are nice for big picture data. But consider what a deeper dive into that data can tell you. You will be able to develop user profiles and determine which type of patrons, by department and status, are your heaviest users. Data in these environments will also demonstrate trends throughout the years since the data has been collected from some time in the past.

Another consideration is to gather data not yet available. Begin by identifying a need. At UB for example, one of the strategic goals for the library is to carefully analyze usage of resources in order to make data driven decisions about purchases and subscriptions and to identify areas for cost savings. The goal was written with

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3 acquisitions in mind. However, Access Services saw an opportunity for cost savings in
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5 resource sharing, particularly utilizing OCLC's new Interlibrary Loan Cost Calculator.
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7 The ILL cost calculator aims to pinpoint the true cost of ILL by gathering data from
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9 sources not considered in the past such as staff resources (Circulation Staff, Mail Room
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11 Staff, Work Study Students) and how much staff time is spent on unfilled requests,
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13 impact of consortial agreements, etc... They aim to use a whole pool of as yet un-
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15 gathered data about ILL in order to identify how much resource sharing truly costs.
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18 Using both existing and new data is another option. Our course reserves service
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20 reports the number of reserves requested each term by hard copy books, electronic
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22 articles & book chapter, and streaming media. We have a big picture of trends in course
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24 reserves requests. But there is other data to be considered. Building a profile of our
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26 faculty that place requests will give us an idea of our faculty saturation. Looking at
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28 which classes utilize the service will point to gaps for which programs can be targeted
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30 for future marketing. Looking at item histories can tell us if the items are being used or
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32 not. Which articles or movies are being clicked on will tell us the same.
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37 *Analyze and interpret*

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41 After you have gathered your data it's time to analyze and interpret it. This part
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43 of the life cycle can be enlightening, exciting and alarming all at once. There are always
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45 unexpected outcomes from assessment exercises. You will prove results you've known
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47 anecdotally all along. And you will have theories going in that will unravel in the face
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49 of hard data.
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52 When we analyzed a deep dive into our user's ILLiad data we found some
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54 unexpected outcomes. Our stated outcome to implement strategies and improve service
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3 took a back seat to cleaning up our data. Initially we found some incongruities in our
4 patron profiles, specifically blank Department and Status fields, which led to ILLiad
5 web reports underreporting our borrowing and document delivery numbers by 13%, the
6 very numbers we had been using in our annual reports. We had been telling library
7 leadership and consortial partners that we were doing less work than we were actually
8 doing.
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10
11 We know from experience that a lot of our resource sharing users are from our
12 College of Arts and Sciences, both faculty and students alike. But when we took a deep
13 dive into the ILLiad data we learned just how true. Even though enrollment is higher in
14 our School of Business and College of Public Affairs, users from the College of Arts
15 and Sciences outnumbered both. In fact, ILLiad use in CAS and CPA saturated the
16 student body at 20% while our saturation in MSB sat at 2.8%.
17

18
19 One theory we had before we looked at the deep dive data was that users who
20 placed one or two ILL requests probably had those requests cancelled, and due to the
21 bad experience, they did not come back to ILL. But we found that our light users'
22 cancel rates were not that much higher compared to the system average. In fact, most
23 cancelled transactions belong to our heaviest users, which makes sense in retrospect.
24 Our overall cancel rate was about 10%.
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44 ***Plan for improvement***

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48 Using hard data to influence decision making can be easy after analyzing the
49 data. The numbers will pop out when there is room for improvement. We saw the gap in
50 school of business users and decided to target that number for improvement. Our
51 Access Services librarian developed a plan with library liaison librarians to the school
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3 of business to target faculty and adjunct faculty about promoting the library's
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5 interlibrary loan service to their students.
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7 We also decided to target our system wide 10% cancel rates. We looked at our
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9 Reasons for No and decided that we canceled too many textbook requests simply
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11 because they were requests for textbooks. They made up a large number of our canceled
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13 borrows. We also decided to try and improve the cancel rate for our light users as well
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15 since it was higher than the system average. We now send an email to a user before
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17 cancelling a request if they have historically placed only one or two requests.
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20 21 22 ***Share data and plan*** 23

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26 At UB we use transparency to hold ourselves accountable and inform others in
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28 our organization what exactly we are up to in order to avoid duplication of efforts. One
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30 requirement of our assessment project is to report our progress to the library's
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32 leadership team made up of administration and department heads. This allows us to
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34 recognize if and where people are doing the same thing. Reporting to our administration
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36 also holds us accountable for our work.
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39 Being transparent also allows us to recognize opportunities for collaboration.
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41 One of our reference librarians is beginning a study on library use and student success.
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43 They received permission from our institutional review board to collect 7-digit student
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45 identification numbers for this study. By coincidence, our data collection uses the 7-
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47 digit identification numbers to identify individuals. We will now be able to add our data
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49 about resource sharing to the study on student success, and hopefully demonstrate a
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51 correlation between resource sharing and student success.
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Implement plan

Using hard data to influence decision making generally promotes buy in from leadership to the front line staff. In the example above, we noted the gap in saturation of users our business school. It was easy for our Access Services department to ask another department, in this instance Reference & User Services, to do something about this.

When presented with the data, we asked business school liaison librarians to plug our interlibrary loan service to faculty over the summer and into the spring term 2017.

Without the hard data it might have been difficult for them to buy in when another department requests they do something they had not been doing. Anecdotally there have been many new users being cleared for interlibrary loan use from our school of business in the fall term. Or have there?

Conclusion

So once again another phase of the assessment life cycle begins.

As mentioned at the outset of this paper, the assessment life cycle as described here goes beyond the five-year plan that initiated this project. At its core, the assessment life-cycle is continuous and dynamic and if implemented will lead to new and unexplored questions. By using the assessment life-cycle framework – gather data, analyze and interpret, plan for improvement, share data and plan, implement plan – any employee, department, or library can embark on assessment initiatives that will produce evidence to support unit, library, and institutional goals, which lead toward continuous improvement. Here at UB, its implementation has done just that, leading us to reflect and ask new questions which starts the assessment life-cycle again. As academic

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3 libraries face more and more pressure to demonstrate their value, implementation of the
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5 assessment life-cycle is a sustainable approach that provides the best information to
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7 answer the question: are we doing what we say we're doing?
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