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# Fitting a Round Peg into a Square Hole: Dickeson's Academic Program Prioritization and Libraries

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## Abstract

In the 2013–2014 fiscal year, Boise State University underwent a Program Prioritization Process (PPP) adapted from Robert Dickeson's *Prioritizing Academic Programs and Services: Reallocating Resources to Achieve Strategic Balance*. The review was mandated by the Idaho State Board of Education (SBOE) for public higher education institutions statewide. The SBOE required a review of all programs including the library. Programs in this case were defined by the SBOE as including "any activity or collection of activities that consumes resources (dollars, people, time, space, equipment)." When beginning this project, Boise State's Albertsons Library had difficulty finding information on other libraries that had undergone Dickeson's prioritization or found that the information available was not detailed enough to be helpful. Developing data and a narrative of meaning to university administrators and the SBOE that was also of value internally for benchmarking and future tracking of library programs and services was a challenge throughout the project.

This paper reports on a survey of other academic libraries reviewed under Dickeson's process, the critical junctures early in the process, and the different decisions made by libraries at each juncture in comparison with choices made by Albertsons Library. Was the library included in the prioritization process and if yes, how? How were "programs" defined? What configuration of library programs resulted? What criteria were used to evaluate each program and who identified them? This paper also addresses the challenge of identifying metrics to measure the success of library programs within each criteria, the most and least valuable aspects of the process and what was learned by undertaking prioritization.

## Introduction

In the 2013–2014 fiscal year, Boise State University underwent a Program Prioritization Process (PPP) patterned after Robert Dickeson's *Prioritizing*

*Academic Programs and Services: Reallocating Resources to Achieve Strategic Balance*.<sup>1</sup> The review was mandated by the Idaho State Board of Education (SBOE) for public higher education institutions statewide. The SBOE required a review of all programs including the library. Programs in this case were defined by the SBOE as including "any activity or collection of activities that consumes resources (dollars, people, time, space, equipment)."<sup>2</sup> When beginning this project, Boise State's Albertsons Library had difficulty finding information on other libraries that had undergone Dickeson's prioritization or found that the information available was not detailed enough to be helpful. Developing data and a narrative of meaning to university administrators and the SBOE that was also of value internally for benchmarking and future tracking of library programs and services was a challenge throughout the project.

This paper reports on a survey of other academic libraries reviewed under Dickeson's process, the critical junctures early in the process, and the different decisions made by libraries at each juncture in comparison with choices made by Albertsons Library. Was the library included in the prioritization process and if yes, how? How were "programs" defined? What configuration of library programs resulted? What criteria were used to evaluate each program and who identified them? This paper also addresses the challenge of identifying metrics to measure the success of library programs within each criteria, the most and least valuable aspects of the process, and what was learned by undertaking prioritization.

## Literature Review

Prioritizing programs requires administrators demonstrate the value of what is done in each of its programs. In a time when state support of higher education institutions is stagnant and the rhetoric in the media seems focused on the rising cost of college degrees, prioritization offers a method of

evaluating programs, reallocating resources, and capitalizing on efficiencies that may move beyond a faculty sense of program ownership and an academic culture resistant to reallocating funds between programs.<sup>3</sup>

Attempts to estimate the value of academic libraries is nothing new. As president of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) in 2006–2007, Pamela Snelson set an agenda of better documenting and communicating the value of academic libraries to stakeholders.<sup>4</sup> Literature attempting to illustrate the value of academic libraries is far too voluminous to discuss here. For an excellent summary of literature on the value of academic libraries and a comprehensive bibliography of the literature, see *The Value of Academic Libraries*, prepared by Dr. Megan Oakleaf for ACRL in 2010.<sup>5</sup> What is new to libraries about Dickeson's approach is the requirement to comprehensively evaluate all activities using the same criteria, documentation templates, and rating instruments as other campus programs.

*Dean and Provost* published a two-part report on a survey they conducted of college and university administrators in the United States, Canada, and the Caribbean to find out whether institutions had plans to prioritize. Fifty-eight percent of survey takers "had a plan in place for academic prioritization or were in the process of creating one." In addition, 88% of the institutions that have a prioritization plan said that the plan includes evaluation of the entire institution. The articles outlined the primary reasons for prioritization, the reasons some institutions had for not planning to prioritize, recommendations for developing and implementing a prioritization plan, and how to choose criteria.<sup>6</sup>

Two publications discuss Dickeson's prioritization process in relation to other models of budget reallocation or program evaluation. In his PhD dissertation, Oren Yagil evaluates decision-making processes related to prioritization during budget cuts. He briefly evaluates different models of budget review, including Dickeson's prioritization process, as part of an overall discussion of decision-making processes when making vertical cuts to programs. Yagil notes that his discussion of prioritization is largely based on Dickeson's book.<sup>7</sup> Dellow and Losinger describe Dickeson's model as excellent and the process logical, "but costly in both

time and funding to implement frequently enough to be practical." As a result, both the authors' institutions opted for a simplified process that looks at enrollment and cost of programs.<sup>8</sup>

The majority of the materials written on Dickeson's process are written by Dickeson. *Prioritizing Academic Programs and Services* is designed to describe the prioritization process from the point of the administrators who will be developing, implementing, and coordinating the process institution wide. The prioritization process is designed to allow different programs across an academic institution to be evaluated equally.<sup>9</sup> For a brief but well done summary of the process, see Grube, Schoon, and Grube's "Program Prioritization: Staying the Course through the Storm."<sup>10</sup>

In 2010, Dickeson surveyed 550 higher education administrators from 300 institutions in the United States, Canada, and Puerto Rico about key aspects of the prioritization process. The survey summary is available on the Education Metrics website (Dickeson's company) and describes the administrators' responses to questions about the reasons driving prioritization, expected outcomes, perceived challenges, evaluative criteria, and potential sources of data for each criterion.<sup>11</sup>

Dickeson stresses that the programs of an institution should revolve around the institution's mission and strategic plan, represent the unique character of the institution and focus on activities that add value to stakeholders (students, faculty, parents, community members, etc.). The process should result in substantive changes and recommendations for improvement at all levels, however the text primarily discusses outcomes for programs in the top and bottom 20% of programs and on evaluating degree granting programs. Non-degree support units such as administration and athletics are mentioned briefly in less detail.<sup>12</sup>

### Survey Methodology

When Albertsons Library was charged to undertake program prioritization, one of the first steps was to look for examples of what other libraries had done through this process. A thorough search of the Internet and higher education literature identified 77 institutions primarily in the United States and Canada that had undertaken Dickeson's prioritization process. However, very few of these

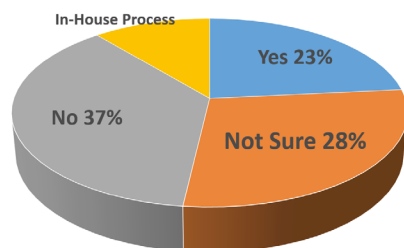
institutions shared the documentation of their process. Those that did tended to share information about degree granting programs only, the end result in general or a ranked list of university wide programs, leaving the actual selection of criteria, metrics, and data points a mystery. Given the challenges experienced with the process, questions arose about how other libraries had handled certain aspects of prioritization.

While developing the survey, it was immediately apparent that the complexity of the process dictated careful consideration of questions to include. Attempting to ask survey questions on every step of the process resulted in a survey so lengthy that few were likely to complete it. In addition, based on the experience at Boise State and information found through research, there seemed to be a considerable reluctance on the part of institutions to share information about the process and outcomes. It was reasonable to assume that institutions would be equally reluctant to share through a survey. Thus a decision was made to

focus on (1) the process of defining and identifying programs, (2) identification of evaluation criteria, (3) general perceptions of the value of the process and (4) the challenges the process raised.

A 30 question survey was designed and e-mail invitations sent to 286 academic libraries at four-year institutions in the United States, including members of the Association of Research Libraries (ARL), Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), and 77 institutions known to have embarked on Dickeson's prioritization process. One hundred thirteen institutions responded, a response rate of 39.5%. Of the 113 institutions, 19 (23%) were among the 77 known to have undertaken Dickeson's Prioritization process, 28% had been through some sort of prioritization, but were not sure it was specifically Dickeson's recommended process. Eleven percent had been through a prioritization process designed at their institution, and 37% said they had not experienced a prioritization process (see Figure 1).

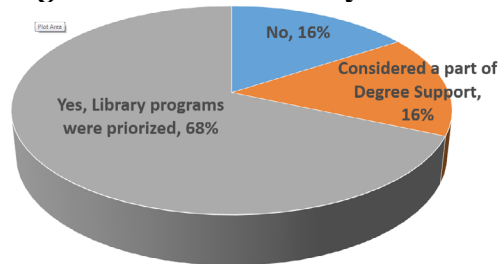
**Figure 1—Within the last 10 years, has your academic institution undergone a program prioritization process based on Robert C. Dickeson's Prioritizing Academic Programs (2010)?**



Given the small number of institutions that had experienced the process, the survey answers may give a hint at variations in how the prioritization process was implemented, but cannot be judged significant. In addition, 68.5% of those who had undergone Dickeson's prioritization process had begun in 2013 or later and the process was not yet complete at the time of the survey. Therefore the number of responses dwindled as the survey progressed into later aspects of the process.

Although the expectation was that institutions had not tended to include academic libraries in the process, 68% of respondents said they were required to prioritize in a process similar to degree-granting units (see Figure 2). Another 16% said the library was included as an indication of the strength of an academic degree granting program such as library materials and services in support a program. This is similar in scope to what *Dean and Provost* found in their survey, where 88% of those with a prioritization plan included the entire organization.<sup>13</sup>

**Figure 2—Was the library included in the prioritization process?**



### Program Definitions

In his book, *Prioritizing Academic Programs*, Dickeson defines a program as “...any activity or collection of activities of the institution that consumes resources (dollars, people, space, equipment, time).”<sup>14</sup> Boise State University and a third of the respondents used this definition or a minor variation of it. Another third of the respondents said a program was defined as any unit granting a degree or major. The remaining respondents described several other methods used to define programs including:

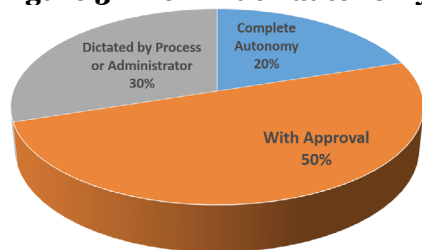
- A budget was divided by operational lines as a method of defining programs
- Each area of the strategic plan a program

- Program definitions were left up to each unit

### Program Identification

Once a program definition is established, the programs that will be evaluated are identified. Respondents were asked how much autonomy they had in identifying library programs. Fifty percent said they were able to choose their programs with approval from a steering committee or administrator (see Figure 3). Thirty percent said the choice of programs was dictated by the program definition, or by a steering committee or administrator. Twenty percent said they had complete autonomy in choosing the configuration of library programs.

**Figure 3—How much autonomy did the library have to identify programs to be prioritized?**



At Boise State, Albertsons Library had considerable autonomy throughout the process, with approval required only of the program and metric choices. At the outset, the library put together a Prioritization Process Team (hereafter referred to as “the team”) of six members selected from among the staff and faculty to guide the process, collect data, and draft documentation. Every library unit head worked with their unit to develop a list of activities within their unit. Each team member then took these activities lists, reviewed them, and gathered activities into no more than 10 programs. The team met, shared ideas, identified several common programs, and discussed how to group the remaining activities. The process resulted in

seven programs. As the team wrestled with the number and structure of library programs, several themes emerged:

- **Mission and Strategic Plan:** Programs must be aligned with the university’s and library’s missions and strategic plans.
- **Audience:** Documentation would be written for several audiences: A small group of raters, the university provost and president, and the SBOE.
- **Departments versus Activities:** Very few activities in Albertsons Library occur only in one department. For example, with the exception of library administration, all library faculty members teach and many serve on the

reference desk even if they are not part of the reference and instruction unit. If programs were identified by departments, how would this interdependence be addressed? If programs were identified by activities, how would resources such as faculty and staff time be allocated to each program?

- **Staff Time versus Benefit:** The more programs, the more staff time is spent gathering data and creating documentation, and there is increased complexity of allocating resources across programs. In contrast, the fewer programs, it is less likely new information would be learned about the library in the process.
- **Maintain Collegiality:** Albertsons Library is a collegial, collaborative place and it was paramount that this collegiality be maintained. The prioritization process requires an institution to rank programs and put them into five equal sized quintiles, which can encourage competition and uncertainty. When *Dean and Provost* asked administrators for reasons why they did not plan to prioritize programs, the fact that the process tends to be divisive was raised.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, as reported by Nick DeSantis in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, a University of Alaska Anchorage professor, “in an e-mail to faculty members,

likened the project to the Hunger Games” where departments compete to eliminate each other.<sup>16</sup> The Hunger Games effect of the process discouraged Albertsons Library from using the departmental structure to dictate programs for prioritization.

- **Risk Assessment:** Identifying the library as one large program would simplify the process. However, what would happen if the library was one program and that program ended up in the bottom 20% of the rankings? What were the chances that the outcome would be positive?
- **Relationship to Academic Unit Process:** In some cases, it was decided to separate an activity into a program because of an assumption that the academic units would be evaluating the same activity and the library could use a parallel process with the metrics and data sources.

Survey respondents with a choice had considered similar factors in deciding on programs. Interestingly two of the areas that carried considerable weight for Albertsons Library, the perceived negative competition from selecting departments as programs and the potentially negative impact of evaluating the library as one large program, were mentioned less often (see Figure 4).

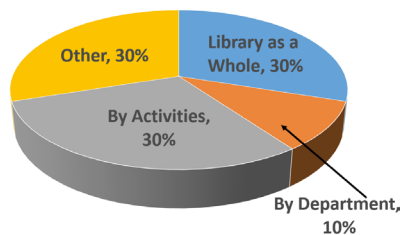
**Figure 4—Library Considerations for Program Selection**

Consideration	Percentage
Match to Strategic Plan	40%
Match to Departmental Structure	40%
Final Report Audience	40%
Match Programs to Available Data	30%
Complexity of Allocating Resources	20%
Staff Time versus Perceived Benefit	20%
Positive/Negative Impact of the Library as One Program	20%
Negative Impact of Competition Among Departments	10%

As shown in Figure 5, the resulting configuration of programs among libraries coalesced into four categories. Thirty percent evaluated the library as one large program. Thirty percent structured programs around activities, and 10% allowed the departmental structure to dictate choice of programs. Among the remaining 30%, programs

were distributed in a variety of ways, for example based on budget lines or facilities (e.g., branch libraries). In one case, the instructional activities of the library for credit bearing courses were evaluated with university degree programs, and the rest of the library services as a group with non-academic programs.

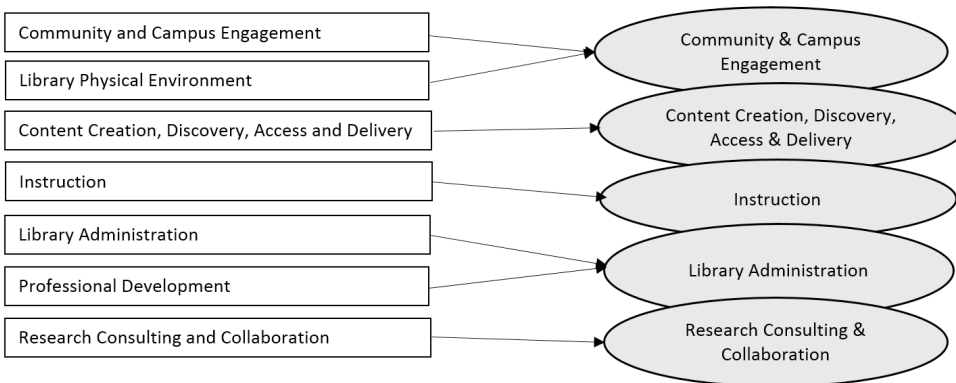
**Figure 5—Survey Respondents’ Resulting Program Configuration**



Albertsons Library started the prioritization process by identifying seven programs. As diagramed in Figure 6, two programs were eliminated as the project moved forward by merging them into the five remaining programs. As

will be discussed later in this paper, the wording of the standardized report template had an impact on choices made early in the process. For definitions of the five programs and examples of what activities are included, see Figure 7.

**Figure 6—Albertsons Library’s original seven programs, two of which were merged, results in five programs**



**Figure 7—Albertsons Library’s Program Definitions**

Program	Definition	Includes (for example)
<b>Campus and Community Engagement</b>	All activities in support of campus and community activities and groups, including the physical surroundings that support research, study, teaching and engagement, and protect valuable resources held in the library	Collection access to community patrons, outreach, events, non-class related presentations & workshops, campus committee work, community service, employing students, campus and community partnerships and collaboration, student computer lab & public workstations, wireless network, printing, iPads & laptops for checkout, etc.; quiet study spaces, collaboration spaces, safety and facility maintenance, configuration of spaces, furniture, etc.
<b>Content Creation, Discovery, Access and Delivery (CCDAD)</b>	Content creation and the collections, personnel, software and processes that allow users to discover, access and receive delivery of materials	Acquisitions, receiving, cataloging, metadata, circulation, ILL, reserves (e and print), link resolver, web pages, mobile apps, Voyager, WCL; Collections, Archives, Special Collections, Scholar Works, gifts, Government Docs, servers, programming support, etc.
<b>Instruction</b>	The design, development and delivery of instruction via in-person & online classes, and through multimedia tools	Teaching, course design, instructional videos, collaborating with faculty to design assignments, development of multimedia instructional tools, LibGuides, etc.
<b>Library Administration</b>	The personnel and resources associated with management and administration of library activities overall, including activities related to library faculty scholarship and professional service and professional development for all employees	Deans office personnel, budget, HR activities, donor relations, network services management, publications, research, professional service, conference presentations, professional development activities, etc.
<b>Research Consulting and Collaboration</b>	Services and activities in support of faculty, student and community users' research	Research support, reference and information services, liaison activities, consulting with faculty and students on data management and metadata, in depth research help, intellectual property, copyright, author rights, open access, etc.

Given 68% of the respondents were just beginning the prioritization process when the survey was administered, very few survey respondents were able to answer questions beyond the process of identifying programs. Among the eight respondents who identified more than one program, the

number of programs per institution varied from two to eleven, with a total of 41 separate programs. While the program titles and configurations varied greatly, many of them are familiar library activities. See Figure 8 for programs listed by two or more respondents.



**Figure 8—Programs mentioned by more than one respondent**

Program Activity	Number of Mentions
Access Services, Discovery	4
Archives, Special Collections	4
Collections and Materials in general	4
Technical Services	3
Administration	3
Research	3
Identified Collections (e.g. Government Documents)	3
External Relations	2
Instruction, Teaching	2
Interlibrary Loan	2
Reference Services	2
IT Systems	2
Specialized Branch Libraries	2

### Evaluation Criteria

The next step in Dickeson's process is identification of evaluation criteria. At Boise State University, the criteria were suggested by an implementation team that managed the process, vetted with input from across campus and used institution wide to evaluate programs, including the library's. When asked about identification of criteria, 67% described a similar process at their institution. Two respondents said campus administration selected the criteria and one institution said campus wide criteria informed the library's choice of criteria.

Dickeson recommends 10 criteria for evaluation of academic programs: history background and

relevance, quality inputs, quality of outputs, costs, revenue generated, productivity, internal demand, external demand, impact, and opportunity analysis. The number of criteria reported by respondents varied from 3 to 10. All but one institution used criteria that followed Dickeson's recommendations closely, with the most common modification the merging of criteria, such as Demand instead of External Demand and Internal Demand. One reported criteria that were uniquely suited to the institution with very little resemblance to Dickeson's criteria. The most common reported criteria are listed in Figure 9. Boise State chose to evaluate programs along five criteria: Quality, Relevance, Productivity, Efficiency, and Opportunity Analysis.

**Figure 9—Evaluation Criteria reported by Library Respondents**

Criteria	Percentage of Institutions reporting
Quality, Quality Inputs, Quality of Outcomes	78%
Cost or Cost Effectiveness	67%
Demand, Internal Demand, External Demand	67%
Opportunity Analysis	56%
Centrality to the Mission	44%
Importance, Relevance, Essentiality	44%

As reported by *Dean and Provost*, the five most commonly mentioned criteria were a program's: enrollment (94%), relevance to the mission (81%), cost (75%), future potential (72%), and academic quality (69%).<sup>17</sup> Results similar to what was found here.

Dickeson's process allows for criteria to be treated equally or to be weighted so that particular criteria demonstrate more importance than others. At Boise State, the group within which the library was evaluated chose to weight the Quality and Relevance criteria more heavily than Cost Efficiency and Productivity (see Figure 10).

**Figure 10—Criteria Weights used at Boise State University**

Criteria	Weight
Quality	0.3
Relevance	0.3
Productivity	0.2
Cost Efficiency	0.2
Opportunity Analysis	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>

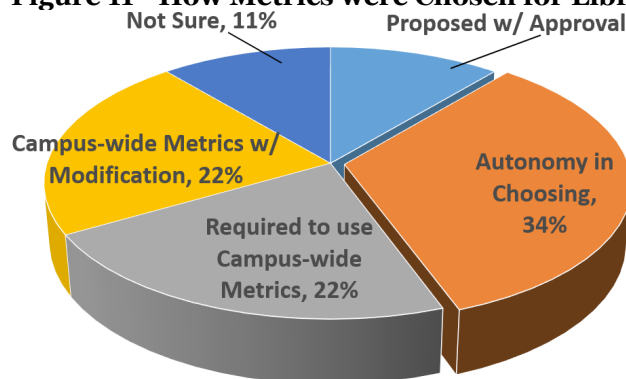
For an example of how weights can be applied by for a larger number of criteria and a sample matrix of how the final weighting structure might look, see Grube, Schoon, and Grube.<sup>18</sup>

program against the criteria. These data points should be comparable with peers, either across campus or within the discipline. Albertsons Library had autonomy in choosing metrics, as did 34% of survey respondents. Other respondents reported using campus-wide metrics (22%) or campus-wide metrics with some modifications (22%) to better fit the library environment. Eleven percent reported that they were not sure as the process was not that far along at their institution (see Figure 11).

### Metrics

Once programs are identified and criteria established, metrics and key data points are chosen to be used to measure the success of each

**Figure 11—How Metrics were Chosen for Library Programs**



At the beginning of the process, Albertsons Library decided to (1) use prioritization to identify gaps in the data gathered and where existing data served little purpose, (2) use existing data rather than gathering new data, (3) choose a few specific data points as representative of each criteria for each program, and (4) focus on data from national sources where peer comparison data was

available such as that from the Integrated Post-Secondary Education Data System (IPEDS) and the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL). The team focused on items where data could be converted to percentages or ratios for comparison, and where long term data illustrated trends in Albertsons Library's performance in relation to peers. The resulting metrics and their

sources are outlined in Appendix A—Albertsons Library Program Prioritization Metrics. In some cases, where data was not available, research studies were cited as examples that potentially demonstrated the impact of the program.

### Program Documentation, Rubrics, and Rankings

Once metrics are chosen, an administrator develops documentation on each program using a standard report template consisting of a series of questions to elicit discussion of metrics and related data. At Boise State, the development of the report templates occurred simultaneously with the identification of programs and metrics. A prioritization implementation team drafted the report templates and rubrics for each division, then the templates were edited and vetted by the divisions that would use them to create program reports. Once the report templates were finalized, scoring rubrics were developed using the same process. Albertsons Library was evaluated as part of the Administrative and Support Programs division of Academic Affairs. Copies of the standard report templates and scoring rubrics used for review of Administrative and Support Programs at Boise State are available in Appendices B and C.

Once the documentation was compiled for each program, the reports were reviewed and rated using the relevant division rubric by representatives from each division and two reviewers who were external to the division. The scores for the programs were summed, a ranking developed, and programs were put into five equal sized quintiles. Feedback was then given to each program administrator with an opportunity to respond to the results, and for each dean or senior leader to move programs within rankings and among quintiles with justification. Summary reports with recommended changes to programs (i.e., action plans) were written and

sent up the hierarchy for evaluation, and a final summary report was eventually presented to the SBOE.<sup>19</sup>

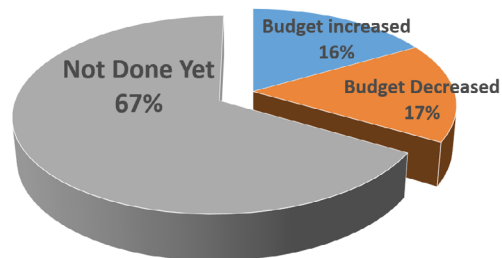
Due to the level of secrecy and discomfort with prioritization and the few libraries expected to have gone through the process, a decision was made at the outset of this project not to ask about resulting rankings and quintiles for each library program at an institution assuming it might discourage participation.

### Outcomes

Albertsons Library had five programs, resulting in one in each quintile. For the most part, the rankings were as expected. In areas where there was a considerable range of data available and good results, the program scored very well. For example, Content Creation, Discovery, Access and Delivery (CCDAD) ranked in the top quintile. As a result of this ranking and the recommendation of the group that scored and ranked the programs, the library received a 0.5% permanent increase in funding for library materials to offset some of the impact of inflation. Where little relevant data existed or peer comparisons were non-existent, a program scored poorly. For example, Library Administration, which will be discussed in more depth in the process analysis section of this paper, fell into the bottom quintile.

When survey respondents were asked about the overall outcomes of the prioritization process, 67% said the process was not finalized. Among the remaining institutions, 17% reporting decreased funding and 16% reporting increased funding (Figure 12). One question this research did not answer was whether the increases/decreases in funding matched the rankings for these programs. For example, did the budget decreases occur where programs were ranked in the bottom quintile?

**Figure 12—Impact of Prioritization on Library Budgets**



**Prioritization Process Analysis**

Survey respondents were asked what they found most valuable about the prioritization process. Their responses were similar both to each other and to the experience of Albertsons Library. Process aspects most often mentioned are outlined in Figure 13. Of particular note, the process:

- Was valuable as a method of educating other units and administrators about the unique aspects of academic libraries and an opportunity to advocate for the library across campus
- Required libraries to
  - Reflect on operations and question traditional practices
  - Identify opportunities for future growth

**Figure 13—What was Valuable about the Process?**

Illuminating Discoveries
Reflecting on Library Operations
Working with Campus Team
Program Documents as Advocacy
Comparison to Other Campus Units
Learning about other units
Opportunity Analysis
Process of Data Gathering

Respondents reported learning surprising or illuminating information that will prove useful as they move forward. A few of the comments received are illustrated in Figure 14. Albertsons Library had a similar experience. In particular, a realization that nearly all of our data collection has been on library materials and the end users of the materials (students, faculty, staff, and community users). Data of consequence to other stakeholders that

would document the value of other programs, such as Library Administration, was not collected. At the outset, the team was most concerned about how to describe the Quality and Relevance of library programs, yet in these criteria our programs scored best while evidence of comparative Productivity and Cost Efficiency was scarcer because data was not collected, reported, or available in national data sets.

**Figure 14—Discoveries from the Process**

<b>Illuminating Findings:</b>
Key Performance Indicators (KPI) are crucial
An enterprise data system is needed for better management and access to data
Library structure is not aligned with strategic priorities
Library Faculty productivity compared favorably to other campus faculty
The process encouraged discussions of strategic directions beyond senior management
In comparison to our peers, we are a lean operation
Internal quality measures have been inconsistently applied
Compared to our peers, our expenses are higher in some areas and lower in others

Respondents were asked what they found most challenging about the prioritization process. Again, their responses were similar to Albertsons Library’s experience (see Figure 15). In particular:

- *Prioritizing Academic Programs* is designed to give guidance to individuals managing the campus wide prioritization process. Little attention is paid to the development of documentation on the part of program administrators
- Dickeson’s process is focused on evaluating degree granting programs, for which he gives detailed instructions and suggested data points. Although he claims the process also works for other units, the book gives little guidance on how to do this, most of which is focused on questions around how budgets can be cut.<sup>20</sup>
- For degree granting programs, the process is driven at the administrative level. As Yagil describes the process, “decision makers following this model provide data to support the criteria...[and] the structure takes a form that leaves the burden of data collection with central administration using the Institutional Research Office.”<sup>21</sup> Much of the data is culled from the institution’s data warehouse, metrics are chosen by a steering group and most of what goes into the program documentation is supplied to program administrators. However, non-academic units are left to their own devices to identify programs and metrics, and to find relevant data.
- *Prioritizing Academic Programs* contends that writing skills should not impact the outcomes of prioritization. However, that was not the experience among the group that worked together at Boise State. Where documentation was poorly written, it was difficult to judge the value of a program thus it scored less well. In fact, the need for writing and persuasive skills were particularly relevant for criteria such as

Quality and Relevance where evidence tended to be more nebulous.

- The wording in the standardized report template sometimes complicated the evaluation of programs. Albertsons Library found that the nature of some questions lead to merge one program into another as documentation did not exist for what was being asked. For example, under productivity was the question “what time is spent on value-added activities that are aligned with program goals or outcomes?” (see Appendix A, Step 4a). The question made little sense in relation to the program “Library Physical Environment” as this program was meant to evaluate the condition of facilities, furniture, and student spaces. Thus Library Physical Environment was merged into Campus and Community Engagement. Similarly, one library reported that the evaluation of a library program was deferred because of a poor fit between the report template and the program.
- Dickeson’s prioritization process relies on comparative peer data for metrics and ideally, metrics are chosen early in the process. However, without guidance, Albertsons Library found it challenging to identify metrics before having a final version of the report template and rubric available. In addition, much of the data available from ACRL and IPEDS was ineffective in demonstrating value. For example, a cost per reference transaction would be an excellent ratio for peer comparison. However the relevant ratios from ACRL included more than just references costs, such as total expenditures on staff library-wide divided by the library’s reference transactions, which grossly overestimate the actual cost of reference. In addition, if campus peer data was not shared, no comparison data

was available for activities such as faculty scholarly productivity.

- Proving the value of library administration as a program was particularly difficult. At Boise State, Library Administration was identified as a program because it was assumed that degree granting departments and college administrative units would be evaluated

and the library would receive metrics and comparative data from institutional research for doing so. For a variety of reasons, that did not turn out to be the case. The team had little guidance on how to evaluate Library Administration. Other libraries reported a similar challenge.

**Figure 15—Challenging Aspects of the Process**

Proving Library Value
Speed of Process
Library Administration as a Program
Trying to Quantify all aspects of the library
Limitations of documentation form & Rubric wording
Lack of guidance on choice of programs, metrics, etc.
Repetitive questions in program documentation form

## Conclusion

Due to the challenges of research into a process this complex and the number of responding institutions just embarking on the prioritization process in concert with the reluctance to share information, this project left many questions unanswered. The academic libraries that responded have found value in going through academic prioritization. If undertaken seriously, the process requires reflection and can illuminate areas where a library needs to better define the value they add to the institution and the key performance indicators that define success. However, in this author's opinion, the process is too complex and time consuming to perform regularly. In addition, the reliance on writing skills puts some program administrators at a disadvantage. Instead, prioritization for academic libraries should be used to identify key data points demonstrative of a program's value so that data can be collected and routinely monitored without the onerous documentation process.

At Boise State as an outcome of prioritization, Albertsons Library is embarking on a process to define one to three key performance indicators for

each program, where data will be actively collected and evaluated via ongoing formative assessments that help document the library's progress in ways that are relevant to external stakeholders and prepare the library for future reviews. The library will be changing the way some data is collected and assessed to better fit our programs, which are closely aligned to the university's mission and strategic priorities. The process holds potential for greatly streamlining the data we collect and analyze, yet more concisely demonstrating our success.

As the need for accountability in higher education continues to increase and more academic libraries find themselves undergoing a similar process, the information gathered here may be of value in their decision making. Indeed, considering library value in terms of a prioritization process may help academic libraries target the key areas of value and importance to their institution and worthy of their focus.

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**Appendix A—Albertsons Library Program Prioritization Metrics**

<b>Boise State University, Albertsons Library Program Prioritization Metrics</b>				
<b>Programs</b>	<b>Metrics</b>			
	<b>Productivity</b>	<b>Cost Efficiency</b>	<b>Quality</b>	<b>Relevance</b>
<b>Library Admin &amp; Professional Development</b>	Administrative FTE:total library staff	Alignment of positions to strategic plan	LibQUAL+ survey results	compliance w/ state and Federal laws
includes budget, planning, etc. and faculty and staff professional development activities	completion of/progress toward of strategic plan action steps	Alignment of positions to university, state and federal requirements for managing resources	Employee evaluations	compliance with State of Idaho agency requirements
	library faculty FTE:publications	professional development activities related to strategic plan	Budget reviews	Ensure Compliance with Boise State policies
	library faculty FTE:presentations	Admin FTE: peer group Admin FTE	Staffing review and analysis	Gather and report data to ACRL, IPEDS, etc.
	library faculty FTE: professional service activities	Staff per Admin FTE: peer group staff per admin FTE	Peer Review of publications	Accreditation Review management
	library staff professional activities	Admin FTE per 1,000 FTE students compared to peers	Juried presentation selection	Facilitate achievement of strategic plan and objectives
		student & staff FTE per 1,000 students compared to peers	Promotion and Tenure process	Best Practice: ALA Library Bill of Rights
		Salary and wages compared to peers		Faculty scholarship informs service decisions
		select overhead expenses compared to peers		
<b>Programs</b>	<b>Metrics</b>			
	<b>Productivity</b>	<b>Cost Efficiency</b>	<b>Quality</b>	<b>Relevance</b>
<b>Content Creation, Discovery, Access &amp; Delivery (CCDAD)</b>	Cost per use data	expenditures per grad student compared to peers	LibQUAL+ survey results	University and college program Accreditation requirements
includes web pages, Cataloging, Metadata, Mobile apps, discovery tools, ILL, Serials, CIRC, Acquisitions, digitization, etc.	Improvements in time to receipt with Patron Driven Acquisitions; increasing requests	Expenditures per faculty member compared to peers	Google Analytics	State Board requirements
	Collection Growth	Expenditures per undergraduate student compared to peers	Project Counter data	Boise State policies on records retention
	use of materials per FTE student compared with peer	Expenditures per library staff FTE compared to peers	Spring Share data on Libguides use	Congressional Mandate on federal depository items

	EBook usage trends	Percent of operating expenditures compared to peers	ILL Turnaround rates	Copyright
	Institutional repository use trends	Materials expenditure trends in relation to peers	Institutional Repository use rates	Digital Rights Management
	trends in use of electronic resources compared to peers	ILL expense trends in relation to peers	Number and type of searches (catalog)	Growth of e-campus activities
	Discovery tools use trends	Overall expenditure trends in relation to peers	Circulation and reshelving counts	publisher licensing requirements; outcomes of lawsuits related to access
	ILL borrowing and lending data per FTE students compared to peers	Revenues	Northwest Digital Archives use data	Relation to specific aspects of campus strategic plan
	ILL turnaround time trends	Consortial agreements what we receive vs what we share/cost	Cost per use data	Demand Trends
			Patron Driven Acquisitions	Best practice guidelines ALA, ACRL, Archives, etc.
				Accessibility requirements for websites & resources
				Use data: physical & electronic collections, archives, special collections, web pages, Libguides, ILL, Digital content, institutional repository
	<b>Metrics</b>			
<b>Programs</b>	<b>Productivity</b>	<b>Cost Efficiency</b>	<b>Quality</b>	<b>Relevance</b>
<b>Instruction</b>	Participants per FTE librarian compared to peers	Trend data in students reached and classes taught	LibQUAL+ survey results	Relationship of instructional activities to university strategic plan goals
includes instruction and instruction tools	Classes taught per FTE librarian compared to peers	Expenditures on instruction in relation to peers	Course Assessments	Embedded in University Foundational Studies (core curriculum), UF 100, 200 & 300
		Partnerships for instruction: university, college, departments, faculty, community	Assessments used via one-shot instruction sessions	Institutional accreditation requirements
			Pre and Post instruction assessments	SBOE standards and goals
			Reference studies of correlation between student use of library and student success	Courses required by college programs



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			Graduate student workshop assessments	Course offered via Idaho Digital Learning Academy
			Feedback from UF Instructors	Accessibility requirements for instructional tools
Programs	Metrics			
	Productivity	Cost Efficiency	Quality	Relevance
<b>Research Consulting and Collaboration</b>	Reference Transactions per librarian compared to peers	operating expenditures per reference transaction compared to peers	LibQUAL+ survey results	Relationship of activities to university strategic plan goals
includes Scholar Works, IP, Data Mgt, copyright, reference	Reference transactions per staff FTE compared to peers	Total staff expenditures per reference transaction compared to peers	Chat transaction analysis and review	Institutional and college accreditation requirements
	Total reference transactions compared to peers	Trends in cost per reference transaction compared to peers		SBOE requirements
	Transactions per week compared to peers	Trends in expenditures compare to peers		Federal data management requirements
	Transactions per enrolled FT students compared to peers	Consortial agreements - what we receive vs what we share/cost		Reference questions trends
		partnerships : Office of Sponsored Programs re: data management		
		Community partnerships		
Programs	Metrics			
	Productivity	Cost Efficiency	Quality	Relevance
<b>Campus and Community Engagement</b>	Weekly gate counts compared to peers	Expenditures on computer hardware & software compared to peers	LibQUAL+ survey results	Relationship to campus strategic plan
includes outreach, campus committee involvement, presentations (non class related), workshops, events,	Traffic per FTE 12 month enrollment compared to peers	Expenditures per FTE 12 month enrollment compared to peers	Campus IT customer service survey	Unique collections
	Campus service per library faculty and staff (university and community)	building traffic trends	BroncoPrint use data	Congressional Mandate on federal depository items
	Trends in technology use	Revenue generated	Technology lending use data	Demand Trends: building use, Special Collections and Archives use, Technology checkouts
	computer lab use data compared to other campus labs	Partnership with other campus units	Traffic flow data	2nd largest student employer on campus

	Bronco print use compared to other campus locations		Social Media Data	largest computer lab on campus w/ longest hours
	Local technology ownership data compared to Educause Center for Analysis and Research (ECAR) data		Demand for study space	Best practices: ACRL, ALA,
				ADA Accessibility guidelines

## Appendix B—Boise State University—Academic Affairs—Administrative and Support Program Documentation Template for University Program Prioritization

### Boise State University—Academic Affairs—Administrative and Support Program Documentation Template for University Program Prioritization

**Step 1: Please identify the program.** A program is any activity or collection of activities that consumes resources (i.e., dollars, people, time, space, equipment, etc.). For your responsible area, please identify the major, significant activities that consume resources and complete one questionnaire for each of these programs. A program may follow org chart guidelines (i.e., a department) or a function (i.e., compliance). Collectively, all activities within an area must be represented within a program. Please keep in mind that areas are encouraged to keep programs broadly defined, so as not to produce more programs that can be reasonably evaluated.

- 1.a. Program Name:
- 1.b. Administrator:
- 1.c. Department/Unit:
- 1.d. Please identify the number of FTE in this program. Attach an organization chart, if applicable.
- 1.e. What are the total costs of the program by funding source (local, appropriated, one time, etc.) and expense category (salaries, O&E, travel, etc., excluding capital expenses)?

**Step 2: Relevance.** This measure is intended to demonstrate the importance of the administrative/support program and how that program is aligned with and supports the mission and strategic plan of the university. In addition, this criterion measures the overall essentiality and demand for its function.

- 2.a. Please describe how this program and its elements (e.g., goals and activities) align and support the university's mission and strategic plan.
- 2.b. Is this this program required? If so, please elaborate using specific examples as evidence.
- 2.c. Are there current or proposed state, regional, or local mandates, or new policies or laws that impact external/internal demand for the program services or operations?
- 2.d. What are the essential services/functions your program provides? Do the actions

of your program align to the core purposes/functions of your program (i.e., depth of intentionality in what you do)? Are the actions of the program informed by best practices?

2.e. What is the demand for these services? And, how is that demand measured? How do you expect the demand to change in the future and what are the drivers of that change?

2.f. For whom are the services/functions provided? Who are the direct, indirect and primary customers?

2.g. Are there any internal or outsourced programs/units providing similar services? If so, how do the services offered by this program differ from theirs?

**Step 3: Quality.** This measure is intended to identify the ability of the administrative or support program to meet its stakeholder needs, including evidence of the quality of services performed and how the services provided meet goals of the program.

3.a. What is your assessment plan/process? How do you assess the quality, effectiveness, and impact of what you do? Include: what you assess, how (i.e., methods), and how often?

3.b. What are your findings from assessment? How effective/well are functions executed and services provided? How do you know you are achieving your outcomes? Please provide evidence from assessment measures, including survey results, etc.

3.c. How do you ensure that data are used to improve the program? Provide two to three top examples of changes that have been made based on the data.

3.d. Please elaborate on occurrences within the program that have an impact to quality of services provided such as training for personnel, staff turnover, etc.

**Step 4: Productivity.** This measure is intended to assess not only the quantity of the program, but the overall impact of the work. In addition, the measure includes a scan of potential improvements that could influence overall productivity.

4.a. Please provide evidence from measures that demonstrate the volume of work performed by this program, such as average turnaround times, and average backlogs. What time is spent on value-added activities that are aligned with program goals or outcomes?

4.b. Please provide external benchmarks, standards, or comparators, if relevant. How well has the program performed compared to these benchmarks?

**Step 5: Efficiency.** This measure is intended to demonstrate the amount of work being performed and how resourcefully those tasks are performed.

5.a. Please describe the scope of duties for each FTE in this program. How well aligned are the position assignments/responsibilities to the core functions of the program?

5.b. Please provide benchmark data addressing how the resources of the program (structure, staff, costs, processing cycles, etc.) and scope of the duties compare with similar/same programs at peer institutions. Please describe why/how the peer institutions were selected as the most appropriate benchmark.

5.c. Does the program have any operations or collaborations that generate revenue (both direct and indirect) or result in cost savings (both direct and indirect)? If yes, please

describe and quantify.

5.d. Does the program foster active collaborations and partnerships to achieve its outcomes and reduce redundancies? If so, what are the collaboration/partnerships and what is gained?

5.e. Are there anticipated changes that will affect efficiency of the program in the near future?

5.f. Have opportunities for savings or additional investments been identified? If yes, please describe.

**Step 6: Opportunity Analysis.** This measure is intended to provide an opportunity to address unmet needs and potential for changes/enhancements to the program that would advance the goals of the university.

6.a. Does the program have unmet needs? How do you know?

6.b. Are there improvements that could be made to save on labor or to improve the product/services offered in the following categories? If so, describe in detail the efficiencies that could be gained.

a. Technology improvements.

b. Business process improvements.

c. Collaborative opportunities.

6.c. What would the program accomplish (e.g., what goals or desired outcomes could be achieved?) if additional resources were made available? What type of investment would be needed and what is the estimated impact?

6.d. What risk factors impact your ability to deliver essential services (funding, staffing, facilities/space, etc.)?

6.e. Do you have resources available to reallocate to another area?

**Other Information:**

7.a. Please provide information that is relevant to the evaluation of the program that is not included in the questions provided above.

**Supporting Documentation Matrix**

If you have attached supporting data/evidence to answer a particular question in the Program Assessment Report (Questionnaire), please identify that document below.

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Question	Name of attached supporting data / evidence	Location in this report (i.e., Appendix A, pp. 25–26, etc.)
1.a.		
1.b.		
1.c.		
1.d.		
1.e.		
2.a.		
2.b.		
2.c.		
2.d.		
2.e.		
2.f.		
2.g.		
3.a.		
3.b.		
3.c.		
3.d.		
3.e.		
4.a.		
4.b.		
4.c.		
4.d.		
4.e.		
5.a.		
4.b.		
4.c.		
4.d.		
4.e.		
5.a.		
5.b.		
5.c.		
5.d.		
5.e.		
6.a.		
6.b.		
6.c.		
6.d.		
6.e.		

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**Appendix C – Boise State University—Academic Affairs—Administrative and Support Programs Review Rubric**

**Boise State University—Academic Affairs—Administrative and Support Programs Review Rubric—FINAL 11.06.13 (PRINT LEGAL-SIZED)**

- 1.a. Program Name: \_\_\_\_\_
- 1.b. Administrator: \_\_\_\_\_
- 1.c. Department/Unit: \_\_\_\_\_
- 1.d. #FTE in the program: \_\_\_\_\_
- 1.e. Total costs by funding source: \_\_\_\_\_

Item	Criteria	Limited/None	Moderate	Exemplary	Reviewer Notes	Score
<b>Efficiency</b>						
5.a.	Position/FTE responsibilities	Positions in the scope of the program are not well-defined, alignment to the program mission/goals is unclear, and/or duties significantly overlap creating a duplication of effort.	Positions in the scope of the program are reasonably well-defined and distinctive although alignment to the mission/goals is unclear and some duplication of effort may be occurring.	Positions in the scope of the program are well-defined, aligned to the mission/goals of the unit, and distinctive in that duties are appropriately assigned.		
5.b.	Resource analysis vs. peers	Compared to peers, the program appears more costly or less efficient or the return on investment is unclear OR identified peers appear to be inappropriate for comparison.	The program appears to be operating on par with peers in terms of cost to operate and overall return on investment AND the identified peers appear to be appropriate for comparison.	Compared to peers, the program appears more efficiently run, with less cost and greater return on investment AND the identified peers appear to be appropriate for comparison.		
5.c.	Revenues or cost savings	The program does not generate revenue or engage in practices/ collaborations that result in cost savings.	The program may generate revenue or engage in practices/collaborations that result in cost savings.	The program generates revenue and engages in practices/collaborations that result in cost savings.		
5.d.	Collaborations/partnerships	Collaborations/partnerships are not identified AND/OR resources are not leveraged to maximize the return from the partnership AND/OR no evidence of the gain from the partnership is provided.	Collaborations/partnerships are identified; resources are leveraged appropriately; and limited evidence is provided to illustrate the partnership's contribution to the program achieving its goals/outcomes.	Value-added collaborations/partnerships are identified; resources are appropriately leveraged; and evidence is provided to illustrate the partnership's contribution to the program achieving its goals/outcomes.		
5.e. 5.f.	Context: Anticipated changes that will affect efficiency of the program in the near future (including any opportunities for savings that have been identified)					
<b>Opportunity Analysis</b>						
6.a.	Unmet needs and sources of evidence				Reviewer Notes	

Item	Criteria	Limited/None	Moderate	Exemplary	Reviewer	Score
6.b.	<p>Identified efficiencies in</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Technology</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Business process</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Collaborative opportunities</li> </ul>	<p>Improvements that are identified appear to have limited capacity to improve efficiency or the gains are not identified. (check as applicable)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Technology</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Business process</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Collaborative opportunities</li> </ul>	<p>Identified improvements have some capacity to increase efficiency. (check as applicable)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Technology</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Business process</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Collaborative opportunities</li> </ul>	<p>Identified improvements are promising and appear to provide strong pathways for increasing efficiency. (check as applicable)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Technology</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Business process</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Collaborative opportunities</li> </ul>		
6.c.	Use for additional resources, investment needed, & estimated impact					
6.d.	<p>Risk factors (funding, staffing, facilities/space, etc.)</p>	<p>The program appears unstable due to multiple risk factors and is not well-positioned to continue delivering its services.</p>	<p>The program has uncertainties in one or more areas, but appears stable enough to continue delivery services and achieve its goals.</p>	<p>The program appears stable and/or well-positioned to continue delivering its services and striving to meet its goals.</p>		
6.e.	Resources available for reallocation					
<b>Other Information</b>						
7.a.	Additional relevant context					
					<b>Reviewer Notes</b>	



## Endnotes

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