

# Project Outcome for Academic Libraries

First Annual Report  
June 2020

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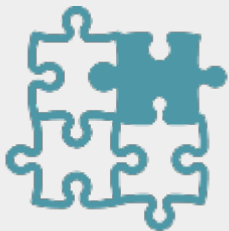


# Introduction

Academic librarians know that their work makes a difference: they set students on the road to success and researchers on the road to results. They provide valuable skills and access to knowledge that helps our colleges and universities thrive. The challenge for libraries is often capturing meaningful data to support that story.

The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) launched **Project Outcome for Academic Libraries** in April 2019, based on a model developed by the Public Library Association (PLA), to help libraries understand and share the impact of essential library programs and services. The free online toolkit provides standardized surveys, a simple process for measuring and analyzing outcomes, and resources libraries can use to apply their results to effect change.

What good did  
we do?



Helping libraries measure four key outcomes



Knowledge



Confidence



Application



Awareness

# 476

academic and research  
libraries have created  
surveys.

They have collected

# 41,400+

responses  
as of April 2020.

Visit:

<https://acrl.projectoutcome.org>

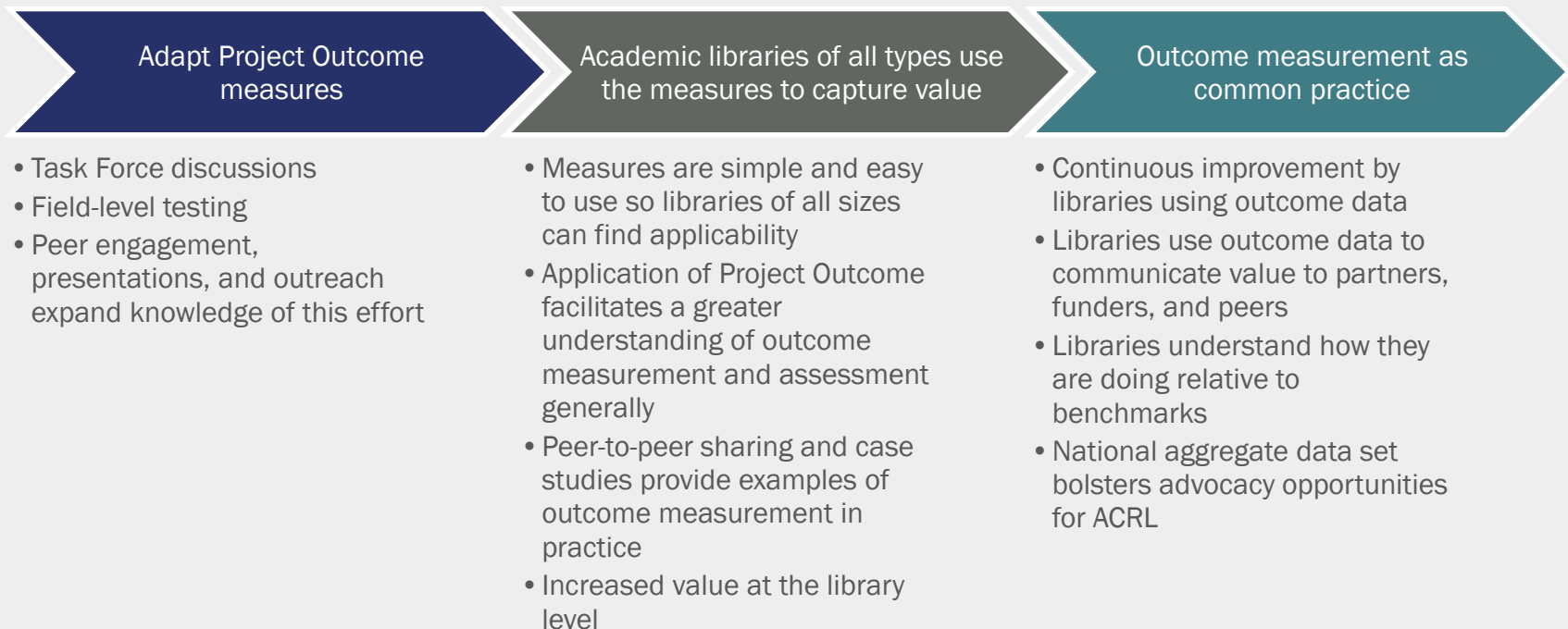
“If you are not already using Project Outcome, I highly recommend it. We used it last fall for library instruction evaluation, and I now have **handy charts and student quotes** from the open ended questions we used that I shared with our new VP for Academic Affairs. She was impressed that I had data handy, and I appreciate **that it shows how students strongly value library instruction**. The beauty of this data is that it is entirely based on students’ own view of **our impact on their success**, so I am not caught up in the conundrums of trying to correlate impact on grades (whenever we try to relate library impact on grades, there are so many confounding variables that may also be positively or negatively impacting students) or other measures. I told her that given the evidence (which our interim president mentions frequently) **that a sense of belonging improves retention**, helping students improve research skills and understand information literacy **counters the imposter syndrome many students feel** when they get a research assignment. [This study](#) notes that both “belonging” and academic success predict retention, and library instruction aligns with both goals.”

- Deb Baker, Library Director, Manchester Community College, New Hampshire

# Theory of Change

The work to develop Project Outcome for Academic Libraries has been driven not only by the desire to provide the platform, but also to provide a valuable model and data that can have a positive impact on the field. The platform, model, and data together can provide value to academic libraries, consortia, and the wider profession. We would like Project Outcome to serve as a standard for the field, engaging more libraries in outcome measurement and other forms of assessment by reducing barriers to entry.

The theory of change outlined below envisions moving towards outcome measurement as common practice: creating a culture of continuous improvement, and using outcome data to understand and communicate the value of academic libraries at the institutional and national level.





# What We've Done

## Development and Outreach

The ACRL Board of Directors established the **Project Outcome for Academic Libraries task force** “to adapt the Project Outcome measures, developed by the Public Library Association, to an academic library context. Collecting consistent outcomes data will allow academic libraries to benchmark at the national and state level and will help ACRL better support its members and mission.”

The task force consisted of eleven members drawn from a cross-section of academic institutions from associate's colleges to doctoral universities. The goal of their work was to create a series of standardized outcome measures that allow for the evaluation of impact over time. The measures needed to be relevant across a range of programs and types of academic libraries. The **seven new survey topics** developed (right) are the final product of their work.



DIGITAL & SPECIAL COLLECTIONS



INSTRUCTION



SPACE



LIBRARY TECHNOLOGY



EVENTS/PROGRAMS



TEACHING SUPPORT



RESEARCH

# Timeline of Development



## ◆ November 2017

ACRL Board of Directors approved the establishment of a task force to adapt PLA's Project Outcome to an academic Library context.

## ◆ March 2018

The task force met in person in Chicago to begin work.

## ◆ June-October 2018

New outcome-based surveys for academic libraries were field-tested by 54 institutions across the United States.

## ◆ February 2019

The final text of the surveys was approved and added to the Project Outcome site.

## ◆ March 2019

Project Outcome for Academic Libraries opened for user registrations.

## ◆ April 2019

Official launch of Project Outcome for Academic Libraries at the ACRL 2019 conference.

## ◆ June 2019

The task force wrapped up its work and the ACRL Board of Directors approved the establishment of a new Editorial Board to oversee Project Outcome going forward.

## ◆ October 2019

First meeting of the Project Outcome for Academic Libraries Editorial Board.



# Toolkit Improvements

We continuously seek user feedback and make improvements to the toolkit with our partners in PLA and the assistance of our web development team, Community Attributes. On-going work has improved the user experience, site functionality, and account management options. The following improvements have been made to the toolkit in the past year:

Google Translate integrated throughout the site.

Carnegie Classification filters added to the data dashboards.

New resource added on “Visualizing Data.”

Mobile-friendly surveys implemented.

Survey introductory text and report text fixed for clarity.

Editorial Board established guidelines for new user case studies and solicited submissions.

New “survey responses viewer” allows raw data to be downloaded from multiple surveys at once.

Revised and reformatted user tutorials.

Published three academic library case studies.

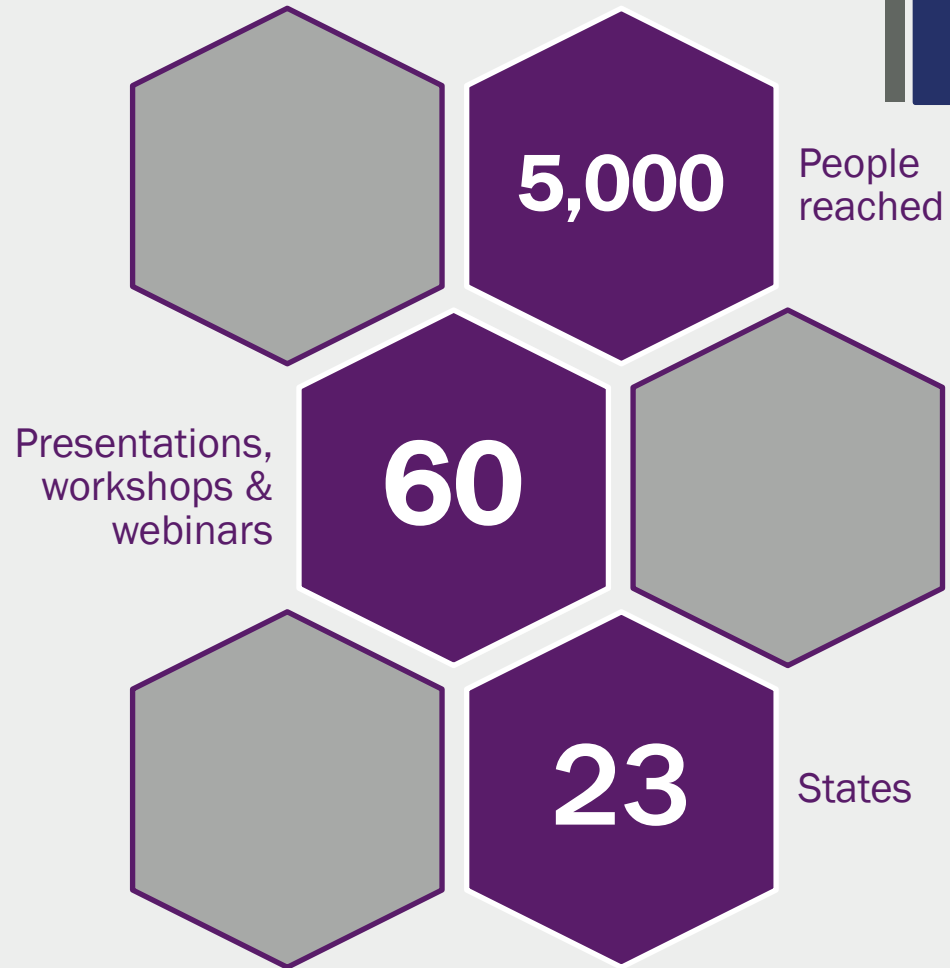




## Learning Opportunities

Over the last two years – since this work began – staff and member leaders delivered 60 presentations, webinars, and workshops on Project Outcome for Academic Libraries. We reached approximately 5000 people live (online and in-person) and the webinar recordings garnered an additional 4000 views.

The majority of these workshops and presentations took place in the year following the toolkit's launch under the scope of ACRL's sponsored workshops series. We reached librarians at events in 23 states, as well as 4 international conferences. The half-day workshops in particular offered an intensive, interactive learning experience designed to not only familiarize participants with the Project Outcome toolkit, but to help them develop a plan to successfully implement it at their libraries.





# Outreach

## Format

- ☒ Half-day
- ☒ One-hour
- ☒ Panel
- ☒ Two-hour
- ☒ Webinar

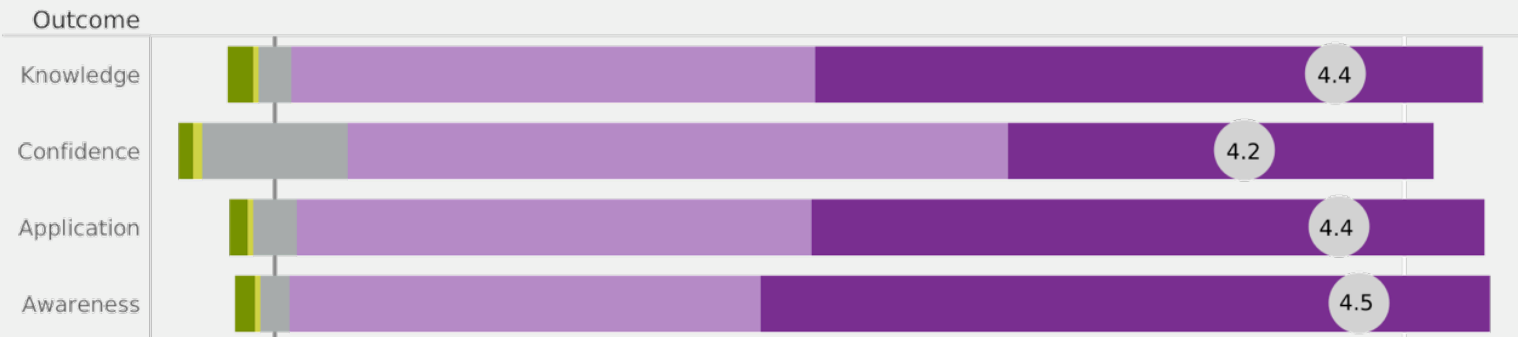
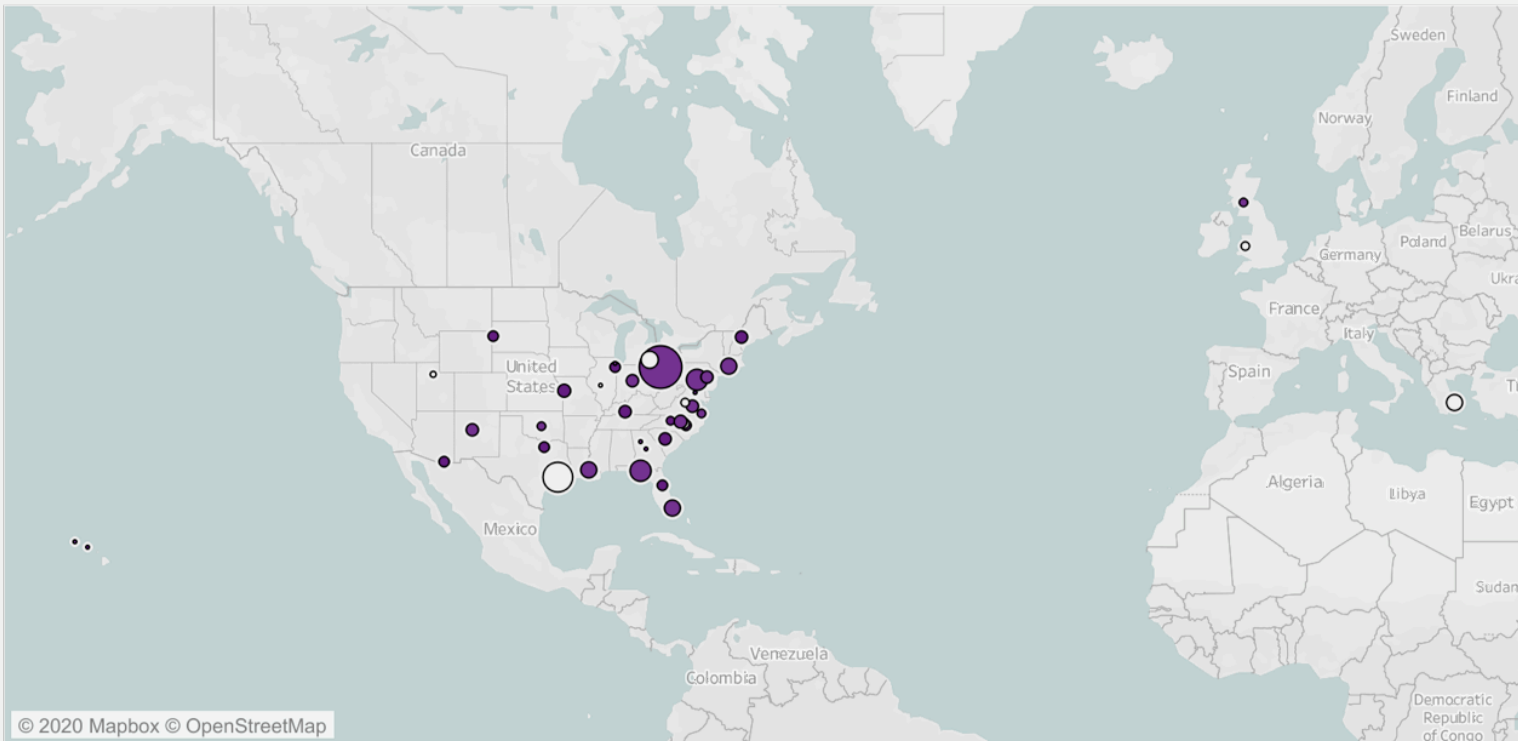
## Audience size

- 6
- 100
- 200
- 310

## Answer

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

The quantitative outcomes are based on 1227 responses to surveys administered at the end of workshops and presentations.



View an interactive version of this visualization [online](#).



# Workshop Outcomes

The survey responses from the half-day workshops included many comments that attest to the value of both Project Outcome and the workshop curriculum:



"I've attended Project Outcome sessions at conferences before, so I knew about this before today. However, it was very helpful to **complete the worksheet with my colleagues** present. Working on this together was VERY helpful."

"Great presenter, great visuals! Highly organized, really **fun and insightful** group work."



"This session was **a tipping point to get started** with this resource. I was familiar, now I'm ready. Thank you!"

"Already have a project in mind to assess and feel **motivated** to do it in the near future."

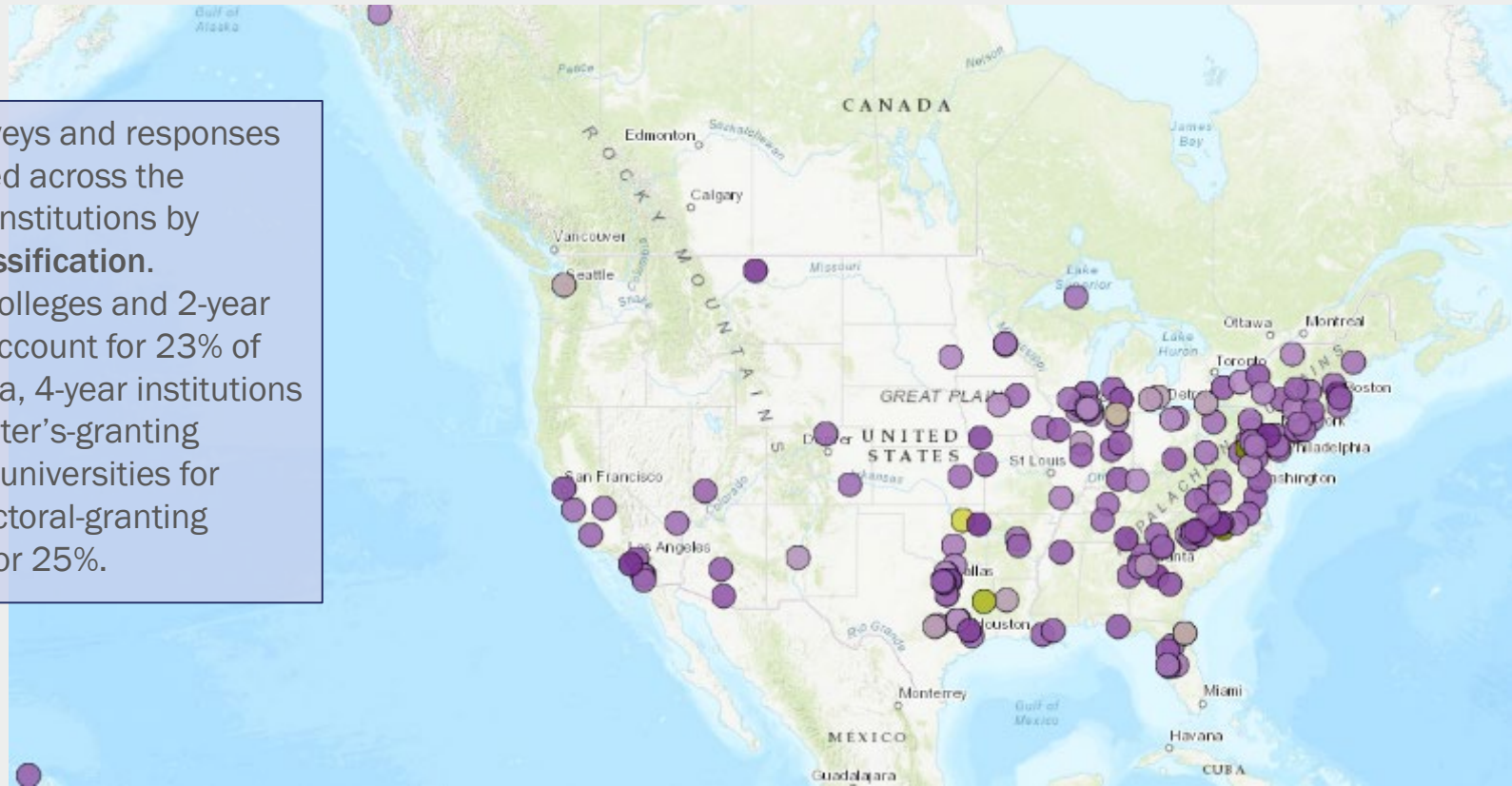


# User Engagement

As of April 20, 2020, Project Outcome for Academic Libraries had **2890 registered users**. The users come from **1104 institutions** in **42 countries**. 476 (43%) of those institutions have created surveys in the toolkit and collected a total of 41,403 survey responses.

While Project Outcome is open to all academic and research libraries globally, the majority of registered users (over 75%) and survey responses (99%) come from institutions in the United States.

Both the surveys and responses are distributed across the spectrum of institutions by **Carnegie classification**. Community colleges and 2-year institutions account for 23% of response data, 4-year institutions for 18%, master's-granting colleges and universities for 34%, and doctoral-granting universities for 25%.





# What We've Learned

## Academic Library Outcomes

Project Outcome provides academic libraries with **ready-to-go surveys** in **seven topic areas**. Each measures four key learning outcomes – knowledge, confidence, application, and awareness – to help libraries understand the benefit of their programs and services.

For each topic, there is an immediate survey with 6 standard questions (4 Likert-scale questions and 2 open-ended questions) and a follow-up survey with 5 questions (3 yes/no questions and 2 open-ended questions). Libraries can add up to 3 custom questions to help them get additional evidence. Looking at aggregate data from across the United States, we can get a **big picture view** of the types of programs and services libraries assess, and how they are doing in those areas.



WHAT GOOD DID WE DO

### Evidence from Custom Questions

The types of questions libraries choose to add tells us about how they are using the surveys and other information they are interested in capturing. For the instruction survey, many libraries choose to add questions that ask more specific outcomes based questions related to the content of the instruction. These include “exit tickets,” asking respondents to name one thing they learned and/or one thing they’re still confused about.

Libraries also use the custom questions to collect other types of assessment data. This includes evidence about:

- Satisfaction, e.g. “was the staff helpful?”
- User preferences, e.g. “which methods do you prefer to use to communicate with library staff?”
- Usage patterns, e.g. “did you use this space today as an individual or as part of a group?”
- Demographics, e.g. “are you an undergraduate student, graduate student, faculty, staff, or other?”





## Instruction

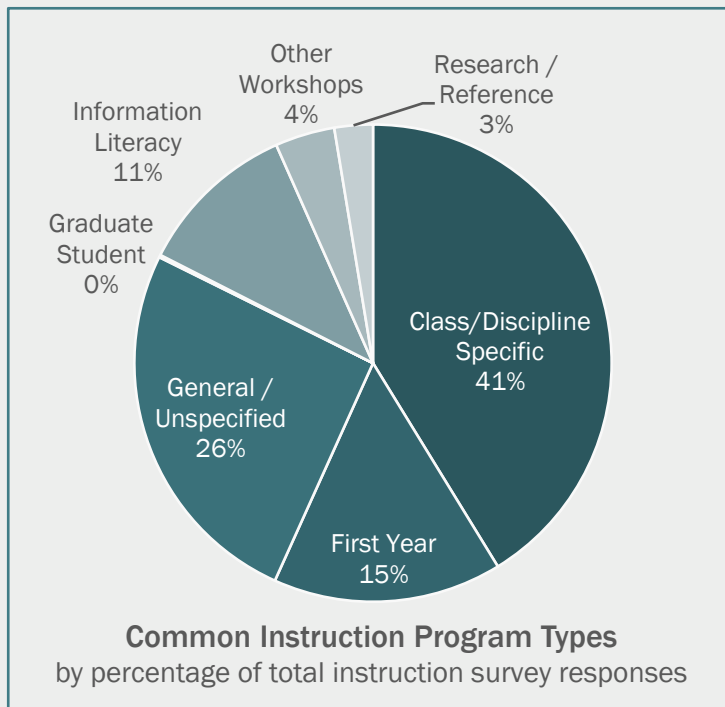


### 1,785 surveys created

32,804 responses to the immediate surveys and

1,826 responses to the follow-up surveys.

The outcomes asked about in the quantitative questions also frequently show up in responses to the open-ended questions. Students report that they learn new skills and about the resources available to them in the library.



The word cloud illustrates responses to the question “What did you like most about this session?” Students appreciate the practical information, enthusiastic instructors, and hands-on activities.



In response to the question “What else could the library do to help you succeed in your classes?” the most common words are “more,” “help,” and “nothing.”

## Space



**79 surveys** created.  
1,103 responses to the immediate surveys and  
101 responses to the follow-up surveys.

Types of spaces assessed using the space survey include study rooms, conference rooms, common areas, and after-hours access.

Many library users appreciate the **quiet** study spaces in the library. They also value group study rooms as places to “**come together and learn**” and the additional resources such as screens and whiteboards that are provided.



A group study room in the Marydean Martin Library, Nevada State College. From: Tiffany Garrett, [Assessing the Impact of Study Rooms](#) (April 2020)

## Library Technology



**38 surveys** created.  
805 responses to the immediate surveys and  
1 response to the follow-up surveys.

Types of library technology evaluated include the library website, equipment in the library (public computers, makerspaces), laptop loans, and software workshops and demonstrations.

In the open-ended comments, users indicated they appreciate the **availability** and **accessibility** of library technology. Asked what else the library could do to help them, most respondents asked for **more resources** and **more availability** of existing resources: loaner laptops, work stations, databases, information about how to use the technology, and printers.

## Digital & Special Collections



**40 surveys** created.  
32 responses to the immediate surveys and  
25 responses to the follow-up surveys.

Types of digital and special collections surveys include digital literacy programs, archives instruction for humanities classes, and programs related to film, photography, and television classes.



## Research



**150 surveys** created.

800 responses to the immediate surveys and

122 responses to the follow-up surveys.

Types of research programs and services assessed using this survey include student consultations and appointments, reference services, data management, and workshops related to sources and citations. These programs were offered to undergraduates, graduate students, and faculty.

In the comments, users shared that consultations and reference services helped them **find sources** and feel **more confident** completing their work.

### 90%

of respondents to the immediate research survey said they **learned something new** that will help with their research.

### 97%

of respondents to the follow up research survey **used what they learned** to complete a research task or goal.

## Teaching Support



**42 surveys** created.

86 responses to the immediate surveys and

4 responses to the follow-up surveys.

Types of teaching support programs assessed using this survey include online instruction support, faculty perceptions of library instruction, and workshops for faculty on topics such as Open Educational Resources.

Faculty comment on how library instruction and consultations help students complete assignments and how their departmental liaisons keep them **updated and informed** about available resources. One faculty member wrote, “The library staff are rock stars in my opinion. Very **willing and able to help faculty as well as students!** Thank you!”

## Events / Programs



**109 surveys** created.

1,304 responses to the immediate surveys.

Types of events and programs evaluated include research and citation workshops, exhibit openings, and lunch & learn sessions.





## Applying Knowledge & Skills

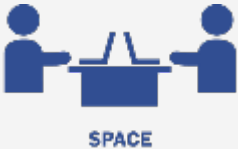


While the follow-up surveys are not as widely used as the immediate surveys, they provide more insight into whether users have changed their behavior or applied their knowledge as a result of their interactions with the library.



**93%**

of respondents used what they learned to do better in their classes.



**94%**

of respondents returned to use the space again.



**95%**

of respondents applied what they learned to other research tasks or goals.



The awareness outcome of the follow-up surveys highlights where

there may be room for actionable change. Though the question language differs slightly for each topic, overall only **51%** of respondents said they used *other* library resources or services. This suggests one interaction with the library is not necessarily translating to as much increased usage as we might like. Libraries should look at the responses to the open-ended questions for insights that may help them make improvements.



# The Value of Academic Libraries

The comments users share in response to the open-ended questions attest to the value of academic libraries – and library workers – in supporting the mission and community at their colleges and universities.

It's a **safe place** to sit and **learn**.

My computer broke and all of a sudden I wasn't able to **complete assignments**. So I started using the library to get my homework finished. It was nice being able to **work late** at night and come back and they were still open.

I love the workers. The environment is very **welcoming** and makes you want to learn.

Love the feeling it promotes. It **motivates me** to continue studying and focus on my career.

I learned a lot of things that are available to me to **succeed** in classes.

[A research consultation] **helped me** to narrow and refine a search in a subject area that is unfamiliar to me. And as a **new faculty member** I received an overview of library services and possible research collaborators.

Everyone here at the Library is so **willing to help** and I **know 100% more** about the library than I knew before this session.



# Taking Action

Project Outcome helps academic libraries apply their results to...

## ◆ Advocacy

Outcome measurement data provides **evidence of library value that can be shared** within the library and with campus administrators. It helps libraries reinforce the importance of their work and create messages for library marketing.

## ◆ Assessment

A library staff member notes, “we have **revised current evaluation measures** in other areas to include outcome data.” While any form of assessment can help libraries gauge the strengths and weaknesses of their programs and services, measuring outcomes can help focus attention on what users learn and therefore the **effectiveness** of those programs. In addition, libraries report sharing their Project Outcome data with campus-level assessment and accreditation offices and including results in promotion and tenure packages as evidence of teaching practice.

## ◆ Partnerships

Libraries have gathered evidence related to **campus-wide initiatives**, including first-year experience programs and others geared towards improving student success.

## ◆ Program Improvements

Having good, consistent evidence can inform changes to library programs and services. Based on Project Outcome data, libraries have made improvements to teaching practices and strategies. As one instruction librarian shares, “I have **modified my classes, handouts, and online materials** based on what students reported they were still having problems with.” Another says they have “revised lesson plan[s] and **incorporated responses** from the measurement in **planning a new online curriculum**.”

## ◆ Resources

A consistent feature of the open-ended response data is that users ask for “**more**” of the types of resources the library offers. Having that evidence can help libraries **make specific funding requests** and prioritize changes. An assessment librarian says, “we expanded the number of study rooms in our library based on feedback received from the Project Outcome library space survey.”



# What's Next

## Improvements and Learning Opportunities

We are always looking for **ways to improve Project Outcome** and welcome input at every opportunity. We have gathered feedback in the form of evaluations after workshops and webinars and a user survey sent to all registered Project Outcome users at public and academic libraries in April 2020. ACRL staff also receive regular comments and queries from users that inform improvements to the toolkit.

Based on user suggestions, **new toolkit features** that we plan to implement over the coming year include:

- a qualitative data dashboard, where users can explore and visualize responses to open-ended survey questions;
- improvements to the survey management interface; and
- database and performance enhancements that will make the site run more smoothly.

The Editorial Board continues to welcome submissions of **new case studies** from users. Guidelines can be found in [the resources](#). If you have suggestions of other resources that would be helpful to users, please email us: [acrl@projectoutcome.org](mailto:acrl@projectoutcome.org).

Share additional anonymous feedback at any time using the [feedback form](#).



# New Learning Opportunities

Are you interested in measuring learning outcomes to drive change, make data-informed decisions, and demonstrate the impact of programs and services at your library?

ACRL offers unique learning opportunities to help you and your library implement outcome measurement using Project Outcome for Academic Libraries. These include:

- **Licensed workshops** that can be brought to any institution, organization, or event. During these interactive, half-day workshops, attendees learn how to use Project Outcome to successfully implement outcome measurement and take action with their results.
- **Introductory, one-hour webinars** for any single institution or organization seeking to engage library staff in using Project Outcome. The webinar provides an overview of the toolkit and an opportunity for attendees to ask questions about implementation at their library.

More information about the workshops and webinars, including costs and how to book one, can be [found here](#).

Questions? Contact us: [acrl@projectoutcome.org](mailto:acrl@projectoutcome.org)

We will continue to offer **FREE Project Outcome webinars** on a regular basis.

These are open to everyone and cover a range of topics related to learning outcomes and assessment.

Learn about upcoming webinars on the [events page](#) and view recordings of past webinars in [the resources](#).

# Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the ACRL Board of Directors for initially seeing the potential of Project Outcome to support our members and the association's strategic vision, and for their continued support of this project.

This work would not have been possible without the member leaders and volunteers who lent it their expertise, especially the dedicated members of the Project Outcome for Academic Libraries Task Force and Project Outcome for Academic Libraries Editorial Board: Eric Ackermann, Jennifer Arnold, Smita Avasthi, Steve Borrelli, Nicole Brown, Greg Davis, Amanda Folk, Tiffany Garrett, Julie Garrison, Sue Hunter, Kelly Jacobsma, Kimberley Miller, Mary O'Kelly, Lauren Pressley, Devin Savage, Diana Symons, and Terry Taylor.

