Tools and Tips for Academic Library Analysis

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Introduction to the Assignment

In this assignment, you will use the main library at the undergraduate institution you attended as an example to understand the context of the academic library within the institution as well as how the library compares to other libraries. If for some reason your undergraduate institution did not have a library, use the University of Kentucky for this assignment. You will write a 3-5 page paper which describes a general overview of the services of the library as well as summarizes the institution’s and the library’s profile using various education and library science statistical sources.

The purpose of the Academic Library Analysis is to help you uncover some information about an academic library and its college/university. Finding and summarizing this information can help you in better understanding the types of data collected and types of classifications assigned to colleges/universities and their libraries.

In planning for a job interview and in ultimately working at an academic library, it is helpful if you have an understanding of the size and scope of the institution as well as general statistics about its library.
Some information resources that will be helpful in completing this assignment:

National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES)
The NCES is a key place for finding educational data. IPEDS (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System) offers a wide array of data sets and tables. While not directly relevant to this assignment, if you are looking for things like retention data, time to degree, diversity of doctoral students, salaries by gender, or many other specific data sets on colleges/universities, you can find that and so much more in IPEDS.

You can also find total enrollments, total budgets, and other basic information about a college/university. An advantage of using this site is that the data has been normalized. For example, when looking for an university’s total enrollment, you might look at the university’s website, but the number you find may include part-time students, employees taking classes, students in an International sister program, etc.; whereas another university might not count those students toward total enrollment. IPEDS has specific requirements for reporting, so you can be more certain that you are comparing apples to apples when you use data from IPEDS.

NCES: http://nces.ed.gov/
IPEDS: http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/

Carnegie Classification
The Carnegie Classification is a framework which describes the size and scope of an institution, particularly as it relates to research. This can be helpful in making comparisons among institutions as it makes sense to compare institutions within the same classification. Apples to apples, once again.

Find the Carnegie Classification of your institution: http://classifications.carnegiefoundation.orglookup_listings/institution.php

Academic Library Statistics
The NCES collects statistics on academic libraries as well. Academic library statistics can currently be found via the Academic Library Survey. In the future, this data will be part of IPEDS. For now, this is the place to go: http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/libraries/academic.asp

Association of Research Libraries (ARL) Statistics and ARL Investment Index
If the institution you are researching is a member of ARL, you will find a good bit of data on your library here. The ARL compiles the annual Investment Index which shows which institutions spend the most on libraries (collections and salaries). Note that this is purely an expenditure index, not an index that describes level of services or service quality.

No surprise that Harvard remains number one by a landslide.

ARL data: http://www.arl.org/focus-areas/statistics-assessment/arl-statistics-salary-survey

The website of your college/university and its library will contain the information you should need to round out your assignment, particularly on library services offered, details about collections, special programs, etc.

While journal and magazine articles are not required for this assignment, you might find something interesting to share, particularly if your library/institution is known for something in particular. Maybe the athletics department gives funds to the library for every athletics ticket sold. That might be worth digging into, for example. Some good resources for conducting research in our field are ERIC and Library Literature. Google Scholar is often worth a look as well. The guide for the final paper assignment contains additional database suggestions.
Evaluate What You’ve Found

How much information have you found? As this is a short (3-5 page) paper, you shouldn’t need a great deal of information in order to summarize and analyze what you’ve found.

What did you find on the library and college/university website? Did you find that information to be similar or the same to what you found via NCES and other reporting agencies?

Are you still looking for something specific? Ask your instructor if you feel stuck here or have any questions.
It's helpful to read through everything you've found before starting to write. Is there anything notable you might want to comment upon?

This is a good time to work on an outline. The description of this assignment is intentionally broad to give you flexibility, so you can outline your paper in a way that works for you and best integrates the information you've found. You would likely do the same in preparing for a job interview or in providing a report for your library director/dean.

One approach might be to describe the university, describe the library, and then comment upon that library compared to one or more similarly classified libraries. If you find something particularly remarkable about your library or institution (free tuition, the largest collection of maps in the world, a campus where every student has an assigned personal librarian, etc.), you might describe those things in a section.

As you start writing, think about what you've found and if there are any gaps. Is there information you might need to go back and find in order to strengthen your summary?

Cite as you write. You might use EndNote if you don't already. Generally need help with citations? These guides offer help with MLA and APA. The instructor is fine with you using either style guide so long as it is used correctly.
Reflect on the Process

Throughout the process of conducting any type of research and writing, it is helpful to reflect on what you have found and what you have learned so far.

At this point, ask yourself some questions: If someone else reads my paper, are they able to understand and connect the points I make? Do I need more information?

This is also a good time to consider revising and polishing your work. Anyone can benefit from the services of the UK Writing Center, so consider working with them if you have time. You can make an appointment or get help online.
Integrate What You’ve Learned

The research process is an iterative process. While you may have reached “the end,” you may need to go back to an earlier step in the process. Learning itself is an ongoing process, and hopefully this guide helped you work through and think about your assignment.

- What did you learn in completing this assignment?
- How will you integrate this new information into what you already know?
- What new questions do you have as a result of this experience?
- What would you do differently if you completed this assignment again?

Your Academic Library Analysis is due in Blackboard on Friday, October 3 at 5 pm Eastern.

We will have a discussion thread about this assignment in mid-October so that everyone can share what they learned.