

Library Assessment Conference Career Achievement Awards 2012

Remarks by Awardee Sam Kalb October 30, 2012

At the risk of sounding clichéd, when I look at the list of distinguished colleagues past and present who have received this award, and their accomplishments, I feel truly humbled and honoured. I would like to thank Vivian Lewis, Acting University Librarian, McMaster University for nominating me, CARL the Canadian equivalent of ARL, for supporting my nomination. I would also like to thank Martha Kyrillidou and the conference planning committee for the award.

It was a pleasant surprise for me to be able to see all my assessment colleagues again. I am retiring in December at the end of the fall term and had already passed on my assessment responsibilities to my colleague, Laurie Scott who is here today. So, I wasn't planning to attend the conference.

I was fortunate in my career to be able to transition from managing traditional core library functions to contribute to the two developing areas in academic libraries: the growth of scholarly communications services and the culture of assessment.

Unlike some of the past winners of this award, my major contributions to the field of library assessment have not been in developing assessment instruments or metrics, but rather as an administrator and facilitator.

When I administered LibQUAL for the first time at my university in 2004, I was excited by the potential benefits that the results could offer us in assessing and managing our services. Our other managers were quick to see the benefits of the results but I was frustrated that, as a Canadian library, there were so few Canadian comparators, in the survey. Before we created the LibQUAL Canada Consortium, relatively few Canadian libraries had done LibQUAL and no more than 10 in the same survey session. In addition, LibQUAL did not generate aggregate data for participating Canadian institutions. While there are many similarities between American and Canadian academic institutions, I knew that there were also many fundamental differences.

Other than national surveys of students by Canadian popular magazines that contained a few library metrics, there were no comparator metrics other than quantitative data collected by CARL and ARL.

In 2007, I was approached by CARL to coordinate a LibQUAL consortial survey on behalf of those

members who wished to participate as a group (approx. 15-20 of Canada's research-intensive universities). I immediately saw this as a great opportunity to make this a true national assessment project by broadening the consortium to include any Canadian university and community college that wished to participate. I arranged for invitations to go to all of the regional library groups and personally did some arm-twisting to persuade the schools that were considered the top comparators in their categories to participate to lure the others. By the 2007 survey, we had a consortium of 54 libraries representing universities from coast to coast, the largest LibQUAL Consortium. The consortium has continued to do the survey every three years with similar numbers of academic participants.

LibQUAL Canada's experience and recommendations have also helped ARL enhance LibQUAL's support for multilingual consortia.

Most important of all for me, was to turn the consortium into an assessment learning experience for our members - a community with a discussion list and a resource web site. Very few of our members had ever engaged with any formal library assessment instrument. Above all, very few had the dedicated staffing to administer the survey and make use of the results, without considerable support.

I feel that the consortium accomplished its goals of supporting and encouraging Canadian academic libraries in assessing and benchmarking their services, and begin to develop a rich set of Canadian library service assessment data for use by individual libraries, library councils and researchers.

Although the culture of assessment has been a gradual development among Canadian libraries, implementing good assessment practices have now become an objective among many of our members.