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This worksheet works

Making the DLS Standards work for you

The ACRL Standards for Distance Learning Library Services are increasingly used by librarians who are striving to provide adequate and equitable services to their online learning populations. In an environment where more fully online programs are springing up, more campus-wide strategic plans include moving general education requirements online, and more students than ever are enrolled in distance or online classes,[1] these Standards can be useful for advocacy, communication to stakeholders, and driving goals and direction both for your library as a whole and for your distance or online learning librarian.

The worksheet

Anyone who has worked with these Standards knows just how useful they can be, but the lengthy document can be cumbersome to use in practice. In 2017, Natalie Haber began working to create a spreadsheet to map the University of Tennessee-Chattanooga's distance and online learning services and resources to the Standards. Shortly after seeing her work in a webinar, Andrea Hebert from Louisiana State University and Melissa Cornwell from Norwich University teamed up to flush out the initial spreadsheet. Their work, "But does it scale? Charting the new DLS standards across three institutions," was presented at the Distance Library Services Conference in 2018. From there, the chairs of the ACRL DLS Standards Committee reached out to officially approve and publish the worksheet onto the DLS website for all distance or online learning librarians to be able to use.

The worksheet is a downloadable Excel spreadsheet located on the ACRL Standards for Distance Learning Library Services website.[2] This document is flexible and can work with any size institution. Fields may be removed depending on an institutions' needs. For example, there is a standard concerning globalization that may not apply to all institutions. Each standard has a comment field detailing the definition. There is a column to track how each standard is benchmarked, a column for any planned improvements as a way to track goals and initiatives, and a column for any additional notes.

Mapping goals in this way accomplishes several things. Gaps in service and areas of improvement are readily apparent and can be used as a foundation for future projects and initiatives. Seeing the Standards visually makes information easier for stakeholders to understand, and the worksheet can be used as a talking point to advocate for support. The overview provided by mapping can strategically create direction for program growth, sustainability, and priorities.

Drive goals

Distance and online learning librarians may find this worksheet particularly useful for creating goals for themselves. Mapping a library's services and resources to the Stan-

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dards allows for the obvious questions to arise: What are we doing for this particular standard? And, Are we doing it as well as we can? With those answers, you can easily fill out the "Planned Improvement" column.

Many individual goals and projects might arise from that improvement piece. For example, the standard "Instruction" can easily be met. The definition of it states,

> The library must provide information and digital literacy instruction programs to the distance learning community in accordance with the ACRL standards and other ACRL documents relating to information literacy. The attainment of lifelong learning skills through general bibliographic and information/computer/digital literacy instruction in academic libraries is a primary outcome of higher education, and as such, must be provided to all students.[3]

At the bare minimum, if your library provides any online tutorials, research or course guides, they could be listed here as a benchmark for meeting the Instruction standard, but the librarian could go a step further and list courses or programs with embedded library instruction, or course pages created for specific online classes. A goal might be to engage targeted faculty or departments for expanded information literacy instruction in the online environment. Another might be to design or refresh self-paced or point-of-need tutorials for your website.

In a recent mapping exercise conducted at the University of Tennessee-Chattanooga, the online services librarian created a goal from the standard under Library Requirements, "Availability for All Users";[4] this standard states,

> The library has primary responsibility for making its resources, services, and personnel available to its users regardless of their physical location. Therefore, the library identifies, develops, coordinates, implements, and assesses these resources and services. The library's programs must be designed to meet not only standard informational and skills development needs but also the unique needs of the distance learning community. The requirements and desired outcomes of academic programs should guide the library's responses to defined needs. Innovative approaches to the design and evaluation of special procedures or systems to meet these needs, both current and anticipated, are encouraged.[5]

The online services librarian reached out to her colleagues across the library to add input to the worksheet, and several things were listed as benchmarks, among them: online access to subscription-based e-resources, growing collections of e-books, and a web page specifically geared towards distance learners. This Distance Learning webpage is meeting the portion of this standard that speaks to the "unique needs of the distance learning community."[6] The worksheet spurred on a closer examination of the webpage, and while serviceable, the page is not laid out as well as it could be and focuses too heavily on borrowing privileges, leaving out valuable information about e-resources. Statistics were pulled analyzing the website's performance which showed very little traffic. Now the online services librarian has a formal goal to rework the webpage's content and layout and to try to get the page placed more strategically on other university websites to boost usage.

Advocate for support and resources

The worksheet gives librarians and library administrators powerful information to use when advocating for support and resources for online and distance learning programs. Mapping is an objective process that can direct your advocacy. A completed worksheet gives you an unbiased view of service areas and highlights those that need additional support. Requests backed by objective and documented data are more substantial than those based on a vague need and may be more likely to be given consideration by university stakeholders.

As noted in the "Institutional Require-ments" section of the Standards,[7] college and university administrators in the planning stages of increasing online offerings may overlook the impact online learning has on library services, staff, and budget. When Louisiana State University announced an ambitious plan to expand its online offerings,[8] the dis-tance learning librarian used the worksheet to map institutional requirements to create a comprehensive list of concerns to discuss with library administrators, including the cost of vendor licenses, the need for additional subject-specific resources, technology, per-sonnel, planning, and promotion to support online and distance learners.

While the primary objective of mapping your library's services to distance and online learners is to see if and how your library is meeting the Standards, mapping the services of peer institutions for comparison is an effective strategy for advocacy. If peer institutions offer more extensive services or materials, this chart can visually offer data to justify requests for ad-ditional support. For example, if your institution provides students with research consultations by email and telephone, but peer institutions offer consultations using video conferencing, you can request funding for webcams, headsets, and software to provide parity of services.

Create direction

For institutions with clear goals and adequate support and resources, using this worksheet can help create direction for programs and help answer some questions, including how do the ways that the Standards are met all tie together? What needs to be improved? How can the library make the services and support provided more sustainable moving forward?

At Norwich University, a small, private university, the sole distance learning librarian was accomplishing goals and getting support from the library and the institution but felt there was no overarching strategy for the librarian's job duties, as a whole. This uni-versity, like many, plans to expand its online offerings, so which responsibilities should take priority among the many that may only

increase in the future? How can the level of service and support be maintained?

The Standards speak to a need for a "written statement of immediate and long-range goals and objectives for distance learning library services, which addresses defined needs and outlines the methods by which progress can be measured."[9] When benchmarking this standard, the librarian spurred on a wider conversation about the current role of the distance learning librarian and possible future directions of the role within the library. These discussions led to the realization that the current rate of growth of the online school wasn't sustainable for library support without more help. As a result, responsibilities were shifted so another librarian could assist with goals and objectives support-ing distance learning.

If your librarians find themselves creating tu-torials on demand, embedding instruction when asked, or making reactive rather than proactive strides with online and distance learning, this worksheet may be just the thing to help open up a broader conversation about vision, sustain-ability, and realistic expectations of workload.

Notes
1. I. Elaine Allen and Jeff Seaman, "Digital Learning Compass: Distance Education En-rollment Report 2017," (n.p.: Babson Survey Research Group, 2017), 11, https://www.onlinelearningsurvey.com/reports/digtial-learningcompassenrollment2017.pdf.

2. Standards for Distance Learning Library Services (American Library Association, re-vised June 2016), http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/guidelinesdistancelearning.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

8. David Jacobs, "LSU Sets Ambitious Online Education Goal for Flagship Campus," Greater Baton Rouge Business Report, Janu-ary 17, 2018, https://www.businessreport.com/business/lsu-online-education-goal.

9. Standards for Distance Learning Library Services. ⚡