

Translating Standards into Actions: A Case Study on Implementation and Training

Mary Ellen K. Davis

Association of College and Research Libraries, Chicago, Illinois, United States
mdavis@ala.org

Lisa Janicke Hinchliffe

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Illinois, United States
ljanicke@illinois.edu



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Abstract:

While individual libraries and library practitioners must take responsibility for implementing standards locally, library workers may not have a fully developed understanding of what standards are, how to operationalize them, or how to integrate them with other organizational practices. The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) is the source that the higher education community in the United States looks to for standards and guidelines on academic and research librarianship. ACRL promulgates standards and guidelines to help libraries, academic institutions, and accrediting agencies understand the components of an excellent library. Members of ACRL report they need training and assistance with using the standards in their institutions to make the most effective use of the resources that ACRL is providing.

In 2011 ACRL released Standards for Libraries in Higher Education. These standards were not simply a revision of the previous version of the standards. They embodied a very different approach, one that emphasized the impact of the library on student learning, faculty research, and institutional quality, not just efficient and effective operations internally. ACRL recognized that releasing the Standards was just a first step in helping the community understand and use the Standards. As the Standards were being developed ACRL also was developing a multi-modal training curriculum to ensure that librarians could successfully use the Standards in their new format.

This paper presents a case study of the resulting curriculum, pedagogical framework, and multi-modal delivery as well as assessment of the training based on participant feedback and examination of participant action plans for implementing the Standards. Because the training implemented in 2012

proved so popular, ACRL contracted with an additional four trainers so that the program's offerings can continue to expand.

Keywords: Standards, Training, Professional Development, Association Management, Competencies

The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) is the source that the higher education community in the United States looks to for standards and guidelines on academic and research librarianship. ACRL promulgates standards and guidelines to help libraries, academic institutions, and accrediting agencies understand the components of an excellent library. In 2011, ACRL released a new edition of the *Standards for Libraries in Higher Education*. The *Standards* are freely available on the ACRL website in both HTML (<http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/standardslibraries>) and PDF (<http://www.ala.org/acrl/sites/ala.org.acrl/files/content/standards/slhe.pdf>) formats.¹ These *Standards* represent a very different approach to articulating standards for academic libraries, one that incorporated emphasis on the impact of the library on student learning, faculty research, and institutional quality, not just efficient and effective internal operations. This paper presents a case study of the *Standards* and the resulting training curriculum to inform future activities of library associations that may develop and promulgate professional standards.

History of the *Standards*

The 2011 *Standards for Libraries in Higher Education* were approved by the ACRL Standards and Accreditation Committee and the ACRL Board of Directors in accordance with the process delineated in Chapter 14: Standards & Guidelines in ACRL's Guide to Policy and Procedures (<http://www.ala.org/acrl/resources/policies/chapter14>). The 2011 *Standards* supersede all earlier separate library standards formerly produced by ACRL's College Libraries Section, Community and Junior College Libraries Section, and University Libraries Section, as well as ACRL's 2004 *Standards for Libraries in Higher Education*.

The first edition of the college library standards was published in 1959 and subsequent editions were published in 1975, 1986, 1995, and 2000. Standards for two-year institutions were first published in 1960 and revised in 1979, 1990, and 1994. Standards for university libraries were first issued in 1979 and revised in 1989. In 1998, on the recommendation of ACRL's Task Force on Academic Library Outcomes Assessment (<http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/publications/whitepapers/taskforceacademic.cfm>), the ACRL Board mandated that all future standards incorporate outcomes assessment. The 2000 edition of *Standards for College Libraries* was the first to incorporate outcomes assessment and was considered a model for the other two type-of-library standards. Representatives from the Standards Committees of the type-of-library sections met and eventually recommended that the new College Library standards be adapted as a single comprehensive standard for use by all academic and technical libraries. ACRL formed a task force in 2002 to accomplish this task. In June 2004, the ACRL Standards and Accreditation

¹ While the text of the *Standards* is currently only available in English, ACRL has an established procedure for partnership with those who would like to translate ACRL documents into other languages. Anyone who is interested in translating the *Standards for Libraries in Higher Education* into other languages is encouraged to contact the Executive Director of ACRL, Mary Ellen Davis (mdavis@ala.org).

Committee and the ACRL Board approved the 2004 document, and the three type-of- library standards were rescinded.

Following the procedurally mandated five-year review of the 2004 Standards, the ACRL Board of Directors charged the Standards for Libraries in Higher Education Task Force in 2009 to review and revise the standards.

The Task Force was charged to:

1. review the *Standards for Libraries in Higher Education (SFLIHE)*, including a review of library outcomes as articulated in regional accrediting association guidelines,
2. engage accrediting representatives to identify new and emerging needs and issues in higher education as they may affect academic libraries,
3. recommend needed changes, including how needs for quantitative data can be met,
4. produce a draft document incorporating these changes,
5. seek comments and input from stakeholder communities and the general ACRL membership,
6. revise the draft as appropriate noting any elements that have changed based on input, and
7. recommend effective ways to inform and educate the academic library community on the implementation of the standards in their libraries.

Patricia Iannuzzi, Dean of University Libraries at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, was appointed chair of the task force and led the group in review, data gathering, drafting, engaging with stakeholders, revising, and finalizing the document. In addition to careful study of the 2004 document, the Task Force conducted a survey of academic library directors in Spring 2010 in order to inform the development of the draft text. In January 2011, the Task Force shared a draft of the *Standards* with the ACRL Board of Directors during the American Library Association (ALA) Midwinter Meeting and solicited the Board's support of the approach the Task Force was recommending. After a wide-ranging conversation the Board agreed that the Task Force's approach was the appropriate one to take. In March 2011, a draft of the *Standards* was published on the ACRL website and made available for comments through a blog (<http://acrl.ala.org/slhe/>). A hearing at the ACRL 2011 Conference provided members with an additional opportunity to provide comments and feedback.

A final version of the *Standards* text was created and sent for review by the ACRL Standards and Accreditation Committee at the ALA Annual Conference in June 2011. The ACRL Board of Directors considered the final draft of the *Standards* and the recommendation for approval from the Standards and Accreditation Committee at the October 2011 meeting of the Executive Committee of Board, which approved the *Standards* for promulgation.

The *Standards for Libraries in Higher Education*

The *Standards for Libraries in Higher Education* are a powerful framework for examining what academic libraries are, what they do, and how they make a difference to the institutions they serve. They represent the profession's collective best thinking about the role and impact of academic libraries on student learning, faculty productivity, and the cultural community. The Standards are a comprehensive description of what it means to be an effective academic library. As such, they can be used as a basis for planning, assessing, and communicating the purpose and impact of academic libraries. Most importantly, the *Standards* posit that an academic library is judged by its contribution to its institution. Understanding the mission and purpose of the institution, its strategic priorities and goals, and its values are very important to assessing the impact of the library and communicating it to all stakeholders.

While the entire text of the *Standards* is too lengthy to be included in this paper, it is helpful to understand the components and structure of the *Standards*.

There are nine Principles in the *Standards* (they are numbered for ease of reference and not to indicate priority):

1. Institutional Effectiveness
2. Professional Values
3. Educational Role
4. Discovery
5. Collections
6. Space
7. Management/Administration
8. Personnel
9. External Relations

For each Principle, there is a set of performance indicators, which are again numbered for ease of reference and not to indicate priority. Here is an example:

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.
 - 6.1. The library creates intuitive navigation that supports self-sufficient use of virtual and physical spaces.
 - 6.2. The library provides safe and secure physical and virtual environments conducive to study and research.
 - 6.3. The library has the IT infrastructure to provide reliable and robust virtual and physical environments needed for study and research.
 - 6.4. The library uses physical and virtual spaces as intellectual commons, providing access to programs, exhibits, lectures, and more.
 - 6.5. The library designs pedagogical spaces to facilitate collaboration and learning, and the creation of new knowledge.
 - 6.6. The library's physical space features connectivity and up-to-date, adequate, well-maintained equipment and furnishings.
 - 6.7. The library provides clean, inviting, and adequate space, conducive to study and research, with suitable environmental conditions and convenient hours for its services, personnel, resources, and collections.
 - 6.8. The library's physical and virtual spaces are informed by consultation with users.

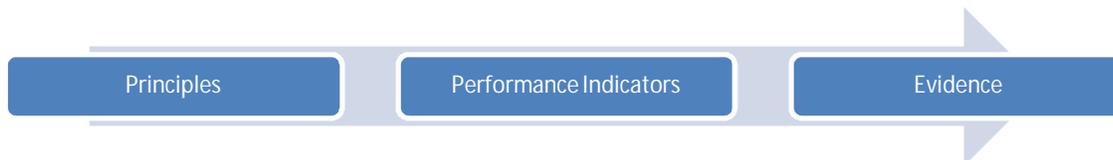
The *Standards* also include a series of appendices:

1. Sample Outcomes
2. Benchmarking and Peer Comparison
3. Sources Consulted
4. History of the Standards
5. Members of the Task Force

Planning and Assessment Frameworks

The *Standards* introduction explains that there are two models for approaching the “Principles and Performance Indicators” – the outcomes assessment-based model and the evidence-based model. Both models start with the principles and performance indicators and end with evidence; the outcomes assessment-based model has two additional components – outcomes and assessment.

The evidence-based model documents what a library does and is an input/output approach:



The evidence-based model recommends that the library staff start with the principle, identify the appropriate performance indicator(s), and then provide evidence of activities that address the principle and performance indicator(s). The evidence-based model does not address whether the activities are sufficient, high quality, or achieving outcomes. It just documents that the library is active in an area. This might seem minimal but documenting what a library is doing is necessary for assessing its impact and this model can also be a basis for considering, from a planning perspective, what a library could or should be doing.

The outcomes assessment-based model focuses on the influence or impact of the library and is thus an outcomes approach:



The outcomes assessment-based model asks library staff to consider how library users are changed as a result of their interactions with the library’s services, programs, and resources. The outcomes model requires that the library staff articulate what they hope to see as the effect of their efforts in order to gather evidence about whether the intended effects are occurring and to provide insights necessary for improvement if the results are not as positive as we want.

Outcomes are statements about library users and what they are doing because the library exists and offers resources and services. Outcomes can be measurable (quantitative) or judge-able (qualitative). Appendix 1: Sample Outcomes of the Standards offers many examples of potential outcomes, but are meant to be illustrative and not provide an exhaustive list of possibilities. Here are a few examples from the *Standards*:

- Faculty include information literacy learning outcomes in their syllabi.
- Students demonstrate information literacy skills and abilities.
- Users integrate library interfaces and architectures into their daily search behaviors.
- Faculty locate data sets needed for their research.

The Plans for Training and Communication

In carrying out its task to “recommend effective ways to inform and educate the academic library community on the implementation of the standards in their libraries,” the Task Force submitted a training proposal and a communication plan. The ACRL Board had requested this from the Task Force because they recognized that these *Standards* would require more effort on the part of the librarians implementing them, than *Standards* that simply recommend input/output measures. The Board wanted to ensure that ACRL provided appropriate introduction, training, and assistance so that librarians could document the role of the library in ways appropriate for their respective institutions.

The communication plan was crafted to articulate the relevant messages, timing, vehicles, strategies and tactics necessary to effectively communicate the availability of *Standards* and to promote awareness of training opportunities. Communication mechanisms included press releases, blog postings, social media, formal association publications, and mailings of the *Standards* document to academic library directors and ACRL members as well as accreditation organizations in the United States. A program at the ALA 2012 Midwinter Meeting and a webinar were also conducted. A recording of the webinar remains freely available online (<http://learningtimesevents.org/acrl/acrl-stds-archive/>).

The training plan established a framework for a multi-year training implementation. The Task Force recommended that initial training be developed to address the *Standards* overall, including how they are different from previous versions of the *Standards*, the level of expectation embodied in the *Standards*, which components should be considered by all libraries, and which elements should be developed by the individual library and library type. The Task Force also recommended the development of additional training focused on the process-based elements in the *Standards* such as outcomes development and assessment, collecting evidence, and presenting results to the institution. The Task Force recommended using a variety of training modes including in-person workshops (both stand-alone and in conjunction with conferences), webinars or other online delivery, a workbook which could serve as stand-alone training or accompany workshops, a component of ACRL’s institutional consulting services, and a robust *Standards* website.

The ACRL Board accepted both of these plans and the ACRL staff then took responsibility for operational implementation. ACRL staff members who have contributed to some component of this work since 2011 include the Executive Director, Associate Director, Senior Strategist for Special Initiatives, Content Strategist, Manager of Professional Development, Marketing and Communications Specialist, and Senior Production Editor.

The Training Model and Curriculum Details

In order to ensure that libraries could benefit from the new *Standards* and implement them effectively, ACRL implemented a multi-modal training strategy. The training strategy complemented the communication strategy. The training strategy was grounded in the belief that library staff must be empowered to carry out planning and assessment of library quality at their own institutions but also acknowledged that member feedback during the *Standards* development process had revealed that library staff may not have a fully developed understanding of what standards are, how to operationalize them, or how to integrate them with other organizational practices.

ACRL staff determined that additional staff capacity was needed to develop and implement the training strategy in a timely matter. Because this was anticipated as a short-term need, rather than pursuing the

additional of permanent staff, a short-term consultancy was devised. The call for proposals provided this general overview:

The association seeks an individual or individuals who have the knowledge and ability to design and develop a versatile, modular professional development curriculum to support the educational efforts for SLHE. The purpose of this project is to provide a wide range of professional development opportunities through a variety of methods and modalities including in-person events, live webcasts and asynchronous web-delivered courses. This versatile, modular and multi-faceted curriculum will address the principles, performance indicators, outcomes, assessment and evidence as described in the standards. (<http://www.acrl.ala.org/acrlinsider/archives/3822>)

The ACRL staff selected Debra Gilchrist, Dean of Libraries and Institutional Effectiveness at Pierce College in Lakewood/Puyallup, Washington, and Lisa Janicke Hinchliffe, Coordinator for Information Literacy Services and Instruction at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, to develop the training materials and conduct initial training sessions in the following modes:

- Half-day workshop (delivered face-to-face).
- Full-day workshop (delivered face-to-face).
- Modular series of three 90-minute webcasts (delivered through Elluminate).
- Three-week asynchronous online course (delivered through Moodle)

All of the training is guided by the following set of learning outcomes for participants:

- Be able to establish the library and institutional contexts to effectively engage in planning, self-study, accreditation, or program review processes.
- Use the ACRL *Standards for Libraries in Higher Education* and other foundational documents as a framework to develop benchmarks, evaluate quality and performance, and demonstrate value to the institutional mission.
- Evaluate various metrics and assessment tools to select the best approach for a given situation.
- Examine the role of leadership in building a culture of evidence to engage all librarians and staff members in effective decision-making.

The materials for each of these training sessions were developed in consultation with ACRL staff, who provided substantive feedback on content and design. ACRL staff also provide administrative, logistics, and technical support for training delivery, including management of registration, duplication and distribution of training materials, and assistance with technical problems. Training curriculum materials were developed using Microsoft Word and Microsoft PowerPoint and filesharing is handled through Dropbox.

Training Effectiveness

As a part of developing the overall training curriculum materials, Gilchrist and Hinchliffe also worked with the ACRL staff to devise training evaluation and participant learning assessment mechanisms. Training evaluations have been uniformly positive. Participants report that the training is high quality and meets their expectations and that the training increases their confidence in their ability to use the *Standards* in planning and assessing library services and programs.

Participants have noted that the training presents the topic from a very positive foundation – they appreciate the recurring emphasis that all institutions have their own culture and history. Participants have also noted that the actual format and structure of the workshop helps solidify the assessment process. The way the training is structured takes participants from theory to practice and provides good guidance on how to conduct assessment at their home institution. Also noted was the inclusion of many different types of training activities - from presentation, to interactive engagement, and discussion. The handouts and worksheets also received positive feedback from participants.

A fair majority of participants observe that interacting with colleagues and working in groups is one of the most valuable aspects of the training. They note that the variety of perspectives and the opportunity to hear other's perspectives confirms that no one is alone in their concerns or challenges with assessment. Many also note that the opportunity to hear other's stories about their progress with assessment led them to believe they could begin to develop their own stories. It was also mentioned that the aspect of sharing stories encouraged self-reflection about the challenges faced in assessment and where there may be leadership opportunities in their institutions.

Participant evaluations have requested additional time for extended discussions, more shared examples, and increased practice opportunities. Online opportunities may provide a mechanism for this in future iterations of the training but as an interim measure the revised training now incorporates additional worksheets and templates for using at a later time.

In addition to evaluation feedback, the trainers have analyzed participant action plans for evidence of achievement of the learning outcomes by participants. The action plans reveal that participants have identified appropriate and productive next steps in implementing the *Standards* at their institutions. Worksheets and group discussions during the training sessions also demonstrate that participants are developing appropriate and necessary knowledge and skills through the training sessions.

Next Steps

The training implemented in 2012 proved so popular and in such demand that original trainers could not keep up with the demand for sessions across the nation in a timely way and recommended that ACRL identify additional people to join the training corps. In 2012 ACRL put out a call for additional trainers (<http://www.ala.org/news/press-releases/2012/11/acrl-seeks-standards-libraries-higher-education-workshop-presenters>) and four additional librarians were added to the training team (<http://www.acrl.ala.org/acrlinsider/archives/6643>). The new trainers have completed a train-the-trainers program that involved observing the full-day face-to-face workshop and then a co-trainer experience with one of the original trainers.

In addition to the training, ACRL has also developed consulting services utilizing the *Standards* to assist libraries with strategic thinking, planning, managing change, preparation for accreditation, and program review (<http://www.ala.org/acrl/consulting>). The consulting services offer libraries customized services that complement but do not replace the training curriculum.

When the training was originally conceived, it was recognized that ultimately a workbook guiding individuals on the implementation of the *Standards* would be an important component of the training. It was decided that the in-person and online training should be developed and piloted before such a workbook was produced. Discussions are now underway about the possibility of producing such

workbook so that yet another opportunity to engage with the *Standards* is provided. Doing so will require identifying one or more people with sufficient time and skills to dedicate to the project.

Conclusion

While library practitioners must take responsibility for implementing standards locally, library workers may not have a fully developed understanding of what standards are, how to operationalize them, or how to integrate them with other organizational practices. The library association is uniquely situated as the promulgator of standards to provide training and support. The case study presented in this paper offers one approach to responding to the needs of library staff and demonstrates how a library association can create value for its members and the profession.