

A Practitioners Perspective: The Library's Reaccreditation Dilemma

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Abstract

The reaccreditation process from a regional accrediting agency is a daunting task for any higher education institution. This article provides some insight on what regional accrediting agencies consider during the process for mandatory foundational requirements for libraries. The areas covered in this article are adequate library services, access, and adequate collections.

A university that is a Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACS COC) member went through the reaccreditation process from the accrediting agency in 2011. The university received notification from SACS COC that Core Requirement 2.9 for the academic library did not meet the reaccreditations team's expectations. According to the accrediting agency, Core Requirement 2.9 states,

The institution, through ownership or formal arrangements or agreements, provides and supports student and faculty access and user privileges to adequate library collections and services and to other learning/information resources consistent with the degrees offered. Collections, resources, and services are sufficient to support all its educational, research, and public service programs. (SACS COC, 2011, p. 20)

The library staff needs to diligently work together to implement sound policies and procedures that match their mission statement and demonstrate they are providing adequate library services, access, and sufficient collections to meet the needs of students and faculty both on and off campus (Sacks & Whilden, 1993).

Purpose of the Article

The purpose of this article is to provide insight on measures that libraries need to take to be prepared for the mandatory foundational requirement that have to be passed for a college or

university to be accredited through the reaccreditation process. The three areas covered are adequate library services, access, and adequate collections. First, adequate library services will describe borrowing privileges, instruction in the use of services, and user assistance. Second, access presents information on library facilities, hours of availability, and number of computers accessible on campus. Finally, adequate collections contain information on collection development policy, physical collection, database and electronic book access onsite, and remote and formal arrangement and agreements.

Adequate Library Services

Borrowing Privileges

A thorough review of the borrowing privileges needs to be reviewed. The library staff needs to provide documentation of their circulation and reserve services. The length of time allowed for undergraduate and graduate students to utilize print materials outside the library needs to be created and documented. An adequate length of time for faculty borrowing privileges of print resources needs to be determined and recorded also. The policies created for items which the university faculty has left at the library's reserves for students to utilize should be recorded. The library staff must list the types of electronic devices they lend through their reserves section to the students and faculty when they utilize the library. The lending policies of their electronic resources need to be listed. All documentation needs to be placed in a centralized location for administrative and professional staff to have access.

Instruction in the Use of the Resources

The administration and librarians must create policies on how formal instructions in the use of library resources are conducted. Adequate logs of when classes come to the library, the name of the class and instructor and the number of students needs to be created and retained. The administration and librarians need to create methods which allow students and faculty the opportunity to evaluate how the instructions of library resources were performed. Since the library utilizes a room for their library instructions, the number of computers and instruction software which is used needs to be documented (Nelson & Fernekes, 2002). Online tutorials also need to be created for those students who are taking online courses. A link should be provided for students and faculty to evaluate the tutorials on the webpage where the online lessons are available.

User Assistance

The library staff needs to document the various methods of assistance that they can provide students and faculty. The library needs to list the personnel, along with their type of position. The library must document information about their website in order for students and faculty to have access to the library's online catalog, databases, and tutorials (Nelson & Fernekes, 2002). Usage statistics of the library's webpage, catalog, and databases by students and faculty can be documented. Since the reference staff provides the ability to conduct online

chat, the library needs to list this as a service to faculty and students. The library needs to also document they provide links in which students and faculty can send questions via email to them on their website (Nelson & Fernekes, 2002). Finally, the library needs to ensure that forms have been created which allows individuals to request books or articles through their interlibrary loan service. Documentation must be provided to show they provide access to the Interlibrary Loan forms online for distance education students (Nelson & Fernekes, 2002).

Access

Library Facility

The documentation of the library needs to include information about the library facility. The number of square feet and number of floors must be listed; in addition, a general history of the age of the library should be included. Additional information must include the number of seats and study rooms available to students and faculty. The documentation must also include information about the amount of workspace provided for library staff (Nelson & Fernekes, 2002). The number of individuals who have entered the library during an academic year should be listed.

Hours of Availability

The schedule in which the library is open should be documented. The library's schedule is important because it allows students and faculty to know when they can come in to check out materials, obtain resources, and conduct research. The reference librarians' schedules in which they are available to faculty and students should be listed and made available. As a result, the documentation will demonstrate to the accreditation agency that the library's resources and services are available to students and faculty (Nelson & Fernekes, 2002).

Number of Computers Accessible on Campus

The library staff must record the number of computers which they have in the library (Nelson & Fernekes, 2002). The computers are the primary method which students and faculty use to gain access to library databases and some online books. There are times when all of the computers in the library are being utilized. Therefore, the number of every computer which is accessible to students and faculty should be documented. As a result, the number of computers in computer labs and faculty offices throughout the campus need to be recorded (Nelson & Fernekes).

Adequate Collections

Collection Development Policy

The library must ensure that it has a collection development policy which states how materials are acquired. The most important aspect of the policy is that it demonstrates the collection of resources support the curriculum of the university (Nelson & Fernekes, 2002). The policy also needs to state that the collection is adequately reviewed on a continual basis. As a result, age analysis and discarding of outdated resources must be demonstrated. The library staff can demonstrate they review Interlibrary Loan requests when purchasing materials since these are areas where the collection is not sufficient for students and faculty. Finally, the identification of collection strengths and weaknesses must be stated. The collection can be measured against a standardized bibliography or shelf list (Nelson & Fernekes, 2002).

Physical Collection

The library needs to provide documentation of the number of physical resources which are available to students and faculty. The physical items include books, current and bound periodicals, audio recordings, microfilm, and microfiche (Nelson & Fernekes, 2002). The library staff must state how many items have been cataloged and arranged according to the Library of Congress call numbers. Documentation should include that the items are available in open shelves so students and faculty can browse the collection (Nelson & Fernekes, 2002).

Database and Electronic Book Access Onsite and Remote

The library needs to record the number of databases which they have acquired and make available through the Internet. For example, some of these databases which are traditionally made available in academic libraries are JSTOR, EBSCO, and Project Muse. In addition, the number of journals which are available on these databases must be documented to demonstrate that students and faculty have a wide variety of resources. The number of electronic books which the library provides access through the Internet must be also documented. The library must state they provide access to databases for remote students and faculty through their proxy server.

Formal Arrangement and Agreements

The library must document the consortia activities and shared resources. These agreements would include any cooperative agreements in which they are affiliated (Nelson & Fernekes, 2002). For example, many academic libraries in Texas are affiliated with the Texshare program. Through this program, libraries can obtain library databases and employee training at a substantial reduced rate. The program also allows students and faculty the opportunity to obtain a Texshare card which can be used for direct borrowing privileges of resources from other affiliated institutions (Dumont, 2002). An additional consortium agreement which is used by academic libraries is a membership with Online Computer Library Center (OCLC). Libraries utilize this agreement to obtain catalog records which are used in the online catalog. As a result, students and faculty are able to find resources in the library (Jordan, 2009). Since many libraries

utilized OCLC and record their items with them, the Interlibrary Loan department uses the records to determine which libraries have resources that are not at the university library.

Conclusion

Once all the necessary documentation has been obtained and created, the library staff needs to compose a written document which states how the library is providing sufficient library services, access and adequate collections to meet the needs of students and faculty both on and off-campus. They must also provide the supplemental documentation which demonstrates they are providing adequate services and resources. After the text and supporting documentation is compiled, the information needs to be submitted to the SACS COC for their review. The staff needs to also create assessment tools which will allow them to conduct continuous and ongoing assessment. Some standardized surveys like Libqual can be used (Nelson & Fernekes, 2002). Other instruments which can be used are student and faculty surveys over the quality of their service. Statistics regarding the usage of resources can be utilized to determine the quality of their books, journals, databases, library catalog and microforms. The usage of these instruments will ensure the library is continually making improvements in their service, access, and collection.

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