

Handbook of Accreditation

Section Nine

Guidelines for Evaluating Library and Information Resources



The Association of Theological Schools
The Commission on Accrediting

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The Handbook of Accreditation
of the Commission on Accrediting
consists of the following sections:

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Guidelines for Evaluating Library and Information Resources

Standard 5 of the Standards of Accreditation of the ATS Commission on Accrediting identifies those organizational conditions, policies, and resources that exemplify a “best practice” model for providing and integrating library and information resources into the educational programs of accredited institutions. The standard does not specifically define the desired outcome that should result from an adequate coordination of these components. Recent efforts by the American Library Association and various regional accrediting agencies to define the desired outcome of library and information services have developed a concept of *information literacy*. To be sure, Standard 5 reflects and encourages member institutions to develop and maintain high levels of mastery. As defined by the American Library Association, the concept of information literacy—a set of abilities requiring individuals to “recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information”¹—provides a useful perspective from which to assess institutional efforts to implement the best practice model articulated in Standard 5.

For the purpose of this handbook section, *information resources* are defined very broadly. The term includes, but is not limited to:

- print collections;
- archives;
- media and multimedia systems (still images, motion pictures, and audio and visual recordings);
- electronic databases, publications, and media (owned, licensed, or publicly available);
- production and publication facilities (analog and digital);
- computing and telecommunication infrastructures (hardware, software, networks, Internet, teleconference facilities, electronic classrooms, etc.);

- knowledge, expertise, and technical skills of faculty, students, and staff.

Information literacy as an outcome-oriented paradigm does not supersede assessment of the specific elements identified in Standard 5, but it provides an overall understanding of the role of library and information resources in theological education. It encourages collaboration among instructional faculty, librarians, and information technology specialists to foster student learning and research. It facilitates the incorporation of information skills throughout the curriculum. Finally, it enriches students' educational experiences and enables them to become lifelong learners.

For librarians and information technology specialists, information literacy creates a dynamic view of information resources and interpretive services. This dynamic view contrasts with the more static, input-based view of the historic library functions of acquisitions, access, and preservation. It also incorporates technological advances in information transfer and presentation as significant contributors to students' information literacy.

Information literacy is common to all theological disciplines, in all learning environments, and to all curricular formats. An information literate individual has been defined as one who is able to:

- determine the extent of information needed;
- access the needed information effectively and efficiently;
- evaluate information and its sources critically;
- incorporate selected information into one's knowledge base;
- use information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose;
- understand the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information;
- access and use information ethically and legally.

Each institution is responsible for ensuring that its information resources are of the quality, depth, appropriateness, and timeliness

necessary to support the institution's articulated mission, strategies, directions, and goals for student learning, research, and teaching. These information resources should directly contribute to the information literacy of all members of the institution. Effective planning, management, and interpretive services are necessary to achieve an adequate level of information literacy.

These issues are best addressed at the institutional level. What follows are questions to prompt effective planning, administration, and utilization of institutional information resources. Rather than being prescriptive, the questions highlight concerns to be explored to understand the dynamic interaction among institutional mission, information technology, information resources, and information literacy.

General Requirements

- Does the institution have a written plan with criteria for information resources, information technology, and policies for information management? How is this plan integrated into institutional strategic planning and assessment?
- Does the institution—consistent with its size, location, and mission—make use of available (international, national, regional) information infrastructures to advance its own information goals?
- Does the institution have its own information infrastructure that is sufficient to provide adequate and convenient access to resources to all students, staff, and faculty (on and off campus)?
- How are software, hardware, and network resources evaluated and regularly upgraded in response to emerging technology?

- How are institutional information resources strategically integrated? How are administrative computing and telecommunication facilities and the library's technological infrastructure related?
- How does the institution intentionally foster information literacy? Does it have clear goals for information literacy?
- How are information resources regularly evaluated for quality, depth, adequateness, and timeliness?
- How are students, staff, and faculty provided with information literacy skills, including the use of information technology?
- How are the needs of persons with disabilities being taken into account in providing access to information resources and developing information literacy?
- If the institution relies on information resources and/or information technology of other institutions or organizations, how is the relationship documented? Are there appropriate criteria for evaluating the effectiveness and adequateness of the services provided?

Information Resources (Section 5.1 of Standard 5: Library Collections)

- What is the library's policy for selection and retention of its information resources; on what basis has it been developed; how recently was it reviewed and updated; and what evidence exists that the resources are being made available according to the policy? Does the policy anticipate changes in the nature of theological study, technological changes, and increasing diversity of the format of information?

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- Does the library's policy for selection and retention demonstrate sufficient concern for relevant materials from cognate disciplines and basic texts from various religious traditions, and does it demonstrate sensitivity to issues of diversity, inclusiveness, and globalization to ensure that theological learners and researchers have access to the variety of voices that speak to theological subjects?
- How does the library integrate print collections, access to electronic information, and other resources to foster information literacy? Are there adequate policies to guide this integration?
- A theological library's resources and services should seek to serve religious communities and their cultural and educational objectives. Thus, is the library able to identify the parameters of its relevant textual tradition? Is there evidence that the relevant textual tradition is available to faculty and students and that it is being preserved for future use?
- Are the information resources preserved in such a manner as to facilitate long-term retention and future use? Are there adequate guidelines or policies in place to govern preservation and provide for future access? Has the nature of any special collections or archives been articulated in regard to preservation policy, access, staff, and facilities? Is the issue of obsolescent technology adequately addressed?
- In what ways does the library coordinate its information resources with other theological schools; what contributions does the school's library make to the information needs of other schools?
- What is the overall quality of the library's resources in the context of the educational programs offered by the school and the research of its students and faculty? How does the library evaluate the quality of its resources?

- What evidence does the institution have that its library is meeting the informational needs of students and faculty and the school's mission? What evidence is there that its graduates possess information literacy?

Contribution to Teaching, Learning, and Research (Section 5.2 of Standard 5)

- What evidence can the school provide that the library and information resources actively support the research interests of faculty and students?
- What evidence is there of the active involvement of the library and information resources in the various instructional patterns used by the school in its educational programs?
- What evidence is there that the library and information resources are active contributors to student learning? Does this evidence demonstrate that the library encourages students to develop independent research skills and equip them for life-long learning skills? How is the evidence collected and evaluated? How is this evidence incorporated into institutional or informational planning?
- Are library collections and services conducted in a social and physical environment that is conducive to learning and scholarly interaction? How are issues of social and physical environment addressed? How does the library seek to maintain and improve its environmental conditions?

Partnership in Curriculum Development (Section 5.3 of Standard 5)

- How do instructional faculty, librarians, and information specialists collaborate to foster information literacy? Is there evidence of collaboration among faculty, librarians, and information specialists in fostering information literacy in the school's curriculum?
- How are librarians and information specialists directly involved in shaping the use of resources and in fostering the informational literacy of students and faculty? How are they involved in long-range curricular and institutional planning?
- What is the evidence that information literacy is incorporated into curriculum development? How are library and information services integrated into the academic and intellectual life of the school (teaching, learning, research)?
- How do the curricular programs foster and encourage the development of information literacy among students? How is student information literacy assessed?

Administration and Leadership (Section 5.4 of Standard 5)

- How does the chief administrator of the library participate in institutional planning, faculty decision-making, and the institutional budgeting process; how do these patterns of participation contribute to the library's engagement in theological scholarship and fostering information literacy? How are information and library staff, students, faculty, and other administrative officers involved in information planning?

- How does the chief administrator of the library provide leadership for evaluation of the personnel who work in the library, the quality of the information resources, and the contribution of library and information resources to information literacy and the educational goals of the school?
- Does the institution have written policies and procedures for granting access to information resources and technology, including the Internet? Are these policies and procedures clearly stated and consistently and equitably applied?
- How does the institution handle copyright compliance issues and promote a high standard of information ethics? How is this standard of ethics incorporated into information literacy?

Information Infrastructure (Section 5.5 of Standard 5: Resources)

- What evidence is there that the library has adequate technology and interpretative services, including staff, to effectively use its information resources to meet the needs of the school?
- How does the institution recognize the curricular and learning contribution of librarians and information specialists (compensation, promotion, conditions of employment, faculty appointment, etc.)? To what degree are library and information personnel afforded regular opportunities to enhance their professional and intellectual abilities?
- To what degree do the library and information personnel demonstrate appropriate diversity in race, ethnicity, and gender? How does the institution act to ensure such diversity?
- Does the institution have adequate policies for ensuring the freedom of academic inquiry in the use of library and infor-

mation resources? How is the academic freedom of librarians and information specialists ensured?

- How does the school determine the appropriate level of information resources for the library, and what evidence exists that these resources are being provided by the institution at a level sufficient for the library to meet the educational needs of the school?
- How does the school determine the portion of its educational and general budget that should be devoted to educational information resources, and what evidence exists that the school has given adequate and stable funding to support its information services (resources, staffing, physical facilities, and technology), including capital replacements and annual operations?
- In what ways are information facilities and space adequate and appropriate for the educational and research purposes of the institution? How do the facilities foster information use by students, staff, and faculty? Are the facilities adequate for library and information staff?
- As collaborative and cooperative endeavors are important to library and information services, to what degree does the institution participate in such endeavors? How are collaborative and cooperative endeavors structured and evaluated? Is there evidence that such endeavors actually benefit (are used by) students and faculty? How does cooperation and collaboration contribute to developing information literacy?
- In situations where adequacy of library and information resources is based, in part or in whole, on cooperative arrangements, what is the nature of the agreements? Can the institution demonstrate adequate actual accessibility and use? Are such cooperative arrangements formally approved by

all cooperating institutions, and how are these arrangements maintained and regularly evaluated? Does the evidence demonstrate adequate missional and curricular integration into cooperative arrangements?

- Does the institution have a disaster recovery plan to protect and preserve information resources?

ENDNOTE

1. American Library Association, *Presidential Committee on Information Literacy: Final Report* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1989). <http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlpubs/whitepapers/presidential.htm>.