

Re-accreditation as an opportunity for improving library assessment: A case study



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Westfield State University's 2023 re-accreditation self-study generated several questions: how can the self-study inform the assessment efforts of library staff? How can the library use data gathered by the New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE), the Integrated Postsecondary Education System (IPEDS), and other reporting bodies to develop an ongoing culture of planning and assessment? How does the data collected for these reporting bodies connect to the larger goals and outcomes of the library and the university?

Goals

- Provide all requested data and narrative assessment to NECHE for re-accreditation
- Identify key library data, document data collection workflows
- Fill in data gaps
- Make library data more easily accessible across departments
- Develop and implement an ongoing planning process that will
 - leave room for multiple types of assessment
 - provide regular opportunity for review and adjustment,
 - proactively prepare the library for external reviews and data requests

Findings

A review of the NECHE standards identified requested metrics that were not routinely collected by the library:

- Materials and staffing cost-per-student data
- Percentage of collections available electronically
- Certain salary cost analyses

There is no documentation coordinating all data collection across library departments. This prompted the Head of Library Collections and Content to draft an updated data inventory to support collection of metrics that are of value to multiple constituencies as well as to document data collection procedures. The Library Director's internal and external scan of reporting procedures identified both challenges and opportunities for tying data collection to library, university, and broader system goals and objectives.

Current Status

With the NECHE self-study underway, the Head of Library Collections and Content is working to ensure the data inventory is complete and reflects the full spectrum of library data, and that reported data align with the library's internal records.

During the Fall 2022 semester, the Library Director has introduced a 3-workshop planning process to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and aspirations, set goals, and tie the library's work more clearly to student success & retention goals set by the University. The planning model has been adapted from that used by the Massachusetts Library System and is designed to be flexible, adaptable, and easily modified as goals and priorities change. A dedicated LibGuide with relevant reading and pre-workshop assignments provides all library staff with a solid grounding for the planning meetings.

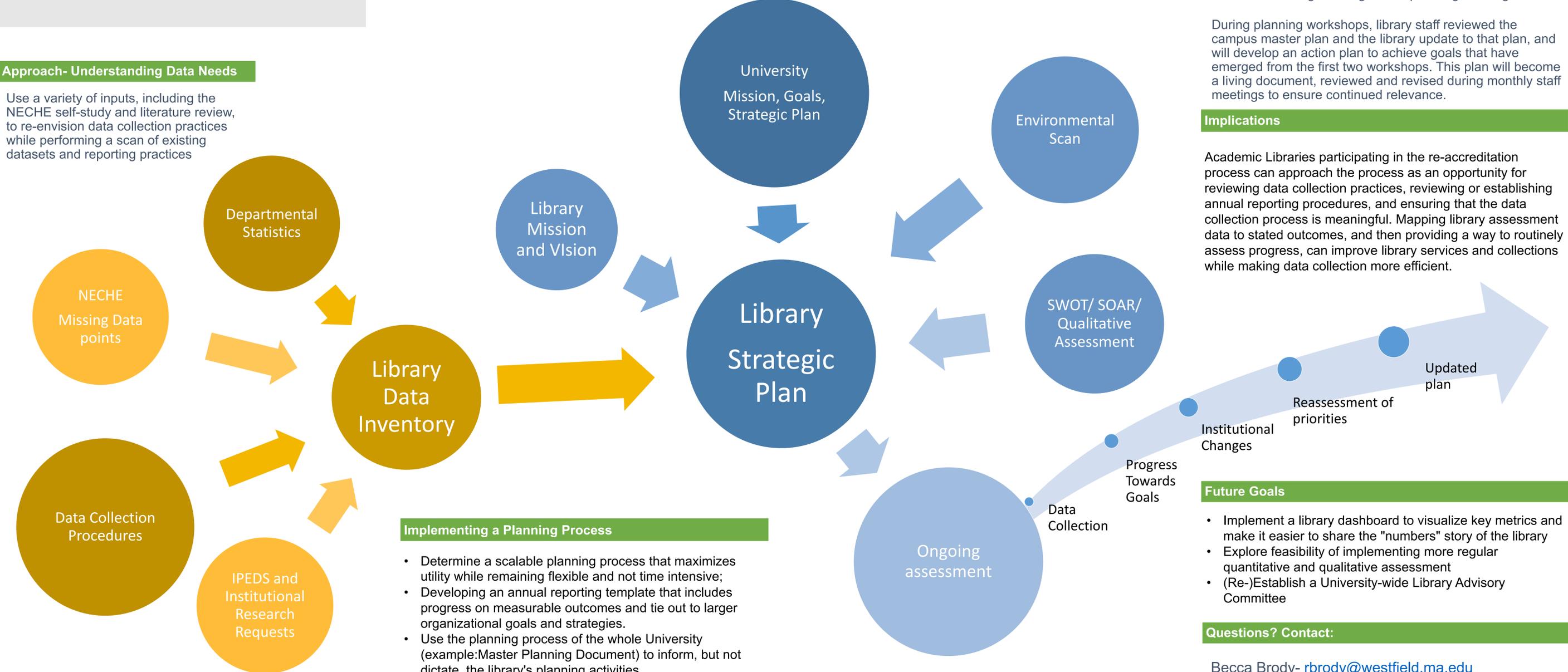
During planning workshops, library staff reviewed the campus master plan and the library update to that plan, and will develop an action plan to achieve goals that have emerged from the first two workshops. This plan will become a living document, reviewed and revised during monthly staff meetings to ensure continued relevance.

Implications

Academic Libraries participating in the re-accreditation process can approach the process as an opportunity for reviewing data collection practices, reviewing or establishing annual reporting procedures, and ensuring that the data collection process is meaningful. Mapping library assessment data to stated outcomes, and then providing a way to routinely assess progress, can improve library services and collections while making data collection more efficient.

Approach- Understanding Data Needs

Use a variety of inputs, including the NECHE self-study and literature review, to re-envision data collection practices while performing a scan of existing datasets and reporting practices



Implementing a Planning Process

- Determine a scalable planning process that maximizes utility while remaining flexible and not time intensive;
- Developing an annual reporting template that includes progress on measurable outcomes and tie out to larger organizational goals and strategies.
- Use the planning process of the whole University (example: Master Planning Document) to inform, but not dictate, the library's planning activities

Future Goals

- Implement a library dashboard to visualize key metrics and make it easier to share the "numbers" story of the library
- Explore feasibility of implementing more regular quantitative and qualitative assessment
- (Re-)Establish a University-wide Library Advisory Committee

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