



# Competencies for Academic Library Outreach Work

*Approved by the ACRL Board of Directors, October 2023*

## Foreword

In July 2022, the ACRL ULS Academic Outreach Committee formed a subcommittee to explore the adoption of professional competencies for academic library outreach work. The subcommittee included Jilliam Eslami (convener), Sarah LeMire (co-chair), John M. Jackson, Randa Lopez Morgan, Leslie Poljak, and Amanda VerMeulen. In collaboration with William Schaeffer from the ACRL Standards Committee, the subcommittee drafted the following white paper.

## Introduction

### Background

In 2020, Rebecca Metzger and John M. Jackson conducted a mixed-methods study of academic library outreach work for the purpose of developing professional competencies. Their work, published in *College & Research Libraries* in July 2022, included a content analysis of LIS literature published between 2010-2020, a content analysis of job advertisements posted in Spring 2020, and a survey of academic librarians in Fall 2020. As a result of their analysis, Metzger and Jackson proposed 18 competencies for academic library outreach work. In the conclusion to their study, they noted: “As of the publication of this article, there is no set of approved competencies for outreach librarianship in the same way that there are competencies for e-resources, special collections, and reference librarians. The authors of this study encourage future researchers and, most notably, the Association of College & Research Libraries to formulate and codify competencies for academic library outreach work.”<sup>1</sup>

In Spring 2022, Jackson brought the list of 18 competencies to the attention of the ACRL University Libraries Section (ULS) Academic Outreach Committee (AOC) and proposed that the committee work toward recommending ACRL to formally adopt competencies of outreach library work. In Summer 2022, the ULS AOC formed a subcommittee to explore the proposal. In consultation with the ACRL Standards Committee, the ULS AOC drafted a proposal that was shared with the academic library community for feedback. The ULS AOC reviewed the feedback and incorporated recommended changes in order to develop a final white paper.

## **Relationship to other Competency Statements**

These Competency Standards define the most prominent areas of outreach work in academic libraries. While many other competency statements mention outreach or aspects of it - especially marketing and advocacy - as important foundational skills on their own or as aspects of other competencies they do not define these terms through the behaviors, knowledge, and skills needed. In addition to providing concrete definitions of outreach competencies, this document provides guidelines specifically for academic librarians and the specific needs of academic library patrons.

## **How to Use these Competencies**

While the activities and experiences of academic outreach library work varies widely, establishing a core set of competencies will aid our profession in a variety of ways. As Metzger and Jackson note, “Managers can use professional competencies to write job descriptions, define organizational best practices, and assess individual and program performance. Individuals can employ competencies to track personal progress toward proficiency in a field and identify gaps for further training. Library schools and continuing education programs can use competencies to develop courses that educate the next generation of practitioners that libraries need.”<sup>2</sup> While the following list is not comprehensive of every practitioner’s experience, these competencies describe the most useful behaviors, knowledge, and skills needed for academic library outreach work.

## **Proposed Competencies for Academic Outreach**

*It should be noted that the following list is not prescriptive. Not all competencies will apply to all positions. For example, not all outreach requires teaching. However, based on a review of job descriptions and the professional literature, the following behaviors, knowledge, and skills are the most common foundational concepts for academic library outreach work.*

**Advocacy:** Understands the unique ecosystem of colleges and universities, especially of their particular institutions and surrounding communities, and can leverage this knowledge to effectively advocate for the role of the library in academic and student success. Also advocates within the library to promote and harness support for outreach activities.

**Assessment:** Sets programmatic goals aligned with library and institutional goals. Ethically uses qualitative and quantitative methods and tools to understand diverse user needs and experiences, measure impact, incorporate feedback toward improving programs and services, and demonstrate the value of the library to the institution.

**Collaboration:** Collaborates effectively with individuals and teams throughout the library and beyond to define mutually beneficial goals, marshal resources toward those goals, and participate in shared decision-making.

**Communication:** Has adaptive, persuasive, clear, and organized verbal and written communication skills. Regularly seeks new and customized ways to connect with diverse audiences through communication channels used by those communities.

**Creativity:** Draws on their own creativity and other creative resources in designing unique programs and marketing materials that can reach target audiences in a competitive information landscape.

**Diversity and Inclusion:** Is aware of and seeks to continually learn more about the diverse and multicultural communities their libraries serve as well as the intersectional identities of library users. Strives to create inclusive and welcoming spaces, programs, and communications, as well as provide platforms for a diversity of voices in the library's outreach efforts.

**Emotional Intelligence:** Outreach work can be stressful, involving competing deadlines, high-profile activities, and constant social interaction. Practices self-awareness and self-care to manage their emotions and bring empathy to their professional interpersonal relationships.

**Marketing:** Creates ads, print and digital media, and marketing deliverables using specialized design tools and services. Cultivates and maintains the library's online image by using best practices for branding and reputation management.

**Networking:** Cultivates and maintains trusted relationships outside the library. Actively networks with campus constituents and surrounding communities. Reaches out to potential ambassadors and partners to identify connections and support for achieving common goals.

**Professional Growth:** Stays abreast of emerging trends, especially in the areas of student success, library pedagogies, cultural competencies, social media, communication, programming, and assessment and integrates this knowledge into their daily work.

**Programming:** Develops and presents programs and activities that promote library collections and services, foster a sense of belonging, and position the library as a vibrant cultural, educational, and civic center within its community.

**Project Management:** Is able to plan and deliver complex events and projects by breaking them down into discrete tasks with deadlines and assigned responsibilities, effectively using

organizational and communication tools to enable teams to achieve desired goals. Works strategically to create long-term goals.

**Research and Policy:** Uses market research, industry trends, published literature, and needs assessments to develop relevant organizational policies and plan outreach strategies.

**Resource Management:** Harnesses, organizes, motivates, and manages staff and/or volunteers from within and without the library to work toward library outreach goals. Manages funds responsibly by projecting, spending, and tracking outreach expenses in accordance with institutional, state, and federal policies, and ensuring fair and timely compensation for vendors and talent.

**Service:** Uses a patron-focused, holistic approach to meeting the needs of their students, faculty, and campus community members through both traditional and emerging library service models.

**Teaching:** Employs pedagogical methods to design, deliver, and assess instructional experiences that promote library services, collections, and staff to distinct groups, especially lower-level undergraduate students.

**Technology:** Is comfortable learning, using, and teaching new technologies that help connect users to library resources and programs, as well as working with technology specialists to design and implement connected spaces and experiences.

**User Engagement:** Ventures outside the doors of the library to reach students, faculty, and other community members where they are, including virtual spaces. Utilizes relationship building to build connections, serve as a point of contact with library users, and improve other aspects of outreach work.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Rebecca Metzger and Jackson, John. M., "[Developing Competencies for Outreach Work in Academic Libraries](#)," *College & Research Libraries*, 83(4), 2022: 646–668.

<sup>2</sup> Metzger and Jackson.

## ACRL ULS Academic Outreach Committee Members

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