Dr. Natasha Jankowski is the director of the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA), an organization that works nationally to assess learning outcomes and provide assistance to organizations looking for proven strategies to improve the learning outcomes of their patrons.

In the context of librarianship, patrons are learners. Librarians and educators are uniquely positioned to coordinate among a variety of resources to help learners learn as best they can. The two big questions that Jankowski works with are “What do you want to be doing?” and “What tools can you best do this with?” These questions help determine both the development of learning outcomes and their assessment.

NILOA’s working definition of assessment is given by Dr. Peter Ewell, Vice President at the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems. He says, “assessment is defined as the systematic collection, review, and use of evidence about student learning from a particular learning experience or experiences for the purpose of improving learning and development.” The model process that NILOA uses to enhance a learning experience takes 5 steps:

- Define learning outcomes
- Select appropriate assessment measures
- Provide learning opportunities
- Assess student learning
- Use evidence to improve

The steps flow in a cycle and should be considered such. Assessment isn’t something that an organization should do once; it should be a process that gets continually executed, so learning experiences are always being improved.

The goal of documenting learning outcomes is to clarify what a particular learner will be able to do at the end of an experience, or what deliverables the organization expects as a result of the experience.

There are two families of assessment measures: direct and indirect. Indirect measures of learning are based upon self-reported experiences, such as after-class surveys. Direct measures are based on the output of the learner, once the learning experience has been completed. For example, if a learner is taught how to write a report, and then writes a good report according to the material he/she has learned, the assessment would take that into account. In actuality, a large variety of approaches are used to assess learning, the largest being national student surveys. The next most popular approaches are rubric-based assessment and classroom-based performance review. These methods are embedded in the learning process and can provide an excellent view of varied styles of work within the same classroom constraints.

Kara Malenfant is Senior Strategist for Special Initiatives at the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) with the American Library Association (ALA). They issue standards and guidelines, offer a peer-reviewed journal, and coordinate with scholarly institutions. Over the last 40 years, assessments of libraries have changed from user satisfaction to a “value-added” standpoint. Rather than considering how a patron’s personal experience was, libraries are being judged based on what they add to a community and what resources are being created with the money being spent.

ACRL published a comprehensive report called Assessment in Action, analyzing the learning programs present in dozens of public and academic libraries nationwide. The outcome of the report was documentation on how to build a professional development program, how to foster collaborative relationships, and how to contribute to higher education goals through documentation and recording what works well. This was a 3-year program that worked with over 200 teams across the country. The cycle used in this study was very similar to the process mentioned above:

- Define outcomes
SHOW NOTES: Measuring the Effect of Library Usage

- Set criteria
- Perform actions
- Gather evidence
- Analyze evidence
- Plan change

Upon completion, the report presented 5 major findings:

- Students benefit from library instruction in their initial coursework.
- Using the library increases student success.
- Collaborative academic programs and services involving the library enhance student learning.
- Information literacy instruction strengthens general education outcomes.
- Library research consultation services boost student learning.

With library instruction, students are able to respond quickly to changing demands in class, with in-person tutoring sessions at the library, or by taking advantage of online resources offered. A strong correlation between higher grade point averages and online library resource usage was reported by the Eastern Kentucky University, among many others. Drop-in learning programs, like collaborative study groups or tutoring services, both show a significant increase in grades and student retention. Information literacy and basic introductions to library or digital resources give the student the tools they need to take advantage of resources on their own. Library research consultation, like one-on-one interactions with a reference department or “book a librarian” sessions also corresponds to an increase in academic performance.

These findings are directly applicable to correctional libraries, as they offer services that are largely universal. The library contributes to student retention, adds value to a student’s long-term academic experience, promotes academic rapport and student engagement, and just simply existing as a space for learning enhances performance of students who take advantage of the space.

There are 6 priority areas that serve as the takeaways from the reports and study results:

- Communicate the library’s contributions
- Match library assessment to parent institution’s mission
- Include library data in institutional data collection
- Quantify the library’s impact on student success
• Enhance teaching and learning
• Collaborate with educational stakeholders

The main drive of these points is that the library must make the effects of their programs and materials clear to the parent organization. Libraries serve as a hub of learning within an institution and directly affect how students grow. It’s important to match a library’s offering with the focus and strengths of the parent institution to guarantee an efficient use of resources, ensuring the library stays in touch with the mission statement it’s operating under. The connection between the library and the organization in which it is housed needs to be clear, and library staff can do this regularly by sending statistics and data to relevant entities. It’s very important for the library to strive to enhance teaching and learning capabilities in sectors that are touched by the library. Collaboration and communication with educational stakeholders, including students, teachers, provosts, etc., are vital to enhancing learning outcomes and ensuring that a library maintains its place within an institution, using resources in a way that benefits the whole.

Resources
The following resources were referenced:


Rubric assessment of information literacy skills, School of Information Studies, Syracuse University, not dated, [http://railsontrack.info/rubrics](http://railsontrack.info/rubrics)

Transparency in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 2019, [https://www.unlv.edu/provost/teachingandlearning](https://www.unlv.edu/provost/teachingandlearning)


VALUE Rubrics, Association of American Colleges & Universities, 2019, [https://www.aacu.org/value-rubrics](https://www.aacu.org/value-rubrics)