Assessment Tool for Sociology Collections and Services in Academic Libraries

For institutions that offer only courses in Sociology, not a minor or major.

Approved by the Executive Committee of Anthropology and Sociology Section of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) on January 11, 2010

Preface

This assessment tool may be used by librarians interested in assessing their own collections and services in sociology, by sociology programs, or by appropriate bodies within the American Sociological Association (such as the Departmental Resources Group) and accrediting bodies. It presents guidelines for baseline sociology collections and services for all types of libraries in higher education.

Background

The *Assessment Tool for Sociology Collections and Services in Academic Libraries* grew out of discussions between the Anthropology and Sociology Section (ANSS) of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) and the American Sociological Association (ASA). ANSS was invited by the ASA to produce a universally applicable tool that could be used to rapidly assess collections and services in sociology.

The *Assessment Tool for Sociology Collections and Services in Academic Libraries* delineates levels of collection and service provision based primarily on types of degree programs and levels of instruction offered in the discipline. It provides librarians and sociologists from the full array of institutions with a means to rapidly assess collections and services. Not all facets of the tool will be relevant to each local situation. The tool is an application of guidelines in a rapidly changing information environment. As such it seeks to balance ownership and access in a world in which information is increasingly held offsite — via licensed and open access databases, on the Web, among libraries in consortia and through interlibrary loan and document delivery. This tool should therefore be revised periodically (every five to ten years) as the information environment changes. [i]

The role of the librarian envisioned by the tool is one of partnership with the sociology faculty, and the exploration of this role through the use of the tool is intended to be an opportunity for learning and reflection on both sides. Librarians can use the tool to educate the faculty in sociology about the variety of formats in which items are held, the limitations and strengths of both licensed products and open access materials, and the advantages and disadvantages of on-site holdings versus access via means such as interlibrary loan or document delivery.

HOW TO USE THIS TOOL

Although intended to facilitate rapid assessment some effort is still required in utilizing the assessment tool. It is advised that the librarian or librarians primarily charged with collection development and the provision of services for the sociology program review the journals and monographs held on-site or licensed. Additionally, determination of the research, instruction and curricular needs of the sociology program is recommended.

A. General Administration & Assessment[ii]

Collection Development Policy

1. Is there a collection development policy?

2. Is it articulated and shared with sociology faculty?

3. Has the collection development policy been reviewed in the last five to ten years?

Budget

1. Is there an articulated budget for the library?

2. Is it shared with sociology faculty?

3. Does the budget contain specific allocations for collections in sociology?

4. Have budget allocations been reviewed or adjusted in the last five to ten years?

5. Do actual expenditures for sociology conform to the allocations set forth in the library budget?

Assessment

1. In the last five years has the library undertaken a qualitative or quantitative assessment of the resources and services for sociology? [iii]

2. Were the sociology faculty consulted in the assessment?

3. Were the results of the assessment made available to librarians and sociology faculty?

4. If changes in collections and services for sociology were recommended by the assessment, were they implemented?

B. Services to Sociology

Reference Services [iv]

1. Is there at least one librarian who can answer general sociology reference questions?

2. Is there at least one librarian who is regularly available to sociology students and faculty for individual reference consultations?

3. Is easily accessible virtual reference available to sociology students and faculty who require it?

Instruction Services ^v

1. Does the library offer bibliographic or information literacy instruction in some form?

2. Is the bibliographic and information literacy instruction for sociology students in line with the ACRL *Information Literacy Standards for Anthropology and Sociology Students*?

3. Are the sociology faculty aware of such instruction?

4. Can sociology faculty easily access instructional materials or easily request bibliographic or information literacy instruction for their courses?

5. Are sociology faculty consulted in the development and evaluation of bibliographic or information literacy instruction for sociology students?

6. Are student outcomes assessment data used in the evaluation of bibliographic or information literacy instruction for sociology students?

7. Does the library or institution provide adequate and technologically appropriate space for bibliographic and information literacy instruction?

8. Are the majority of library instruction classes requested by sociology faculty actually delivered?

Liaison Role of a Librarian to Sociology ^{vi}

1. Is there at least one librarian whose responsibilities include liaison duties to the sociology program?

2. Does the librarian discuss collection development with the sociology faculty?

3. Does the librarian make the sociology faculty aware of the full range of services offered by the library?

4. Does the librarian work with the sociology faculty to develop and assess bibliographic and information literacy instruction?

5. Is there collaboration between the librarian and the sociology faculty in the development of outcomes assessment in the bibliographic and information literacy instruction for sociology students?

6. Is the librarian invited to academic seminars and other academic events sponsored by the sociology program?

7. Does the librarian attend academic seminars and other academic events sponsored by the sociology program?

Distance Learning ^{vii}

1. Does the institution offer distance learning opportunities in sociology in any format?

2. Does the library support such opportunities by providing sociology students with direct human access to a librarian knowledgeable about the sociology resources and trained to provide services in sociology?

3. Does the library's support for distance learning explicitly include bibliographic or information literacy instruction to sociology students?

4. Does the library work with sociology and distance learning faculty to develop assessment tools, including outcomes assessment, specifically for distance learners in sociology courses?

Services to Patrons with Disabilities

1. Does the library ensure that sociology students and faculty with disabilities have physical access to library resources?

2. Does the library have assistive technology available to sociology students and faculty who require it?

3. Does the library work with appropriate administrative offices to ensure that sociology students and faculty have other reasonable accommodations provided?

4. Do the library website and other locally produced resources made accessible via the library conform to accessibility guidelines?

C. Resources

Journals & Databases [viii]

1. Does the library subscribe to at least one database that searches for and identifies current articles from major journals in sociology and closely related disciplines? [ix]

2. Can the faculty and students access articles such that research and curricular needs are met? [x]

Reference Materials

1. Does the library provide access to up-to-date sociological dictionaries and at least one general encyclopedia published by a reputable scholarly press or organization?

Circulating Books [xi]

1. Other than textbooks, are the books assigned as reading material in sociology courses held by the library?

2. Do faculty request new books or other materials to be added to the collection?

3. Is there a sufficiently diverse collection of books in sociology and closely related disciplines available for sociology faculty to assign research or paper topics in sociology courses? [xii]

4. If research is required for retention, tenure, or promotion of sociology faculty, does the library have the means to supply books needed for such research in a timely manner? [xiii]

Datasets [xiv]

1. Does the library or institution provide (or link to) a web-accessible research guide on publicly-available datasets?

2. Does the library or institution provide services to identify data sources relevant to teaching and research?

Audio, Visual and Interactive Media Resources[xv]

1. Does the library or institution have a collection development statement for media resources?

2. Does the library or institution's budget sufficiently provide for the maintenance of equipment as well as for the preservation of media resources?

3. Does the library provide the same level of bibliographic access to media resources as it does to other resources?

4. Does the library or institution ensure that the teaching and research needs of sociology faculty in the use of media resources are met?

5. Are mechanisms and resources available for sociology faculty to recommend media resources?

Open-Access Materials

1. Does the library evaluate and make available a full-range of open-access and social communication tools to sociology faculty and students?[xvi]

[i] At present most academic libraries are characterized by a mix of print and electronic materials, items held on-site, in consortia, owned, licensed and open-access materials, and items provided by interlibrary loan and document delivery. The tool takes no position on the balance of this mixture and recognizes that significant changes may occur within the next five to ten years in the composition of library collections, formats and delivery. However, it also notes that interlibrary loan cannot be used as a substitute for good collections. This is in accord with the American Library Association Reference and User Services Association's 2008 *Interlibrary Loan Code for the United States. Exploratory Supplement* which reads in part "Interlibrary loan (ILL) is intended to complement local collections and is not a substitute for good library collections intended to meet the routine needs of users. ILL is based on a tradition of sharing resources between various types and sizes of libraries and rests on the belief that no library, no matter how large or well supported, is self-sufficient in today's world. It is also evident that some libraries are net borrowers (borrow more than they lend) and others are net lenders (lend more than they borrow), but the system of interlibrary loan still rests on the belief that all libraries should be willing to lend if they are willing to borrow".
www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/rusa/resources/guidelines/interlibraryloancode.cfm

[ii] The questions on budget and assessment attempt to rephrase selected 2004 ACRL standards in a way to make them rapidly assessable. See American Library Association. American College & Research Libraries. *Standards for Libraries in Higher Education*. *(*Approved by the ACRL Board of Directors, June 2004).
www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/standards/standardslibraries.cfm Furthermore, the American Library Association. Reference and User Services Association. *Guidelines for Managing Liaison Work in Collections and Services* (Revised version approved by RUSA Board of Directors, June 2001) specifies that budgets, and collection development policies, should be articulated and shared with faculty (as well as students, staff, and other service populations) in academic institutions.
www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/rusa/resources/guidelines/guidelinesliaison.cfm

[iii] It is suggested that beyond the rapid assessment outlined here librarians perform some form of assessment which goes beyond immediate curricular, reference, instruction, and research needs. These assessments could be client or collection oriented. They could then act as the basis for discussion with the sociology program. Possible issues to be raised could include what books the sociology faculty believe should be held regardless of immediate needs, the currency of the present collection, and an appropriate balance between titles held in sub-areas of sociology. Devising and assessing new means of instruction and new ways of providing reference services might be addressed. Such assessments may provide a context in which the library can engage emerging areas of librarianship. Use of interlibrary loan statistics and circulation statistics might be employed. The American Library Association's American College & Research Libraries' *Standards for Libraries in Higher Education (*Approved by the ACRL Board of Directors, June 2004) lists many points of comparison with peer institutions which may be useful for librarians involved in more sustained assessment. Libraries may choose those they wish to explore and adapt them to assessment of collections and services in sociology. The 2004 *Standards* often recommend the use of self-selected peer institutions. It is recommended here that selection of peer institutions for comparisons be those institutions which are both peer (however defined) but which also offer sociology degrees at the same level. Furthermore, librarians might consider selecting the comparison institutions using a random sample once the universe of peer

institutions is defined.
http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/standards/standardslibraries.cfm Finally, Joseph M. Matthews (2008) *The Evaluation and Measurement of Library Services* Libraries Unlimited: Westport, Connecticut is an excellent guide to the evaluation of collections and services. Chapter 8 "Evaluation of the Physical Collection" and Chapter 9 "Evaluation of Election Resources" are especially relevant to the assessment of collections.

[iv] Reference and collection development are now closely related in that reference includes the evaluation of reference sources which can be held in print or electronic format. See American Library Association. Reference and User Services Association. *Definitions of Reference*. (Approved by RUSA Board of Directors, January 14, 2008). www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/rusa/resources/guidelines/definitionsreference.cfm

The questions for assessment of both reference services and reference collections are in broad accord with the American Library Association. Reference and User Services Association. *Guidelines for Information Services*. (Revised version approved by the RUSA Board of Directors, July 2000.) These guidelines emphasize the development and provision of services and resources appropriate to the institution being served with an emphasis on currency of information and equality of access to all members of the institution. www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/rusa/resources/guidelines/guidelinesinformation.cfm

American Library Association. Reference and User Services Association. *Guidelines for Behavioral Performance of Reference and Information Service Providers*. (Approved by the RUSA Board of Directors, June 2004) provide guidelines for reference services. They are especially useful in assessing virtual reference. www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/rusa/resources/guidelines/guidelinesbehavioral.cfm

Further guidelines for virtual reference can be found at American Library Association. Reference and User Services Association. *Guidelines for Implementing and Maintaining Virtual Reference*. (Approved by RUSA Board of Directors, June 2004). www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/rusa/resources/guidelines/virtrefguidelines.cfm

[v] The tool seeks to determine if information literacy instruction is available to students in sociology courses when requested, whether it is easily requested, whether sociology faculty are consulted, whether it is delivered in a technologically appropriate environment, and whether up-to-date standards for information literacy instruction in sociology are used. This delivery of information literacy instruction can take place in a variety of modes, such as credit-bearing library information courses, in-class instruction on library resources at the request of sociology faculty, one-on-one consultations between a librarian knowledgeable about library resources in sociology and a student. Electronic instruction and electronic reference, resource guides in print or electronic form, web pages detailing resources are also other possible modes of instruction and reference delivery, and are essential for distance education classes in sociology. If reasons for non-delivery of reference or library instruction in sociology include lack of classrooms, lack of appropriate technology, or insufficient numbers of librarians, this should be explicitly noted in the assessment. At present no standards, or guidelines, exist for the availability of computers in academic libraries. Moreover it would be difficult to establish such standards in today's changing technological and information environment. This is the conclusion of a committee established by the ACRL's College Libraries Section. See Deborah Malone, Bethany Levrault and Michael J. Miller. "Factors Influencing the Number of Computers in Libraries: An Exploratory White Paper." This paper was accepted by the College Libraries Section of ACRL

on March 31, 2006 and published in *College and Research Libraries News*, March 2007, vol. 68, no.3. The ACRL *Information Literacy Standards for Sociology and Anthropology Students* (Approved by the ACRL Board January 15, 2008) can be found at www.acrl.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/standards/anthro_soc_standards.cfm

[vi] The partnership between librarians and sociology faculty should allow for the full exercise of the librarian's professional role in developing collections and providing services to the sociology program. Such a partnership involves an interchange of views and information in which librarians recognize and draw upon sociologists' knowledge of their discipline and upon sociologists' knowledge of their own and their students' information needs. Sociologists in turn should be able to draw upon librarians' knowledge of resources in sociology and related disciplines, information technology, ethical standards in librarianship, guidelines for information instruction, and other resources available to sociology faculty and students and of the budget and library mission statement. Given that the assessment of library resources depends on satisfying curricular and research needs of a specific sociology program, and further given the increasingly complex and variegated nature of resource collections and services in academic libraries the role of liaison to the teaching faculty and the partnership between teaching faculty and academic librarian, becomes increasingly central. More than one librarian can perform these functions for the sociology program. The liaison relationship here and elsewhere in the tool (e.g. in involving sociology faculty in assessment, in communicating the library's collection development policy) is in accord with the American Library Association Reference and User Services Association's *Guidelines for Liaison Work in Managing Collections and Services*. (Revised version approved by the RUSA Board of Directors, June, 2001.) http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/rusa/resources/guidelines/guidelinesliaison.cfm

[vii] This section relies upon the ACRL's *Standards for Distance Learning Library Services*(approved by the ACRL Board of Directors, July 1, 2008). The *Standards* define distance learners as those receiving instruction "offered away from or in the absence of a traditional academic campus." This definition includes all those receiving instruction in all formats at a distance, electronic and otherwise. The essential point of the 2008 Standards is the full access entitlement of all learners at an institution of higher education to the library services and resources, including direct communication with appropriate library personnel. www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/standards/guidelinesdistancelearning.cfm

[viii] It is the librarian's role to educate sociology faculty about differences in the content of licensed databases, differences in licensed and open-access content, differences in searching methods and capacities among databases (e.g. indexing or algorithmic searching), as well as about the limitations and advantages of specific databases. The library should at a minimum hold licensed databases that provide access to articles in sociology and closely related disciplines that satisfy the curricular and research needs of the program. Full access can be provided by full-text availability in databases, by on-site print subscriptions, or by a timely use of interlibrary loan and document delivery. Sociology faculty and sociology graduate student satisfaction is a major assessment measure. However, a survey of required readings and course assignments for sociology classes compared to local holdings and other provisions for access can indicate whether students have quick and convenient access to journal articles needed for course assignments. As stated above more sustained assessments should also be undertaken periodically.

[ix] It is suggested that the databases be multi-disciplinary ones only if they identify by indexing or algorithmic searching current articles in sociology and closely related disciplines.

Purely archival databases, which by definition do not contain the most current full-text articles, are not sufficient. The essential point is that indexing or algorithmic searching must lead students and faculty to up-to-date articles in the major journals in sociology and closely related disciplines, which are then fully accessible in a timely manner by some means, either on-site in print, full-text in the databases, or by timely use of interlibrary loan or document delivery.

[x] It should be emphasized that this is required at all institutions regardless of level of instruction.

[xi] Assessments of monographs are format blind, provided that materials are accessible and readable in the formats in which they are held.

[xii] Books assigned as required reading material in sociology courses (other than textbooks) should be available for reserve in a timely manner. Sociology faculty should be able to assign research projects in sociology courses which entail the use of some up-to-date sociology books as well as some classics in the field if the sociology faculty member believes this is appropriate. Faculty satisfaction and review of syllabi for courses in sociology are one means of assessing this at Levels One through Three. Some books for research topics in sociology courses may be supplied via interlibrary loan or document delivery, but at least some books used by students for research projects or papers in sociology courses should be held on-site. Books accessible only via consortia should be available for the full term in which they are assigned or, if used for research by students, should be as quickly and easily accessible as books held in the collection.

[xiii] Sociology faculty at all levels should have quick and easy access (via print books held on site, electronic books, interlibrary loan, document delivery or via consortia or some other means) to almost all books required for their research, if research is expected of sociology faculty at the institution.

[xiv] See the American Sociological Association's *A Brief Summary of the Integrating Data Analysis Project (IDA)* for a rationale on the importance of providing numeric data resources and services. Guidelines and standards have not emerged for the acquisition and provision of datasets by academic libraries. This section of the tool is not prescriptive for Levels One, Two and Three. Rather it is intended to raise discussion and reflection on the part of librarians and sociologists. However, it is strongly recommended that institutions at Level Four provide access to web-accessible research guides on publicly available datasets, identify data sources relevant to teaching, catalogue and/or otherwise make available its data holdings, facilitate access to major data repositories or archives, provide access to statistical software and, when necessary for research and teaching in sociology, archive/curate faculty datasets and privately controlled datasets. The questions raised in this section may best serve as a basis for discussion between librarians and sociologists at specific institutions.

[xv] This section relies upon the ACRL's *Guidelines for Media Resources in Academic Libraries* (approved by the ACRL Board in January 2006.) The guidelines address seven dimensions of maintaining a media collection in academic libraries and enumerate best practices for administration, staffing, budgeting, service, collections, facilities and bibliographic access. www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/standards/mediaresources.cfm

[xvi] This could include social utilities as well as social tagging sites for scholarly communication.