

The ARL Membership Criteria Index

The criteria for academic library membership in the Association of Research Libraries are based partly on quantitative data that provide a view of the range of resources deployed among the existing members of the Association. Statistical analysis shows a high degree of homogeneity in respect to five data categories:

- volumes held
- volumes added, gross
- current serials
- total library expenditures
- total professional plus support staff

Each year ARL uses the statistical method of principal component analysis to identify the commonalities in the membership. The analysis is conducted on the 35 charter members of ARL and produces coefficients, or weights, for each of the five data categories. When the data for a given library are multiplied by the weights and summed, the result is a “score” for that library. This process of multiplying by weights and summing is carried out for each ARL academic library. The resulting scores comprise what is known as the ARL Membership Criteria Index. The term “score” in this context is not a judgment about the library’s quality or performance. “Score” is a term from principal component and factor analysis that refers to the summation of data. The ARL index score in effect aggregates the five measures of size and resources. Each year the current year’s data in the five categories are published in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, arranged in descending rank order by the ARL Index scores.

The weights and data categories can also be applied to the data of non-ARL libraries. This technique is one of the tests used to determine potential members of the Association. Candidates for membership are required to have a score on the ARL index scale of at least -1.65 for the most recent four years in order to be considered. This criterion was established to ensure that new members share the essential characteristics of the existing members in regard to the five measures of size. The membership criteria also include other requirements to ensure the homogeneity of the membership. See <http://www.arl.org/stats/qualcov.htm> for the complete description of membership criteria and <http://www.arl.org/stats/factor.html> for more information on the membership index.



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