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Putting Assessment Into Action: Selected Projects From the First Cohort of the Assessment in Action Grant

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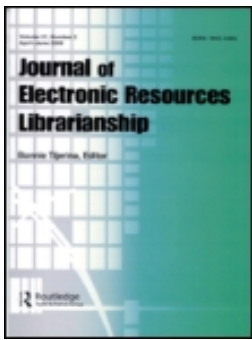


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Sweeper, Darren, "Putting Assessment Into Action: Selected Projects From the First Cohort of the Assessment in Action Grant" (2016). *Sprague Library Scholarship and Creative Works*. 54.
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To cite this article: Darren Sweeper (2016) Putting Assessment Into Action: Selected Projects From the First Cohort of the Assessment in Action Grant, Journal of Electronic Resources Librarianship, 28:2, 136-136, DOI: [10.1080/1941126X.2016.1167555](https://doi.org/10.1080/1941126X.2016.1167555)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1941126X.2016.1167555>



Published online: 03 Jun 2016.



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Putting Assessment Into Action: Selected Projects From the First Cohort of the Assessment in Action Grant, edited by Eric Ackermann, Chicago, IL, ACRL, 2016, 216 pp., ISBN: 9780838988138.

The assessment of services, activities, and programs designed to demonstrate value and highlight the impact of libraries is critical and much needed. We must know what our students are learning; we must employ suitable methodologies of collecting data to determine which methods best reflect what works best for students. The assessment methods that we use should not be inimical to learning. With that spirit in mind, the recently published book entitled “Putting Assessment Into Action” contains a selection of case studies from the first cohort of libraries that were selected to participate in the Assessment in Action: Academic Libraries and Student Success (AiA) project sponsored by the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) in 2014.

The book is divided into three parts, consisting of 27 chapters that detail assessment projects at libraries from universities that vary widely in size, geography, and type. In the first part, entitled “Assessing Information Literacy/Library Instruction,” the chapters focus on assessing the experiences of students in various stages of their educational journey.

In the first chapter, the author reflects on an assessment of freshman student essays in an urban Catholic institution in the Midwest. Using an assessment methodology that focuses on four learning outcomes based on the Association of American Colleges and Universities VALUE rubric for Information Literacy, this chapter sets the tone for the book; it addresses the context in which learning occurs and the myriad issues that can arise when assessing learning when the city itself is the learning laboratory. It also challenges the reader to be imaginative in selecting methods to assess learning. The first part of the book contains 17 case studies that address issues as wide-ranging as academic integrity, usage and citation analysis, use of multiple methods for assessment, and library–faculty collaboration. Most chapters conclude with notes and a list of further readings.

In the second part of the book, entitled “Assessing Outreach, Services and Spaces,” the focus shifts to assessing issues related to outreach, services, and spaces. The eighteenth chapter, entitled “Get By With a Little Help From Your Friends,” shares the experience of working with university departments to address the problem of the students’ lack of information literacy skills and knowledge of the library. For this project, the team used a mixed methods approach of assessment including paper surveys to collect data. In this chapter several important questions are raised concerning and including the changing information needs of users, as well as offering advice about how to reach out to campus partners.

In chapters 19 through 22, the issue of services is broadly addressed. Among the topics addressed are measuring new services, creating new services that contribute to student success, dedicated technology facilities, and working with writing centers. In the twenty-third chapter, entitled “Research Assistance Linked to Student Retention,” the author directly addresses this very important and timely concern for colleges and universities. In the third and final part of the book, entitled “Longitudinal Assessment,” and the last two chapters, “Known Library Use” and “Student Retention and Assessment Archaeology,” the authors end the book with thoughtful and insightful essays.

This book is as readable as it is evocative. It is a book of practical application and reflective narration that captures the complexity and importance of assessment in libraries. Not only does the book serve as a real-world, practical handbook, it encourages informed debate concerning the pedagogical questions surrounding how librarians assess what we are teaching and the services we offer. Reading the book will help librarians interested in demonstrating the value of libraries better plan and design projects of assessment of services and of activities they offer to address their users’ needs.

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