Guest Editorial - Assessment in Libraries: Evolving Research, Strategies, and Best Practices

Libraries continually adapt to an ever-evolving information landscape shaped by shifting user needs, rapid technological advancements, and ongoing funding pressures. In this environment, effective assessment becomes essential. It not only demonstrates the quality and impact of library services but also strengthens strategic decision-making and communicates institutional value. This special issue of the *International Journal of Librarianship* (IJoL) seeks to explore the dynamic challenges inherent in library assessment. It provides a platform for sharing research, insights, strategies, and best practices across the practical, theoretical, and methodological dimensions of assessment, while highlighting recent advancements and pointing toward future directions for the field.

This special issue brings together thirteen articles from academic, public, and special libraries across the United States, Iran, and Taiwan, showcasing diverse approaches to evaluating services, collections, operations, and user experiences. To highlight the breadth of contributions, we organize this editorial around the following thematic areas:

Assessing Service Quality and User Experience

Four contributions focus on evaluating frontline library services and user interactions. Together, these works demonstrate how assessment strengthens the quality, empathy, and innovation of library services:

Helen Cawley (USA) presents *You Say Hello and I Say Goodbye: Methodology and Findings from An Academic Library's Virtual Chat Service Assessment Program,* , a structured, peer-based evaluation model for virtual reference at the University of Notre Dame. Her study demonstrates how rubrics, norming, and reflective practice improve chat quality, responsiveness, and staff cohesion.

Shannon Adams, Rebecca Graff, and Melissa Johnson (USA) contribute *Assessing Chat Transcripts*, a comprehensive analysis of reference chat interactions at Southern Methodist University. Their findings highlight patterns in question types, staff communication practices, and instructional opportunities within real-time exchanges.

Piper Cumbo and Abigail Higgins (USA), in *Creating a Culture of Care: A Case Study of Finals Week Activities and Student Wellbeing Assessment*, examine student wellbeing initiatives at Auburn University Libraries during finals week. Their assessment reveals strong impacts on stress reduction and underscores libraries' contributions to student mental health.

Hsiang-Ping Ma and Yun-Fan Chen (Taiwan) explore emerging technologies in *Implementation and Application of a Generative AI Virtual Librarian*, assessing user satisfaction, accuracy, multilingual support, and staff impact at Taiwan's National Library of Public Information.

Data Stewardship, Analytics, and Operational Assessment

Five articles illustrate how libraries harness operational data to inform decision-making and improve workflows. These articles underscore how meticulous data work enhances transparency, efficiency, and strategic planning:

Joanne McIntyre (USA), in *What's in an Address? Transforming ILLiad Data into Resource Sharing Insights*, demonstrates how standardizing ILLiad address data unlocks powerful insights into resource-sharing patterns.

Cherié Weible and Janelle Sander (USA) assess interlibrary loan labor and cost metrics in *Benefit and Cost Analysis of Resource Sharing*, offering a replicable model integrating OCLC's ILL Cost Calculator and statewide ROI analysis.

Jeff Graveline and Peggy Kain (USA) present Translating Data into Action: Utilizing Cost-Savings Evidence for Read and Publish Success, detailing the development of a robust APC dataset at the University of Alabama at Birmingham to assess cost savings and inform negotiations of read-and-publish agreements.

Michael. Hawkins (USA) showcases Visualizing Impact: Assessing Engagement and Outcome through the Map It! Data Visualization Service, where assessment dashboards track consultations, engagement, and community impact at Kent State University.

Orolando Duffus (USA) provides a rigorous methodology for aligning electronic journal holdings with new academic programs in Strategies for Assessing and Enhancing Electronic Journal Collections: A Data-Driven Approach for Supporting New Academic Programs and the College of Medicine at the University of Houston.

Learning Assessment and Instructional Impact

Two articles focus on evaluating learning outcomes and strengthening information literacy instruction. Together, these works illustrate how assessment strengthens curriculum alignment, instructional design, and institutional collaboration:

Shuyi Liu (USA) presents Fresno State's Information Literacy Core Competency Assessment Committee's work in From Rubric to Reality: Reflections on Norming and Scoring Information Literacy at Scale, a large-scale, collaborative rubric-based assessment across undergraduate programs. The study highlights the complexities of norming and faculty–librarian collaboration.

Shannon Adams, Rebecca Graff, and Melissa Johnson (USA) also contribute to this theme through insights in Assessing Chat Transcripts, where chat assessments reveal students' research behaviors and staff instructional roles.

Collections and Preservation Assessment

One article examines physical and digital collections, as well as preservation practices. The study reinforces the role of assessment in sustaining collections, infrastructures, and long-term access:

Ron Martin-Dent (USA) contributes *Conducting a Historical Map Collection Condition Assessment Survey at the Rochester Public Library*, detailing a systematic condition assessment and actionable preservation plan for a large map collection.

Assessment Methodologies and Frameworks

Feng-Ru Sheu's article, *Beyond Numbers: Advancing Human-Centered Library Assessment Through Qualitative Understanding*, demonstrates how qualitative methods can illuminate rich, user-centered perspectives. The article equips libraries with actionable strategies to embed empathy and contextual awareness into their assessment practices.

Maryam Fattahi, Davood Noorn, and Azim Azimin present *Designing and Prioritizing Key Performance Indicators in Evaluating and Improving the Productivity of Special Libraries*, applying LibQUAL, SERVQUAL, Balanced Scorecard, and AHP methods to develop a strategic KPI framework for special libraries in Iran's water and electricity sector .

CONCLUSION

The articles in this special issue collectively illuminate the evolving and multifaceted landscape of library assessment. Together, they offer a rich examination of the dynamic challenges libraries face today: from rapidly advancing technologies and shifting user expectations to organizational pressures surrounding equity, budgeting, and service innovation. These challenges demand assessment approaches that are flexible, data-informed, and deeply attuned to local contexts.

This issue also fulfills its goal of providing a platform for disseminating research, insights, strategies, and best practices across both practical and theoretical dimensions of library assessment. The articles demonstrate the diversity of assessment work: from cost modeling, data stewardship, and preservation surveys to AI-enabled service evaluation, information literacy assessment, and studies of user wellbeing. Collectively, they show that assessment is not a single method or tool but a multifaceted practice that integrates quantitative and qualitative methodologies, operational analytics, pedagogical frameworks, and reflective practice.

Importantly, these works highlight recent advancements and point toward future directions in the field. Emerging areas such as generative AI in public services, data visualization as assessment evidence, and cross-institutional performance metrics reveal new possibilities for

understanding impact and communicating value. At the same time, the studies underscore the enduring importance of foundational practices: rigorous rubric design, data cleaning, cost analysis, and preservation assessment, which continue to shape the core of evidence-based librarianship.

Taken together, the articles in this special issue demonstrate that assessment remains central to the future of libraries. By embracing both innovation and reflection, libraries can deepen their understanding of user needs, strengthen organizational effectiveness, and chart strategic paths forward in an increasingly complex and demanding information environment. We hope these contributions inspire continued dialogue, experimentation, and scholarship in library assessment and support libraries worldwide in building cultures of evidence, learning, and continuous improvement.

Acknowledgments

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