REVIEW OF ARL E-METRICS PHASE II

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Shim, W., McClure, C.R., Fraser, B.T., Bertot, J.C., Dagli, A., Leahy, E.H. *Measures and Statistics for Research – Library Networked Services: Procedures and Issues. ARL E-Metrics Phase II Report October 2001.* Washington, D.C. Association of Research Libraries (ARL), pp. 101. http://www.arl.org/stats/newmeas/emetrics/index.html

This is what the electronic measurement community has been waiting for. It formed the basis for Rush Miller's Conference presentation, published in this issue of *Serials*, but has been published since the conference. It is the fruit of the E-Metrics programme mounted by ARL for the past few years. While the consultancy is not yet quite complete – Phase III is to still come – the essential issues have now been thoroughly explored and the team has produced a comprehensive Manual that will be the 'gospel' for workers in this area for some time to come. There are, of course, sensible reservations concerning the pace of change and technological surprises around the corner. There is still much work to do to get database and journal suppliers to provide data standardised for content and format, as was discussed at the autumn conference. But this report comes close to being the ideal recipe and framework for the medium term future.

There are three main sections. First is an overview of the context and issues, the contextual framework, outlining reasons for measuring networked services and the prospect of more complete statistics than were possible with conventional materials. Second is the pragmatic part – a review of the field testing work carried out and an analysis of the present state of vendor statistics. Finally there is the 'Data Collection Manual', giving recommended network statistics with their definitions and collection procedures.

The writing is of outstanding quality: it combines sound generalisation with detailed description and examples drawn from the extensive field work. This reflects the amount of detailed research that has been undertaken and incorporated in the finished product. Academic libraries, both in North America and elsewhere, are some years ahead of public libraries in provision of electronic services. Thus this report is more satisfactory than the public library manual produced last summer by many of the same authors. Too often reports of this nature are overweight with generalisation and exhortation: not so here. Both the academics and the ARL administrators deserve our respect and congratulations on this splendid achievement.

There is not space here to go into much detail. The section on 'suggested performance measures' is over brief, but now that the base is established the generation of more performance measures will be straightforward. The relation of this work to the larger ARL statistics context has yet to be explored. Similarly the need to address statistics of 'freely available databases and library-created finding aids' is for the future. E-books are, however, already well covered. The definition of 'electronic reference sources' (R2) is clear and comprehensive, but the need for categories of database to be analysed is not spelt out to this reviewer. This is the only serious weakness in the overall structure.

This publication is particularly timely. In 2000 and 2001 there were important contributions to the debate (Luther, 2000; Blecic *et al.*, 2001; Tenopir and Read, 2000; etc.) and now we have a new revision of the ICOLC Guidelines (2001). Consensus has become the order of the day and this is synthesised in the ARL E-Metrics Manual. All of a sudden librarians engaged in collecting these statistics have gone from famine to feast and are now well provided with the intellectual tools to get on and measure the hybrid library scene.

This report is likely to become essential to the intellectual tool chest in the same way that the

ALA Manuals of Van House *et al*. did for performance measurement a decade ago. It is essential reading and reference material. It is therefore disappointing that, so far, the hard copy version has only been produced in a small run of complimentary copies. When Phase III of the project is complete a hard copy version is projected to supplement the web version: that cannot come too soon!

References

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