
Book Review

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Assessment Strategies in Technical Services (An ALCTS Monograph). Eds. Kimberley A. Edwards and Michelle Leonard. Chicago: ALA Editions, 2019. 272 p. \$69.99 softcover (ISBN 978-0-8389-1857-9).

Assessment of all library services is essential to meeting user needs, and more than ever, it is critical to practice assessment consistently within library technical services departments. Rising costs, space issues, budget issues, changing models within the publishing industry, and providing resources that meet users' needs all have a role in this criticality. Long-standing assessment practices that are likely numbers-based and rely on "how much" of a certain area, such as how many books were purchased or how many new items were added to the collection during a given time-frame, are only a piece of the broader picture of assessment. Statistics have their time and place in library assessment, and *Assessment Strategies in Technical Services* provides a detailed, well-organized introduction to methods that technical services staff can use to either rethink or establish a culture of assessment within their department units.

In chapter 1, Botero and Curricco provide a broad overview of library technical services, noting that today's technical services departments typically represent acquisitions, cataloging, preservation, and serials units. These four areas make up the focus of this book. The overview of traditional and contemporary methods of assessment in the areas of acquisitions/collection development, cataloging/metadata, digital preservation, and e-resources/serials is a helpful orientation to the current environment for technical services assessment. The comparison of traditional against contemporary methods is not only helpful in getting a full picture of technical services assessment but also bringing to light that many contemporary methods rely on a more holistic approach where technical services assessment is "part of the larger assessment strategies of the library" when that has not been the case in the past (1).

Chapter 2 is "Assessing Collections Holistically," wherein the authors Kelly and Smith detail their experience with holistic collections assessment at George Mason University (GMU). The authors take the time to explore defining holistic collections assessment—loosely defined as blending multiple assessment methods rather than using one or two assessment instruments—and details both its benefits and challenges through their use of holistic collections assessment of GMU's collections. Easily the most practicable part of the chapter is the methodologies section where Kelly and Smith provide detailed charts and systematic examples for

specific strategies, such as how to select assessment data or holdings' comparisons against peer institutions, to name a couple examples.

Chapters 3 and 4 address acquisitions/e-resources and serials/continuing resources, respectively. Chapter 3 is highly recommended for those new to assessing acquisitions work as the authors Shelton and Curricco specifically detail how to begin acquisitions assessment, and what exactly ought to be assessed in today's acquisitions environment. Calvert and Jordan continue with serials assessment in the following chapter through an examination of methods and challenges of assessing both print and electronic serials. One idea that this reviewer thought Calvert and Jordan expressed particularly well is that assessment is good stewardship of the collections budget (109). This line of thinking is obvious with serials and their constantly rising prices, but beyond the collections budget, assessment being good stewardship demonstrates why assessment work is *necessary*. It is not enough to maintain a library's collection and hope that users find the resources that they need.

Chapter 5 highlights assessment of cataloging and metadata, with specific focus on the three strategies of benchmarking, user surveys, and balanced score cards (BSC). Pettitt details these strategies, focusing on the significant challenges of assessing cataloging and metadata work: no two cataloging departments are the same; workloads are divided differently on staff position versus professional librarian, the time spent on copy, complex copy, or original cataloging can vary widely, etc. For example, benchmarking, defined as "a process in which a comparison is made between the unit being assessed and a similar unit in another organization or department" particularly intrigued this reviewer, as a cataloging department manager (159). However, Pettitt adeptly points out that the benefits of benchmarking are tricky to achieve within cataloging and metadata units. The primary reason being that it can be difficult to identify peer institutions due to the differences described above. Additional exploration of how to mitigate these challenges would have been welcome, but perhaps is a topic for an even more comprehensive look at cataloging and metadata assessment.

Durant examines the area of preservation in chapter 6. Along with thorough coverage of needs and strategies

for preservation assessment, the reminder that assessment is “a discovery process” is notably useful (205). This phrase means that within the context of preservation, assessment involves a physical presence, such as identifying a mold-contaminated location or pests in the collection. In this case, a lack of assessment would have serious, detrimental consequences to a collection. Readers will also find the list of freely available assessment tools for preservation to be of value (207–209).

In chapter 7, appropriately titled “The Future of Technical Services,” Servizzi discusses the need for data governance through warehouses. Library workers conducting assessment must have a plan for the data gathered through the various methods described in the preceding chapters. The inclusion of New York University Libraries’ data warehouse as a case study makes this chapter especially

beneficial with a glimpse at what a data warehouse looks like in practice.

Assessment Strategies in Technical Services excels in not being overly prescriptive in the strategies discussed for each area. The editors state at the beginning that the primary purpose of this book is to provide a starting point so that readers can consider their individual library’s situation when developing an assessment framework. A common theme throughout the book is that a one-size-fits-all approach does not work due to institutional hierarchy, staffing, etc. Although this fact is very true and allows for interpretation or tailoring of assessment strategies, the chapters also contain enough practical information so that anyone new to assessment has resources when implementing any of these strategies at their institutions.—*Shay Beezley (sbeezley@uco.edu), University of Central Oklahoma*