

ARL Task Force on New Ways of Measuring Collections

Chronology and Status Report

September 2006

December 2004

The ARL Task Force on New Ways of Measuring Collections was established in December 2004 with a charge of articulating current issues that are associated with the ARL Statistics and to propose changes for how ARL should be measuring research library collections.

May 2005

A preliminary report on the work of the Task Force on New Ways of Measuring Collections was presented during the ARL Business Meeting on May 27, 2005. Brinley Franklin (Connecticut) chair of the task force, summarized the issues that surfaced in interviews of 100 ARL directors conducted by members of the task force over the previous two months:

- A major theme is the need for ARL to present the research library story more fully, including its relevance to teaching, learning, and research. Interview subjects suggested that ARL should highlight the unique collection content and strong service component of research libraries.
- Statistics are important and will continue to be important for their historical contributions, accountability, and comparison with peer institutions; however, an increasing number of directors have noted that the ranking (Membership Criteria Index) published in the Chronicle of Higher Education is misleading and unhelpful.
- Many directors would like to describe the benefits research libraries provide to their communities and the relation of research collections to the success of their users. The need for a framework that recognizes and describes success from a user perspective has surfaced again and again.

October 2005

During the October 2005 Membership Meeting, the Task Force forwarded a set of recommendations and the ARL Board approved the following actions:

1. Revisit the foundations of the ARL statistics collected for membership purposes to determine if there are new ways of describing research library collections
Undertake exploratory factor analysis to find:
 - (a) what is it we are measuring with our data collection activities,
 - (b) whether ARL statistics measure the correct constructs and for what purposes, and
 - (c) develop alternative models regarding the nature of the constructs measured by ARL.

The possibility of developing a range of indices using the existing data elements may be one of the possible outcomes from this recommendation.

2. Simultaneously, develop a profile of the characteristics of a contemporary research library that could serve to complement other measures of library collections.

The profile might include consortial partnerships, collection strengths, unique materials, collection use, service quality, contributions to the North American community (e.g., interlibrary loan, preservation), investment in local digital projects, contributions to research, teaching and learning, good local stewardship, and how library staff contributes to advances in librarianship.

3. Then, determine/develop new meaningful measures to augment current ones to support the profile of a research library.

These measures might address the provision of resources and services, assessment of the quality of resources and services, and outcomes for research, teaching and learning.

February 2006

In early 2006, Bruce Thompson and Yvonna Lincoln were engaged by ARL to conduct research projects to carry out the first and second recommendation, respectively.

Bruce Thompson is Distinguished Professor of Educational Psychology and College Distinguished Research Fellow, and Distinguished Professor of Library Science, Texas A&M University. He is a prolific author including works on factor analysis and behavioral statistics.

Yvonna Lincoln is Distinguished Professor and Program Director of Higher Education, Educational Administration Department, Texas A&M University. She has published extensively in the areas of evaluation and qualitative research.

October 2006

Bruce Thomson and Yvonna Lincoln reported on their research findings in an ARL Membership Meeting program titled *Profiling Research Libraries: Steps Toward Understanding Their Contributions to Research, Teaching, and Learning*.