

Book Review

Michael Fernandez, editor

Assessing Academic Library Collections for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. By Karen Kohn. New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2025. 190 p. \$90.00 hardcover, \$36.00 softcover, \$32.40 ebook (ISBN 9781538195734).

Assessing Academic Library Collections for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion is a practical introduction for those who work in academic libraries who, as author Karen Kohn writes, “have a sense that they should be conducting some type of diversity assessment or audit but are unsure how to do it or are overwhelmed” (1). Kohn’s book reads like an intensive, asynchronous workshop and follows a project planning approach. The text is not prescriptive; it offers four different approaches (list checking, metadata searching, diversity coding, and evaluating institutional efforts) to assess collections’ diversity, with the reader selecting what works best for their institution and needs.

Kohn grounds the book in explaining and defining what diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) mean within the context of collection assessment, inviting readers to define diversity to align with the purpose of their prospective collection evaluation. Kohn advocates for intentionality in this process. While a longing to do the right thing is a common feeling and experience for many academic librarians, she says that “many diversity assessments stem from a general sense that the library ought to be doing more to build equitable collections. If this is your situation, you’ll need to articulate a clearer motivation before designing your study” (17). Kohn offers many reasons for embarking on diversifying an institution’s collections in the grounding of the book, including curricula support and ensuring that library’s holdings reflect the student body, and helping prepare students to enter society, among other reasons (4–5). Each of the four assessment methods Kohn covers has a corresponding case study—except for metadata searching—authored by those who have undertaken this work. Each chapter follows a linear, narrative progression from project completion to next steps. Readers who want to cut and paste an approach will be disappointed as the narrative style instead compels them to wrestle with the pros and cons of each method, the implications of selecting one method over another, and the importance of doing the work.

List checking, Kohn explains, is the only method that allows for identifying what an institution does not have in their collection. List selection and compilation will be the most intensive portion of this approach. Which type of list (award winners, bibliographies, and vendor lists are the most popular approaches) one uses comes with its own considerations and drawbacks, and once this is selected, the process is a simple holdings check. List checking’s accompanying case study is authored by Melissa Gonzalez from the University of West Florida (UWF). Many may be familiar with UWF’s LibGuide detailing the institution’s diversity collection assessment across multiple methods. Gonzalez’s case study provides the narrative behind the initiative, walking readers through the thought process behind decisions and acknowledging that this work is done within “the confines of restrictive state statutes” (77), a changing reality that most academic librarians in the United States will need to contend with. Notably, the case study includes using Bowker Book Analysis System (BBAS) collections software, so

users who do not have BBAS access will need to adjust their expectations for time and labor involved in this method.

Metadata searching is an attractive way to evaluate much of an institution's holdings, but Kohn flags serious concerns "using subject headings to quantify and evaluate diversity in terms of practicality, accuracy and sensitivity" (84). This method, which is available to most academic libraries, requires evaluating Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) and Library of Congress Classification Numbers (LCCN). Despite, as Kohn notes, myriad examples in the literature noting bias present in LCSH vocabulary and LCCN classification, this may still be a compelling option to search an institution's holdings quickly. If adopting this approach, Kohn wisely warns that those partaking in the evaluation will likely encounter offensive and harmful language. The metadata section offers three types of metadata LCSH compilations for "Queer LCSH," "Trans and Gender Diverse LCSHs," and "Racism (Researching Racism): Identifying available books (print and electronic)" (table 7.1, 84–85). Although these are great resources, this section would have been strengthened by the inclusion of a case study chapter on metadata. An institution using one of these metadata compilations to evaluate its collection would elucidate the labor and timeline associated with this method. Similarly, there are brief image-based examples of a query run in Primo using call numbers as well as one in Alma Analytics using subject search terms related to racism. This chapter is made better for those examples, but a fleshed-out case study would benefit readers who want to adopt this approach.

The diversity coding approach can be applied to the identity of a work's author or the content of the work itself. Kohn focuses primarily on coding author identity, with two clear considerations: the labor and the care needed to undertake coding. Due to how time-consuming this approach (i.e., coding individual works or individual authors) is, one will need to focus on a sample of an institution's collection or a subset. The care involved in diversity coding, Kohn notes, is significant because it addresses individuals' identities. Kohn offers examples of resources for determining an author's identity and makes note of places and methods that are not appropriate, such as relying on a picture to determine an individual's ethnicity or relying on a name to determine gender or national origin. Kohn's overview chapter includes samples of institutions that undertook coding projects (table 8.1, 97–99); its accompanying case study by Artemis D. Vex and Ruth Castillo of Emory & Henry University shares online resources and toolkits they have developed on diversity assessment codes—great resources for those who choose this methodology.

Evaluation of institutional efforts, unlike the other methods, does not assess a collection's content. Institutional assessment will often occur two ways. The first includes initiating a goal or project, such as holding staff discussions on DEI topics and then conducting a survey of staff on existing strategies for collecting (133). The second concentrates on evaluating existing efforts, such as assessing whether an institution's collection policy includes language on diversity. This method's corresponding case study by Karin Wikoff of Ithaca College showcases a suite of projects related to different aspects of the collection, including areas previously not covered, such as marketing e-resources and liaising with other departments on shelving choices.

Assessing Academic Library Collections for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion is a great starting point for those interested in assessing their collections. It compiles assessment approaches that were often available only in standalone journal articles, webinars, or as sections within larger books related to DEI in academic libraries. Kohn's successful assessment breakdowns would not be as effective without her consistent advocacy that this important work should not be shouldered by minoritized and nondominant communities. Kohn illustrates assessment methods deftly, although the true success of this book will be determined by those who take up the mantle and apply it to their own institutions.

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