

The Continuing Quest for New Measures

by Julia Blixrud, Director of Information Services

ARL has been exploring new measures of research libraries for several years. The April 1998 issue of *ARL* (no. 197), available on the Web at <http://www.arl.org/newsltr/197/197toc.html>, provided a comprehensive look at the state of inquiry into library performance measures. The status report presented here and the three articles that follow bring the reader up to date on ARL activities in this arena as well as related work that is ongoing in the United Kingdom.

Within ARL, members of the Statistics and Measurement Committee and the Research Library Leadership and Management Committee are leading Association efforts to develop new measures that research libraries can use to better describe and assess their operations and value. In early 1999, the committees sponsored a retreat to address this topic in a concerted way. Retreat participants identified eight areas of interest for which measures would be helpful: Ease and Breadth of Access, User Satisfaction, Library Impact on Teaching and Learning, Library Impact on Research, Cost Effectiveness of Library Operations and Services, Library Facilities and Space, Market Penetration, and Organizational Capacity Ability.

Draft papers developed for some of these areas take the ideas represented at the retreat a few steps further by identifying possible approaches to investigation. A website, <http://www.arl.org/stats/newmeas.html>, provided a location for posting these drafts and for inviting comment by the community. In addition, an electronic discussion list was established for retreat participants and was expanded to others in ARL member libraries interested in the development of new measures.¹ The areas of interest were tested with the larger ARL community at the May 1999 Membership Meeting. The general sense emerging from these membership discussions, and subsequent conversations with other interested experts in the profession, is that all of these areas are important and that an action agenda should be advanced to engage the challenges identified. It was also recognized that ARL should make every effort to build on the expertise and experience present both within research libraries as well as in comparable venues.

At the October 1999 Membership Meeting, the ARL Statistics and Leadership Committees supported the initiation of specific projects to advance what has come to be called the New Measures Initiative. These projects include: a) an investigation into outcomes activities at the university level that could be used as a basis to determine measures for library contributions; b) a pilot project, spearheaded by Texas A&M, testing the utility of service effectiveness measures using the SERVQUAL instrument; c) an identification of library functions that are seen as cost-drivers for which a cost study could be developed; d) development of an assisted self-study program applying the results of the recent ARL ILL/DD study; and e) an invitational meeting to address electronic resource measures.

Concurrently, the Office of Leadership and Management Services, together with the Statistics and Measurement Program, are developing workshops on assessment. They have also begun collaborating with Carnegie Mellon University and the U.K. organizers of the Northumbria International Conference on Performance Measurement in Libraries and Information Services to cosponsor an international multicenter teleconference on performance measurement, to be held in conjunction with IFLA 2001 in Boston.

The following articles show that the topic of effective measures for library operations and services is multidimensional and global. First is a [report from Texas A&M's Fred Heath and Colleen Cook](#) on their assessment of the usefulness of a SERVQUAL study. Their article outlines the plans for a pilot project that will expand the number of research libraries using the SERVQUAL instrument and also evaluates

its utility as a best practices tool.

The next article consists of [excerpts from a summary of the recent third Northumbria International Conference on Performance Measurement](#) prepared by Waterloo's Amos Lakos. The full summary report is available on the ARL website at <http://www.arl.org/newsltr/207/lakosfull.html>; the excerpts included here highlight papers presented on the measures of electronic and network services and service quality.

This section on new measures concludes with an [article by Ian Winkworth](#) from the University of Northumbria reporting on the groundbreaking work undertaken through the Standing Conference of National and University Libraries (SCONUL). The report describes the process that has led to the availability of a new publication that presents six "management statistics" about U.K. libraries along with further background data about each library and institution—data that was selected to characterize the individuality of the institutions. The article also describes some of the difficulties and complexities of working in the area of new measures development, demonstrating that we should take note of the significance of each step made, regardless of the work that still remains.

Endnotes

1. If you are interested in joining the ARL new measures discussion list, contact Julia Blixrud at jblix@arl.org.

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