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Using Your Library's Objectives as the Organizational Framework for Library Documentation in Planning, Assessment, and Accreditation

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ABSTRACT

The San Diego Christian/Southern California Seminary Library[1] uses its objectives as the organizational framework for its strategic plan, annual report, assessment plan, and policies and procedures manual. This article describes how the library's objectives compare to the Association of College and Research Libraries' *Standards* (to ensure best practices), relate to the areas covered in the library strategic plan, annual report, and operations manual, and correspond to the standards and criteria from their respective accrediting agencies, showing how easy it is to identify supporting evidence for a program review or self-study when using this organizing method.

Introduction

Academic libraries, like other areas of an academic institution, always seem to be in a cycle of self-evaluation. Whether it is the routine data collection that leads to annual reporting and assessment or the need for strategic planning in an effort to keep the library current with innovations in collections, technology, and user-centered service, academic librarians need a strategy to help them collect data, report findings, and plan for the future in a logical and organized manner. For the last decade,

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1 The San Diego Christian/Southern California Seminary (SDC/SCS) Library is a joint library operated in two branch locations (Santee and El Cajon, California) for two separate academic institutions. The SDC/SCS Library shares a library website, library catalog, collections, 100+ databases, and the knowledge and skill of its four librarians and two paraprofessionals. This article was originally a workshop, "Stop Going In Circles! Using Your Library Objectives in Strategic Planning and Annual Assessment to Map Out Your Library's Self-Study or Program Review," presented at the 2015 Association of Christian Librarians Conference at Carson-Newman University in Jefferson City, Tennessee.

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the San Diego Christian/Southern California Seminary (SDC/SCS) Library has been organizing all of its data collection and documentation around the library's current objectives. This method has been extremely useful for planning, reporting and assessment, when completing national library surveys, and for providing documentation about the library for accreditation.

Library Objectives

Before planning or assessment can take place, a review of the library's mission statement and objectives is necessary. First, the library should have a useable mission statement which supports the institution's mission statement. Second, the library's objectives should clearly relate to the library's mission, cover all aspects of the library, and represent best practices. They must be concrete and somewhat measurable. The SDC/SCS Library objectives are based upon the primary functional areas of the library: collections, services, and operations. The SDC/SCS Library Committee revises the objectives or wording of the objectives as needed. Listed below are the library's objectives as of April 2015. The main focus for each objective is in bold face.

1. Increase depth and breadth of the **collection**, in a variety of formats, by continuous evaluation and improvement of the library's resources.

2. Create an environment that promotes study and research by maintaining and improving the **physical environment** of the holdings and use of the library.

3. Improve **access** to the library **collections** and **promote** library **services** to students and faculty.

4. Partner with faculty to provide support for **information literacy**, critical thinking and life-long learning.

5. Continue **systematic updates of computer hardware** and enhance access to **new software technologies**.

6. Assess and strengthen the **operations and administration** of the library through quality staff, resource management, and user-centered service.

7. Secure sufficient and consistent **financial support** for maintenance and improvement of the library.

For those libraries who have not reviewed their objectives recently, the Association of College and Research Libraries' (ACRL) *Standards for Libraries in Higher Education* (2011) are a useful set of best practices in academic librarianship. They "are designed to guide academic libraries in advancing and sustaining their role as partners in educating students, achieving their institutions' missions, and positioning libraries as leaders in assessment and continuous improvement on their campuses" (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2011). They include nine principles and 57 performance indicators.

Table 1 shows how the SDC/SCS Library Objectives were mapped to the principles outlined in the ACRL *Standards*. The mapping was done by reviewing the 57 performance indicators under the nine principles; some principles are applicable to more than one library objective. In the review of the ACRL *Standards* for the presentation this article is based on, it was discovered that library Objective 6 did not align well with the principles. During the last SDC/SCS Library Committee meeting of the 2014–2015 academic year, Objective 6 was revised, shifting the emphasis from the development of staff to include the broader area of library operations and administration. Interestingly, this revision also aligned Objective 6 to the functional area of "Library Operations and Administration" already present in the Library Strategic Plan.

Table 1. *A Comparison of ACRL Principles and SDC/SCS Library Objectives.*

ACRL Principles	SDC/SCS Library Objectives
1. Institutional Effectiveness	6. Library Admin
2. Professional Values	6. Library Admin / 3. Access & Service
3. Educational Role	4. Information Literacy
4. Discovery	3. Access & Service / 5. Computer Hard/software
5. Collections	1. Collections
6. Space	2. Physical Environment / 3. Access & Service
7. Management/Administration	6. Library Admin / 7. Financial Support
8. Personnel	6. Library Admin
9. External Relations	3. Access & Service

Once a library's objectives have been identified and reviewed against best practices, the next step is to examine how the library organizes its core documentation: the strategic plan, assessment reports, and policies and procedures manual.

Planning and Assessment

While planning and assessment take place primarily in the fall semester, the SDC/SCS Library conducts data collection year-round. Figure 1 shows the library's annual cycle of data collection, planning, and reporting. The timeline is fluid at times (depending upon how busy the individual branch libraries are and the demands of the parent institutions). For example, the SDC budget requests are due before the end of the fall semester, while the SCS budget requests are not due until the spring semester (usually February). Even though the strategic plan and library budgets are forward-looking (what is going to be done?) and the assessment and annual report are backward-looking (what and how well was it done?), they are interconnected and should share a similar organization.
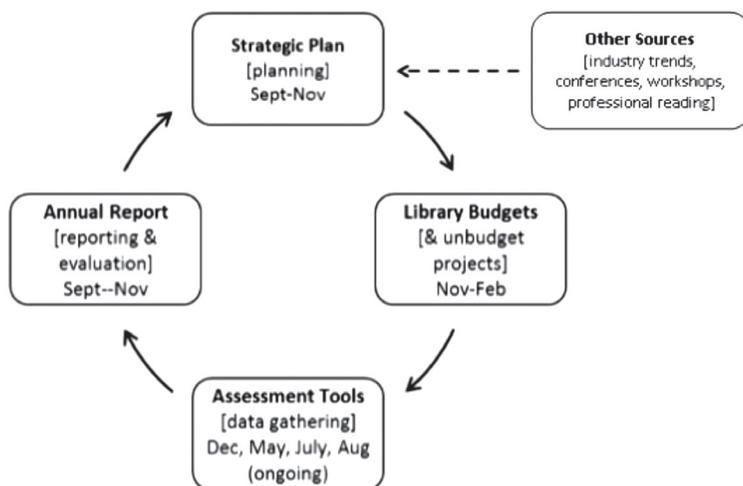
Figure 1. Planning and Assessment Cycle

Library Strategic Plan

The SDC/SCS Library Strategic Plan (LSP) was first developed in 2000 by the SDC Director of Library Services. The LSP is reviewed and updated each fall semester by the joint SDC/SCS Library Committee. This committee is comprised of library staff, a student representative, and faculty from both SDC and SCS. The LSP grew organically over the years until the 2006-2007 academic year when it was reorganized by "functional areas" that aligned generally to the library objectives. The current structure, which directly aligns the plan to the library objectives, was applied to the 2012-2013 LSP.

The LSP starts with the library's vision, mission and objectives. The objectives are mapped to the SDC Strategic Initiatives and the SCS Institutional Strategic Direction (developed by the respective boards of directors). The LSP includes both routine library tasks and specific projects, additions in technology, and/or the development of areas of the collections. Where relevant, an item can have a target date or, when accomplished, a completion date. The functional areas in the plan mirror those of the library objectives: collections, facility, library access and services, information literacy, library technology, library operations and administration, and budget and finances. The budget and finances section takes all the items from the rest of the plan that have a direct financial cost and lists them by library priority. This priority list is used to determine what will be included when the following year's library budget requests are submitted. At the end of each academic year, before the next round of strategic planning, the SDC Director of Library Services removes the items that have been completed and records them in a document called Progress Made. Each accomplishment is listed under its corresponding functional area (library objective). Reporting on the progress made to the LSP by library objective has helped the SDC/ SCS Library demonstrate that the library is actively being improved.

Library Annual Report

The next core document is the Library Annual Report (LAR). The LAR is completed each fall semester by the SCS Library Director using data collected from all areas of the library. The LAR in its present form was not initially designed to be the assessment instrument of the library. The data was collected to speed up the completion of national library surveys. Before 2005, it took days to complete the Academic Libraries Survey (now part of IPEDS) and the ACRL library survey. Each question was individually researched and answered as it was asked in the survey; reports were produced on an as-needed basis. The process of completing a survey was time consuming and dreaded by library staff. Ten years ago, the library began the active collection of information. This intentional data collection reduced the survey completion from weeks to hours. From this collected data, the librarians also developed a formal Library Annual Report for internal distribution.

The LAR became the tool for annual data collection and reporting of library progress (assessment). Each successive year this document has been developed and refined, giving the library the ability to conduct longitudinal studies. Table 2 shows how each library objective is represented by a corresponding area in the LSP and the LAR. Every summer the library compiles a new binder of organized, raw data containing: circulation and collection reports (if it moves, count it), library visits, reference question statistics, budget information, library staffing, hours, an organizational chart, information literacy statistics, library marketing emails to students and faculty, survey data, and every other interesting piece of data that was collected or reported for that year. The resulting LAR is divided into eight sections:

1. Year in Review/Major Changes – presented by functional area with highlights from the year, including improvements in facilities and technology (this first page can be distributed as a separate document from the rest of the report)

2. Library Use – visits to the library, circulation by patron, by call number and format, database use, and ILL

3. Collections – changes to the holdings by call number, new acquisitions, donations, periodical subscriptions, and databases

4. Budgets – actuals by area: books, e-books, AV, periodicals, databases, supplies, and staff

5. Staffing and Professional Development – a listing of the meetings, conferences, workshops/webinars, publications, etc., performed by or attended by each library staff member

6. Information Literacy – how many sessions, which departments, how many students

7. Surveys – results of the surveys of students, faculty, and alumni

8. Assessment – what needs improvement

In the assessment section, the library staff reviews the annual report and select data and reports used for its creation (including student and faculty surveys) to determine what areas need study or improvement. Items in the list that have been accomplished from the previous year's assessment are marked completed (they are removed the following year). The items listed in the assessment section can also include a cross-reference to a related item listed in the LSP (the annual report for the past year and the strategic plan for the next year are created each year at the same time during the fall semester).

Table 2. *A Comparison of Areas Covered in the Library Objectives, Strategic Plan and Annual Report*

Objectives	Strategic Plan	Annual Report
1. Collections	1. Collections	3. Collections
2. Physical Environment	2. Facility	1. Major Changes
3. Collection Access / Promotion of Service	3. Library Access & Services	2. Library Use
4. Information Literacy Instruction	4. Information Literacy	6. Information Literacy
5. Updates of Computer Hardware & Software	5. Library Technology	1. Major Changes
6. Library Administration	6. Library Operations & Administration	5. Staffing & Professional Development 7. Surveys 8. Assessment
7. Stable Financial Support	7. Budget & Finances	4. Budgets

Library Operations Manual

The final core library publication that is organized around the objectives is the policies and procedures manual: the Library Operations Manual (LOM). The LOM is the working document of the library, which covers all processes and activities of the joint library. The purpose of the LOM is not just a record of the policies and procedures; it also contains a detailed description of the SDC/SCS Library facilities (the two library branches), collections, and services. The LOM is intended to be used as: 1) a guide to the policies and procedures of the library, 2) a training tool for new staff members, and 3) a mechanism for refining and reviewing the library's current policies and procedures. Initially started in 2005, it took several years to fully compile. Its creation was a time-consuming task but it has been a useful tool for examining not just how the library staff completes a required task but also for asking why the library staff is doing it. This documentation process has also helped the library staff to clarify conflicting legacy policies. Documents in the manual are updated as needed and the entire manual is scheduled for a full review every few years (it was last revised in 2014-2015). The LOM includes the following areas of the library:

Part I Introduction – provides a description of the library including: its mission, objectives, cooperative agreements and memberships, statement of academic freedom, and its physical descriptions

Part II Management – personnel overview, organizational chart, library committee, budgets, emergency plans, and technology polices, etc.

Part III Service – services, publications, website policies, reserves, ILL, open/close procedures, circulation policies and procedures, guest access cards, etc.

Part IV Collections – collection development and management policies, selection and acquisition policies and procedures, donation and gift policies, collection descriptions, weeding, cataloging procedures, etc.

Part V Instruction – information literacy plans

Part VI Assessment – information about the strategic plan, annual report, surveys, and a list of the various assessment instruments

Once a library's core documents are organized by library objective (and are kept current), the writing of the narrative and identification of supporting evidence for accreditation purposes is fairly straightforward.

Program Reviews, Self–Study Reports, and the Library

Accreditation not only provides an assurance to students about the quality of their education, but it is also an opportunity for the library to assess itself against national and regional standards and criteria. The SDC/SCS Library is responsible to two accrediting agencies: SDC is accredited by WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC) and SCS is accredited by Transnational Association of Christian Colleges and Schools (TRACS). In the last five years, the library has completed a Department Program Review (SDC) and the Library and Learning Resources section for a Ten–Year Reaffirmation II Self–Study Report (SCS).

WASC Senior College and University Commission

The WSCUC is the western regional accrediting agency. Its *2013 Handbook of Accreditation Revised* (WASC Senior College and University Commission [WSCUC], 2013) includes three core commitments, four standards of accreditation and 39 criteria for review. The core commitments express accreditation values. Standards build on these three commitments with broad principles for good practice. The standards are explicated by 39 criteria for review (CFR). These elements provide "a coherent basis for institutional review and at the same time assure quality and integrity" (WSCUC, 2015, p. 2). The library staff identified five CFRs under two standards that are applicable to the library.

Standard Two, *Achieving Educational Objectives through Core Functions*, is divided into three core functions with 14 criteria. Under *Teaching and Learning*, CFR 2.2a, SDC is to demonstrate that students are prepared for lifelong learning including information literacy (Objective 4). CFR 2.3 is the only mention of "library" in the standards or 39 CFRs. The bolded text is the core concept for each criteria.

2.2a Undergraduate programs engage students in an integrated course of study of sufficient breadth and depth to prepare them for work, citizenship, and life-long learning… and ensure the development of core competencies including, but not limited to, written and oral communication, quantitative reasoning, **information literacy**, and critical thinking…

2.3 The institution's student learning outcomes and standards of performance… are reflected in academic programs, policies, and curricula, and are aligned with advisement, **library, and information and technology resources**, and the wider learning environment. (WSCUC, 2015, p. 14-15)

Standard Three, *Developing and Applying Resources and Organizational Structures to Ensure Quality and Sustainability*, is divided into three core functions with ten criteria. Under *Faculty and Staff*, CFR 3.1 and 3.3 address the need for an adequate number of dedicated faculty and staff who have the ability to perform assessment, program reviews, and engage in professional development (Objective 6). CFR 3.5, under *Fiscal, Physical, and Information Resources*, describes the need for information and technology resources that support the academic offerings and the research and scholarship of its community (Objectives 13, 5, 7).

3.1 The institution employs faculty and staff with substantial and continuing commitment to the institution. The **faculty and staff are sufficient in number, professional qualification, and diversity** and to achieve the institution's educational objectives, establish and oversee academic policies, and ensure the integrity and continuity of its academic and co-curricular programs wherever and however delivered.

3.3 The institution maintains **appropriate and sufficiently supported faculty and staff development activities** designed to improve teaching, learning, and assessment of learning outcomes.

3.5 The institution provides access to **information and technology resources** sufficient in scope, quality, currency, and kind at physical sites and online, as appropriate, to **support its academic offerings and the research and scholarship** of its faculty, staff, and students. These **information resources, services, and facilities** are consistent with the institution's educational objectives and are aligned with student learning outcomes. (WSCUC, 2015, p. 18-19)

Table 3 shows how the library's objectives can be mapped to the WSCUC Criteria for Review. Because of the broad nature of WSCUC's accreditation standards, several CFRs can be applicable to a single library objective.

Table 3. *A Comparison of Library Objectives and WSCUC CFRs*

Library Objectives	WSCUC CFRs
1. Collections	2.3 Library, information & technology resources 3.5 Access to information resources, services and facilities
2. Physical Environment	3.5 Access to information resources, services and facilities
3. Collection Access / Promotion of Service	2.3 Library, information & technology resources 3.5 Access to information resources, services and facilities
4. Information Literacy Instruction	2.2a Lifelong learning & Information literacy
5. Updates of Computer Hardware & Software	2.3 Library, information & technology resources 3.5 Access to information resources, services and facilities
6. Library Administration	3.1 Sufficient number of faculty & staff 3.3 Faculty & staff assessment & development activities
7. Stable Financial Support	3.5 Access to information resources, services and facilities

Practical Application: A WSCUC Department Program Review

The SDC Library was tasked with completing a department program review in 2011. It took approximately 20 hours to write and assemble the supporting documentation; the library submitted a 30-page review with over 40 supporting documents. The library's biggest challenge was that it could not adopt the model used by the academic departments because their emphasis was primarily on curriculum and instruction, and the library does more than provide instruction. Instead, using the same structure as other department program reviews (document the current state of evidence and identify areas of proposed improvement), the library program review used the library's objectives as the areas for evaluation. Table 4 shows an abbreviated sample of the content for the library's information literacy objective.

Table 4. *SDC Library Department Program Review (2011)*

Objective 4: Library Instruction	
Current State of Evidence (Areas of Review): – The Cayot Room (description of instructional lab) – Information Literacy (description of information literacy plan, statistics, working with faculty) – Research Guides (LibGuides, etc.)	Proposed Improvement: – Perform a citation analysis of the bibliographies from summative projects – Contact departments doing program reviews to have library questions included in the alumni surveys – Encourage use of the Information Literacy Rubric – Develop more LibGuides in underrepresented disciplines – Create library video tutorials using Camtasia
Documentation: – Library Annual Reports, 2005-06 to 2009-10 – Library Surveys – Information Literacy Rubric – LibGuides http://sdcc.libguides.com/ – Library Operations Manual (2010-2011 revision)	

Transnational Association of Christian Colleges and Schools

TRACS is a national accrediting agency of postsecondary institutions which have a distinctly Christian purpose. The *Accreditation Manual* (Transnational Association of Christian Colleges and Schools [TRACS], 2015) is divided into foundational and operational standards with 23 total standards and 213 evaluative criteria; the standard for library and learning resources has seven evaluative criteria. The library and learning resources are also referenced under the sections for alternate delivery methods/online education (12.17, 12.18), branch campuses (13.14, 13.15) and teaching sites (14.9), as well as institutional assessment (19.15), with two information literacy criteria located under undergraduate and graduate programs (11.14, 11.15). The bolded text is the core concept for each evaluative criteria.

21.1 Furnishes information resources and services and instructional and information technology appropriate to support the institution's mission, academic programs, and administrative functions, through **strategic, operational, and financial planning**.

21.2 Provides sufficient and consistent **financial support** for the library/LRC and the effective maintenance and improvement of the institution's information resources and instructional and information technology.

21.3 Utilizes **instructional technology** appropriate to its academic mission and the modes of delivery of its academic programs.

21.4 Employs an adequate number of **professionally qualified staff** who administer the institution's library, information resources/services, and instructional and information technology support functions.

21.5 Makes available, through ownership or formal arrangements or agreements, **library and information resources** necessary to fulfill the institution's mission and objectives which support the academic and research programs and the intellectual development of students, faculty, and staff.

21.6 Provides appropriate **training and support** to allow faculty, staff, and students to make effective use of library and information resources, and instructional and information technology.

21.7 Ensures appropriate **access and availability** to library and information resources and services for all students, regardless of program location or mode of delivery to support and enrich student academic work. (TRACS, 2015, p. II.J.–1)

Table 5 shows how the library's objectives map to the TRACS evaluative criteria. They are very similar. The only objective that is not explicitly reflected in the TRACS evaluative criteria is Library Objective 2, physical environment or facility, so it was placed under 21.2, financial support.

Table 5. *A Comparison of Library Objectives and TRACS Evaluative Criteria.*

Library Objectives	TRACS
1. Collections	21.5 Library & information resources
2. Physical Environment	21.2 Financial support
3. Collection Access/Promotion of Service	21.7 Appropriate access & availability
4. Information Literacy Instruction	21.6 Training & support… effective use of library & information resources
5. Updates of Computer Hardware & Software	21.3 Instructional technology
6. Library Administration	21.1 Strategic, operational, & financial planning
7. Stable Financial Support	21.2 Financial support

Practical Application: A TRACS Self–Study Report

During 2015, SCS wrote a self–study report for its Ten–Year Reaffirmation II. The SCS Library Director discovered that because of years of data collection, the problem was not a lack of information and documentation to support compliance to each criteria, but rather too much. The documentation needed to support compliance for each evaluative criteria was completed before the self–study narrative for the library was started. The real task was to be selective about which documentation to include. Table 6 shows an abbreviated sample of the content for two library objectives.

Table 6. *SCS Self-Study Report: II. J. Library and Learning Resources (2015)*

21.2 Financial Support	21.7 Access & Availability of Resources & Services
– Exhibit: Library Operations Manual, Management, Part II.4.1 Library Budgets & Reimbursements – Exhibit: SCS Library Budget Requests, 2015–2016★ – Exhibit: Library Budget Year-end Stats, 2013–2014★ – Exhibit: Library Annual Report, 2013–2014, "Budget," pg. 9	– Exhibit: Library website: sdcc.edu/library – Exhibit: Library Catalog: sdcclibrary.worldcat.org – Exhibit: Library LINC email, 5/12/2015 – Exhibit: Library Handbook (flyer) – Exhibit: Library Operations Manual, Service, Part III.1.1 Library Services
	★ From LAR binder (raw data, library internal reports)

Conclusion

Academic libraries have the continual challenge to be both agents of innovation and guardians of the status quo. With the ever-present pressures of the academic year, the willingness to create and maintain documentation for the library can be lost in the need to do the job. However, with the use of its objectives as an organizational framework, a library can develop a strategic plan, provide for the annual reporting and assessment of collected data, and produce a working policies and procedures manual which is both useful for the library staff and data rich for the departments and agencies to which it reports – whether it is the institution's chief academic officer, vice president for institutional effectiveness, dean of assessment and institutional research, a national library survey, or an accrediting agency. ☩

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