

# 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 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

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

Research and Policy:

John M. Jackson  
Travis L. Jones  
Randa Lopez Morgan  
Dee Anna Phares  
Leslie Poljak  
Jessica Szempruch  
Amanda VerMeulen