

POINT

The Association of College & Research Libraries Standards for Libraries in Higher Education (SLHE) “provide a comprehensive framework using an outcomes-based approach.” When used for planning purposes, the SLHE guide library personnel to identify and measure desired outcomes and to implement a continuous improvement cycle.

The “expectations for library contributions to institutional effectiveness” articulated in the SLHE can be communicated and demonstrate library value to University administrators.

SLHE signify and communicate to University administrators that the library director and library personnel are members of a particular profession that contribute unique knowledge of value to the institution. While administrators may not be familiar with the SLHE, they understand the higher education accountability landscape (i.e., units and programs are guided or governed by standards).

SLHE provide personnel across library units an organizational guidepost, and personnel across academic libraries a professional guidepost. Ideally, use of the SLHE improves shared understandings, commitments, and organizational and professional engagement.

SLHE are inclusive and flexible. Library personnel determine the outcomes, measures, benchmarking, and peer comparisons that meet the local needs of their library, including “unique user populations and institutional [environments].”

Point-counterpoint: Library Standards and University Accreditation Can Improve Academic Libraries

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SCENARIO 1: SPACE

- Library required to develop three outcomes to be assessed each year as part of a **campus mandate to prepare for reaccreditation**. Library selected outcomes related to current or forthcoming work, such as assessing student reaction to space improvements, and **wanted the outcomes to reflect the SLHE framework**. The outcome “students will find physical spaces in the library to engage and explore in their intellectual pursuits” was developed, reflective of the SLHE Standard 6. Space “Libraries are the intellectual commons where users interact with ideas in both physical and virtual environments to expand learning and facilitate the creation of new knowledge.” **Assessment findings led to concrete changes** such as furniture, lighting, and outlet **additions and resource allocations** for space improvements the following year.
- Developed a three outcomes a year **assessment cycle that is now ingrained in the library’s work**. Assessment reports are shared with the institutional research office “to **demonstrate institutional effectiveness**”, included in the director’s annual reports for and discussed with their administrative supervisor, and provide a basis and narratives for accreditation responses.
- **Assessment reports** shared on the library website **provide rich details** of the outcomes addressed each year, assessment measures and methods used, findings, and actions taken, but **do not specifically cite the standards**.

SCENARIO 2: EDUCATIONAL ROLE

- Library indicates that they “follow the 2011 SLHE Framework” on their Assessment website. The multiple measures used to understand users and the impact of services and the robust reports provide **evidence of a strong culture of assessment**. The library’s Instruction Framework includes concrete and achievable curricular goals, and lays out best practices aligned with the **ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education**, but does not include similar language or clear linkage to the SLHE framework.
- The most recent Strategic Plan and Dean’s Reports (2016 and 2017) indicate that the library places “student achievement” as a top tier goal. In the reporting figures, **the library demonstrates impressive and clear alignment with Association of American Colleges & Universities VALUE (Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education) rubric components and NWCCU accreditation standards**.

Questions for Consideration

- Based on what we know from library website content and the literature about these two libraries, in what ways, and for what purposes, is each library using the SLHE?
- What factors influenced their uses of the SLHE?
- What do their reported uses suggest about the value they find in and perceptions they hold for the SLHE?
 - For space? For instruction? For planning? For assessing? For decision-making? For reporting?
- What do we not know about the libraries use or non-use of the SLHE that would provide a richer understanding of the value and perceptions they find in the document?
- Where do you place yourself on the point-counterpoint argument? In what ways, if any, is that related to your current position?

See handout and online pdf for Bibliography.

COUNTER

Expectations for academic libraries are outlined in regional accreditation standards (e.g., Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities) and use of those standards is required for reporting purposes. SLHE lack an explicit alignment to regional standards. Multiple sets of standards are not necessary.

The SLHE are not understood or valued by many campus stakeholders.

Library personnel utilize standards targeted to their job responsibilities (e.g., Framework for Information Literacy), or that address particular library initiatives (e.g., Diversity Standards), for planning purposes, and these are not clearly linked to the SLHE, even though published by the same organization.

Library directors and managers have multiple standards and tools available to guide their work. It may be easier for leaders to continue to use frameworks that have led to improvements in the past rather than for them to invest the time and resources to learn to utilize the SLHE.

SLHE, like other professional and regional standards, present a particular worldview and self-regulation framework that limits divergent, experimental or unfamiliar concepts and practices (e.g., decolonizing library subject headings).

While the SLHE state “it is expected that each library will develop its own outcomes based on the mission and goals of the institution,” the sample outcomes suggest the use of novel achievements (e.g., food pantries in libraries) is not invited or encouraged.