3-16-2010

Building a Seamless Environment for Assessment of Information Literacy: Libraries, Student Affairs, and Learning Outside the Classroom

Scott Walter

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, swalter@illinois.edu

Communications in
INFORMATION LITERACY

INVITED COLUMN [PERSPECTIVES]

BUILDING A "SEAMLESS ENVIRONMENT" FOR ASSESSMENT OF INFORMATION LITERACY

Libraries, Student Affairs, and Learning Outside the Classroom

Scott Walter
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

ABSTRACT

Assessment has been a topic of interest in higher education for decades, with its recent growth rooted in a number of scholarly traditions, as well as the broader interest in "accountability" that has been characteristic of American education since the 1980s. Many previous studies have demonstrated that the literature of assessment in higher education is a rich resource for those wishing to identify effective approaches to the assessment of information literacy. This piece invites readers to pay attention to the lessons taught by faculty development experts as well as by scholars of the science of teaching and learning, but also to remember that student learning takes place both inside the classroom and outside the classroom.

Despite the perception by many on the curricular side that academic concerns, like student learning, are their sole purview, the reality is that many factors in the learning environment impact student success and development.

Bresciani, Zelna, & Anderson, 2004, p. 3.

Assessment has been a topic of interest in higher education for decades, with its recent growth rooted in a number of scholarly traditions, as well as the broader interest in "accountability" that has been characteristic of American education since the 1980s (Ewell, 2002). Leaders in the contemporary assessment movement in higher education have described how assessment activities may be linked to the mission, vision, and values of an institution (Palomba & Banta, 1999), as well as how they might be rooted in a reflective approach, or even a scholarly approach (Banta, 2002), to everyday practice. A reflective approach to professional work is also a key component of the parallel movement in libraries in support of assessment

and evidence-based library and information practice, both of which can inform the full range of services offered in an academic library, including management of collections, development of information and resource discovery systems, provision of reference and information services, and the design and delivery of information literacy programs. Of course, the reflection one sees when considering either the effectiveness of one's own work or the accomplishments of one's information literacy program is shaped to a great degree by the lens through which one chooses to look.

Many previous studies have demonstrated that the literature of assessment in higher education is a rich resource for those wishing to identify effective approaches to the assessment of information literacy. Let me take the opportunity afforded by the invitation to contribute to this collection to encourage its readers to mine that resource more thoroughly— that is, to pay attention to the lessons taught by faculty development experts as well as by scholars of the science of teaching and learning, but also to remember that student learning takes place both inside the classroom and outside the classroom. Librarians with an interest in fully telling the story of their contribution to teaching and learning on their campuses should draw not only on the models for assessment of student learning that focus on that which takes place as part of formal instructional programs, but also on those that focus on that which takes place as part of co-curricular programs. For a fully-featured vision of information literacy instruction on campus, we should draw not just on research and practice in the assessment of teaching and learning in the classroom, but also on research and practice in the assessment of student affairs programs.

Given that the majority of the literature on assessment in higher education focuses on the assessment of student learning taking place as part of formal instructional programs, I will trust my fellow contributors to this collection to draw your attention to relevant works in both the library literature (e.g., Rockman & Associates, 2004; Markless & Streatfield, 2006; Radcliff,

Jensen, Salem, Burhanna, & Gedeon, 2007) and the literature of higher education (e.g., Palomba & Banta, 1999). I will trust them, too, to highlight the value of the work of people like Angelo and Cross (1993), Walvoord and Anderson (1998), Bean (2001), Suskie (2004), Stevens and Levi (2005), and Wiggins and McTighe (2005), who provide practical advice to those wishing to learn more about best practices in the assessment of student learning in the classroom and in other formal instructional settings, e.g., service learning programs (Gelmon, Holland, Driscoll, Spring, & Kerrigan, 2001). I will focus instead on what we might learn from another assessment tradition in higher education: the assessment of student affairs programs. As others have noted, collaboration between academic libraries and student affairs programs in support of student learning remains relatively unexplored in the library literature (Forrest, 2005; Hollister, 2005; Dahl, 2007; Love & Edwards, 2009), and, as I have argued before (Walter & Eodice, 2007), there is much that the academic library can learn from student affairs practice.

Over a decade ago, Upcraft and Schuh (1996) made the case for the importance of assessment in student affairs programs. "Without assessment," they wrote, "student affairs is left only to logic, intuition, moral imperatives, goodwill, or serendipity in justifying its existence" (Upcraft & Schuh, p. 12). Long recognized as a distinctive feature on the higher education landscape, they argued, student affairs programs risked marginalization (and even elimination) if they did not begin to present compelling evidence of their impact on student learning and development, and if they did not align that evidence with the core values of their institutions and the strategic initiatives being pursued on their campuses. For student affairs programs, they concluded, effective assessment was "a matter of survival" (Upcraft & Schuh, p. 7). This argument should be familiar to librarians working in an environment in which access to digital content, changes in approaches to teaching and learning, and the reshaping of the scholarly communication process have redefined both the information-seeking behavior

of faculty and students, and the ways in which they use (or choose not to use) the academic library. Librarians should learn from the argument presented by our colleagues in student affairs, lest we likewise risk allowing decisions about our future and our role on campus to be decided by "intuition" and "goodwill."

At least since the publication of "The Student Learning Imperative" (American College Personnel Association, 1996), the seminal statement on the place of their programs in the education of college students, student affairs professionals have pursued a variety of means of assessing both the effectiveness of their programs in meeting student learning goals, and the impact of those programs on student learning and development (Roper, 2003; Bresciani, Zelna, & Anderson, 2004; Love & Estanek, 2004). The rise in recent years of the phrase "student academic services" (Kramer et al., 2003) to capture the full scope of the programs led by these professionals suggests the importance they have placed on articulating and documenting the educational impact of student affairs activities, including leadership development programs, health and wellness programs, international and multicultural student services programs, career services programs, and residence hall and Greek Life programs. As part of these efforts, student affairs professionals have designed a framework for the assessment of student learning outside the classroom (Schuh , Upcraft, & Associates, 2001)—learning taking place in what Kuh (1996) referred to as the "seamless learning environment" that should exist for our students—and have presented academic librarians with new opportunities for collaboration in support of information literacy instruction (Hollister, 2005; Lampert, Dabbour, & Solis, 2007; Love & Edwards, 2009; Swartz, Carlisle, & Uyeki, 2007; Walter, 2005).

Keeping in mind Lewis's vision of the academic library as "the primary informal learning space on the campus" (2007, p. 420), we should consider not only how to nurture and extend existing instructional partnerships with student affairs programs (Dahl, 2007), but also how we

might make use of the assessment models employed by those programs to articulate our contribution to their efforts to provide student academic services. In considering the use of those models, I am reminded of a colleague who asked me how to assess the impact of information literacy instruction delivered in collaboration with a student affairs program when the nature of her teaching for that program did not match the approaches taken in more familiar efforts such as workshops or course-integrated instruction. The answer, of course, was not to try to fit an approach to assessing student learning in the classroom to the learning taking place as part of this program, but to turn the question around and ask how the student affairs professionals planned to assess the value and impact of their program. How are multicultural student service programs assessed, or residence hall education programs? How are health and wellness programs assessed, or career services programs?

Answers to these questions (and more) can be found in the "assessment manual" provided by Schuh, Upcraft, and Associates (2001), but it is notable how few of the models found in this manual identify the library as a partner or include information literacy as a learning goal. Consider, for example, the entry on "Assessing Career Services" (Rayman, 2001), which identifies the assessment of information needs as a component of the career services assessment program, but concludes that "there are no formal assessment devices for determining the information and information technology needs of a career center" (p. 373). Given the information literacy programs designed to support career service programs described by Hollister (2005) and Song (2007), it seems that there is a valuable opportunity for outreach from the library to the career services community, and for the collaborative development of approaches to the assessment of the information needs of the career center, as well as for the information literacy skills that one might expect a student making use of the career center to gain.

The examples given above are brief by

necessity, but they point to the fact that the academic librarian must be comfortable with multiple models of assessment if he or she is to foster information literacy across a seamless learning environment, including those that come from the library world, those that come from the world inhabited by our classroom colleagues, and those that come from the world of student affairs. The readers of this collection are undoubtedly conversant with at least two of these worlds; let me take the remainder of this essay to conclude my (very) brief introduction to the third.

In their landmark work on the subject, Upcraft and Schuh (1996) identified the components of a comprehensive approach to the assessment of student affairs programs, including:

- tracking who uses student services, programs, and facilities
- assessment of service needs
- assessment of clientele satisfaction
- assessment of campus environment and student culture
- assessment of service program outcomes (including learning outcomes)
- benchmarking against comparable institutions (pp. 27–30)

Anyone familiar with standard approaches to library assessment, for example, LibQUAL+, as well as innovative approaches to library assessment, for example, the ethnographic research pioneered at the University of Rochester, will see clear connections between our work and the approach advocated by Upcraft and Schuh for the assessment of student affairs programs:an approach that embeds the assessment of student learning outcomes within a broader framework for assessment of user interests, needs, and satisfaction with facilities and services provided.

Anyone experienced in library assessment, however, will also appreciate the warning that Bresciani, Zelna, and Anderson (2004) gave when noting that even this approach may be too narrow to serve the full scope of assessment

needs in student affairs. They wrote: "The assessment of student satisfaction, needs, and service utilization is very important .... However, findings from this type of assessment do not necessarily help you understand your program's contributions to the greater work of the university" (Bresciani, Zelna, & Anderson, p. 19). If this is true of student affairs, with its well-defined core constituency, how much more so is this the case for libraries, which contribute in many ways to research, teaching, learning, and service on campus, and which serve not only students, but also faculty, staff, alumni, visiting scholars, and members of the public?

The assessment of student affairs programs, then, like the assessment of information literacy instruction, is complex. Love and Estanek (2004) articulate this complexity in their discussion of the competing definitions of "assessment" that may be found in any student affairs program [a point made for assessment in higher education writ large by Ewell (2002)], and of the importance of each individual in the program developing an "assessment mindset." Student affairs professionals with an assessment mindset, they write, "consciously and intentionally gather, analyze, and interpret evidence that describes their individual effectiveness and use that evidence to improve their effectiveness" (Love & Estanek, 2004, p. 90). The individual commitment to sustaining an assessment mindset is the first step that must be taken before the assessment of student learning can be integrated into student affairs work; the second is the commitment by student affairs leadership on campus to incorporating the lessons drawn from assessment activities into administrative practice and decision making (Love & Estanek, 2004). Librarians should recognize this argumentas well, as it is the same argument that members of our own profession have made for evidence-based librarianship (Eldredge, 2006) and the need to foster within libraries a "culture of assessment" (Lakos & Phipps, 2004).

And so, we find that student affairs professionals see assessment as critical to their ability to tell the story of their contribution to

student learning on campus;that they have articulated, through a number of publications, programs, and professional resources, their commitment to fostering student learning through programs that take place outside the classroom; and that they have implemented comprehensive assessment programs designed to demonstrate the impact that their facilities, services, and professional staff have on student learning and development. In all these ways, the issues and opportunities they define for the assessment of student affairs seem very similar to those we have defined for the assessment of information literacy and instructional service programs in libraries. And, when it comes to information literacy assessment, there is one more critical area of overlap – the commitment by student affairs professionals to collaborate with classroom faculty and other academic affairs professionals on the design, delivery, and assessment of their programs (Schroeder, 2003). Bresciani, Zelna, and Anderson (2004) take the framework provided by documents such as "The Student Learning Imperative" and its successor, "Powerful Partnerships: A Shared Responsibility for Learning" (Joint Task Force on Student Learning, 1998), to articulate the need for collaboration between academic and student services on issues of assessment, and Bresciani (2006) explores the nature of complementary practices across academic and student affairs in the design of outcomes-based assessment. The commitment among librarians to collaboration with faculty members (Raspa & Ward, 2000; Curzon, 2004; Van Cleave, 2007), as well as with academic service programs— such as: teaching centers (Jacobson, 2001; Warner & Seamans, 2004), writing centers (Elmborg & Hook, 2005), and first-year-experience programs (Hardesty, 2007)— in the design, delivery, and assessment of information literacy instruction is well known. Again, it appears that we find like-minded partners among our colleagues in student affairs.

At the most recent LILAC conference <http://www.lilacconference.com/>, Iannuzzi reminded information literacy librarians of the importance of being aware of the broader discussions that occur in higher education around the issue of student learning and of taking advantage of those discussions to provide a context for successful collaboration with faculty colleagues on instructional initiatives (Webber, 2009). In his award-winning study of the relationship between information literacy programs and Writing-Across-the-Curriculum programs, Elmborg (2003) demonstrated how parallel approaches to enhancing student learning can arise in higher education and how librarians conversant with broader discussions in higher education can collaborate with campus partners to build information literacy programs designed to address common concerns. Two years ago, my colleague Michele Eodice, Director of the ConocoPhillips Writing Center at the University of Oklahoma, and I presented a collection of case studies of successful instructional collaboration between academic libraries and student affairs programs in the final issue of the journal Research Strategies. The case studies demonstrated the potential for wide-ranging collaboration across campus on service and on the student learning goals shared by academic libraries and student affairs programs, and that potential has been further demonstrated by the work of my colleagues at Illinois (Song, 2007; Love & Edwards, 2009). I hope this brief introduction to the current collection in our new flagship journal for information literacy studies demonstrates that there is also great potential for collaboration between librarians and student services professionals on approaches to the assessment of those services and to the assessment of student learning.

REFERENCES

American College Personnel Association. (1996). *The student learning imperative: Implications for student affairs*. Retrieved June 8, 2009, from http://www.acpa.nche.edu/sli/sli.htm

Angelo, T. A., & Cross, K. P. (1993). *Classroom assessment techniques: A handbook for college teachers* (2nd ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Banta, T. W. (Ed.). (2002). *Building a*

scholarship of assessment. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Bean, J. C. (2001). *Engaging ideas: The professor's guide to integrating writing, critical thinking, and active learning in the classroom*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Bresciani, M. J. (2006). *Outcomes-based academic and co-curricular program review: A compilation of institutional good practices*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.

Bresciani, M. J., Zelna, C. L., & Anderson, J. A. (2004). *Assessing student learning and development: A handbook for practitioners*. Washington, DC: National Association of Student Personnel Administrators.

Curzon, S. C. (2004). Developing faculty–librarian partnerships in information literacy. In I. F. Rockman, and Associates, *Integrating information literacy instruction into the higher education curriculum: Practical models for transformation* (pp. 29–45). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Dahl, C. (2007). Library liaison with non-academic units: A new application for a traditional model. *Partnership: The Canadian journal of library and information practice and research, 2* (1). Retrieved June 10, 2009, from http://www.criticalimprov.com/index.php/perj/article/view/242/332

Eldredge, J. (2006). Evidence-based librarianship: The EBL process. *Library Hi-Tech, 24* (3), 341–354.

Elmborg, J. K. (2003). Information literacy and Writing Across the Curriculum: Sharing the vision. *Reference Services Review, 31* (1), 68–80.

Elmborg, J. K., & Hook, S. (Eds.). (2005). *Centers for learning: Writing centers and libraries in collaboration*. Chicago: Association of College & Research Libraries.

Ewell, P. T. (2002). An emerging scholarship: A

brief history of assessment. In T. W. Banta (Ed.), *Building a scholarship of assessment* (pp. 3–25). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Forrest, L. U. (2005). Academic librarians and student affairs professionals: An ethical collaboration for higher education. *Education Libraries, 28* (1), 11–15.

Gelmon, S. B., Holland, B. A., Driscoll, A., Spring, A., Kerrigan, S. (2001). *Assessing service learning and civic engagement: Principles and techniques*. Providence, RI: Campus Compact, Brown University.

Hardesty, L. L. (Ed.). (2007). *The role of the library in the first college year* (The First Year Experience Series Monograph No. 45).Columbia, SC: National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition, University of South Carolina.

Hollister, C. (2005). Bringing information literacy to career services. *Reference Services Review 33* (1), 104–111.

Jacobson, T. E. (2001). Partnerships between library instruction units and campus teaching centers. *Journal of Academic Librarianship, 27* (4), 311–316.

Joint Task Force on Student Learning. (1998). *Powerful partnerships: A shared responsibility for learning*. Retrieved June 10, 2009, from http://www.myacpa.org/pub/documents/taskforce.pdf

Kramer, G. L., and Associates. (2003). *Student academic services: An integrated approach*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Kuh, G. D. (1996). Guiding principles for creating seamless learning environments for undergraduates. *Journal of College Student Development, 37* (2), 135–148.

Lakos, A., & Phipps, S. E. (2004). Creating a culture of assessment: A catalyst for organizational change. *portal: Libraries and the Academy*, 4 (3), 345–361.

Lampert, L. D., Dabbour, K. S., & Solis, J. (2007). When it's all Greek: The importance of collaborativeinformation literacy outreach programming to Greek student organizations. *Research Strategies, 20* (4), 300–310.

Lewis, D. W. (2007). A strategy for academic libraries in the first quarter of the 21st century. *College and Research Libraries, 68* (5), 418–434.

Love, E., & Edwards, M. B. (2009). Forging inroads between libraries and academic, multicultural and student services. *Reference Services Review, 37* (1), 20–29.

Love, P. G., & Estanek, S. M. (2004). *Rethinking student affairs practice*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Markless, S., & Streatfield, D. (2006). *Evaluating the impact of your library*. London: Facet.

Palomba, C. A., & Banta, T. W. (1999). *Assessment essentials: Planning, implementing, and improving assessment in higher education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Radcliff, C. J., Jensen, M. L., Salem, J. A., Jr., Burhanna, K. J., & Gedeon, J. A. (2007). *A practical guide to information literacy assessment for academic librarians*. Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited.

Raspa, D., & Ward, D. (Eds.). (2000). *The collaborative imperative: Librarians and faculty working together in the information universe*. Chicago: Association of College & Research Libraries.

Rayman, J. R. (2001). Assessing career services. In J. H. Schuh, M. L. Upcraft, and Associates, *Assessment practice in student affairs: An applications manual* (pp. 365–389). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Rockman, I. F., and Associates. (2004). *Integrating information literacy instruction into the higher education curriculum: Practical*

models for transformation. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Roper, L. D. (2003). Teaching. In S. R. Komives, D. B. Woodard, Jr., and Associates, *Student services: A handbook for the profession* (4th ed.) (pp. 466–483). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Schroeder, C. C. (2003). Using the lessons of research to develop partnerships. In S. R. Komives, D. B. Woodard, Jr., and Associates, *Student services: A handbook for the profession* (4th ed.) (pp. 618–636). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Schuh, J. H., Upcraft, M. L., and Associates. (2001). *Assessment practice in student affairs: An applications manual*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Song, Y-S. (2007). Collaboration with the Business Career Services Office: A case study at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. *Research Strategies, 20* (4), 311–321.

Stevens, D. D., & Levi, A. J. (2005). *Introduction to rubrics: An assessment tool to save grading time, convey effective feedback and promote student learning*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.

Suskie, L. (2004). *Assessing student learning: A common sense guide*. Anker: Bolton, MA.

Swartz, P. S., Carlisle, B. A., & Uyeki, E. C. (2007). Libraries and student affairs: Partners for student success. *Reference Services Review 35* (1), 109–122.

Upcraft, M. L., & Schuh, J. H. (1996). *Assessment in student affairs: A guide for practitioners*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Van Cleave, K. (2007). Collaboration. In S. C. Curzon & L. D. Lampert (Eds.), *Proven strategies for building an information literacy program* (pp. 177–190). New York: Neal-Schuman.

97

Walter, S. (2005). Moving beyond collections: Academic library outreach to multicultural student centers. *Reference Services Review, 33* (4), 438–458.

Walter, S., & Eodice, M. (2007). Meeting the student learning imperative: Supporting and sustaining collaboration between academic libraries and student services programs. *Research Strategies, 20* (4), 219–225.

Walvoord, B. E., & Anderson, V. J. (1998). *Effective grading: A tool for learning and assessment*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Warner, J. E., & Seamans, N. H. (2004). Teaching centers, libraries, and benefits to both. *Resource sharing and information networks, 17* (1/2), 29–42.

Webber, S. (2009, April 7). LILAC report: Patricia Iannuzzi. Message posted to *Information Literacy Weblog*. Retrieved June 10, 2009, from http:/informationliteracy.blogspot.com/2009/04/lilac-report-patricia-iannuzzi.html

Wiggins, G., & McTighe, J. (2005). *Understanding by design* (2nd ed.). Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Communications in Information Literacy publishes invited editorial content, including reviews of books and other media, interviews with select figures in the information literacy community, and guest editorial and opinion.

If you are interested in contributing editorial content to the journal, please inquire with the Editors (editors@comminfolit.org).