INLS 782: LIBRARY ASSESSMENT

FALL 2020
WEDNESDAYS, 9:20 - 10:35
SYNCHRONOUS ONLINE +
ASYNCHRONOUS
COMPONENTS

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Addresses evaluation and assessment activities in libraries. Existing tools for evaluating library operations will be considered. Students will design and conduct their own evaluation of one or more library systems.

INSTRUCTOR

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She / Her / Hers

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OVERVIEW

Libraries are complex organizations that fulfill, or attempt to fulfill, a variety of needs - informational, social, educational, cultural, technological, and more. Libraries work toward these goals through the operation of interconnected systems and services including staffing, policies, physical and digital space, collections, and programming and instruction. Because of this complexity, the task of evaluating a library's quality, impact, or value is a challenging one.

This course is designed to help you explore methods used to assess library services, space, collections, policies, and staff. Beyond the question of *how* we assess, this course will also focus on *why* we assess and *for whom*, employing a critical lens to interrogate the purposes, products, and possibilities of our evaluation activities. Course assignments will encourage you to both apply existing library assessment methods to realistic evaluation tasks and to reimagine how we might approach these tasks in ways that advance equity and inclusion.

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, this course will meet remotely via Zoom. Weekly course meetings will last approximately 75 minutes; the remainder of our scheduled class time will be dedicated to asynchronous individual tasks that will vary from week to week.

REQUIRED MATERIALS

There is no required textbook for this course; all readings will be linked from Sakai. To participate fully in our online course meetings, you will need a laptop or desktop computer equipped with a webcam and microphone and Internet access.

INCLUSION AND STUDENT SUPPORT

My teaching philosophy is grounded in relationships and shared meaning-making. This means that I believe people learn best when they are given the opportunity to construct their own understanding of content through authentic engagement with ideas and with each other. I strive to create learning environments that support and honor students' identities and prior knowledge. Who you are as a learner and as a person matters to me.

It is my intent that the diversity that you all bring to our class be viewed as a resource, strength and benefit. I have worked to include and develop course materials and activities that are respectful of diversity: gender identity, sexuality, disability, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, nationality, religion, and culture. With that said, research in our field, like most others, has been largely built on a foundation of work from privileged voices (read: white, straight, cisgender, non-disabled, (U.S.) American, male), and I acknowledge that there may be both explicit and implicit biases in the selection of materials for this course. Suggestions for improvements are always encouraged and appreciated.

I understand that you have lives outside of this course, and that sometimes experiences outside of your control may interfere with your class performance (especially now, as we continue to deal with COVID-19). If this happens to you, please reach out.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

In this course, students will:

- identify and explore factors that motivate libraries to evaluate / assess their systems and services.
- critically evaluate all stages of the library assessment cycle and its impacts on both dominant and marginalized stakeholder groups.
- demonstrate knowledge of available methods and tools for evaluating library systems and services, with a focus on participatory methods.
- interrogate the ethics of data collection methods and strategies commonly used to evaluate library systems and services.
- apply evaluation methods to investigate contemporary library issues and/or solve practical problems relevant to library work.

GRADING

For Fall 2020, SILS will return to the H/P/L/F grading system. **My focus will be on providing you with actionable, thoughtful, qualitative feedback on all your assignments, including the final project**. So if the feedback you get will be qualitative, how will grades be determined?

- **H:** The "H" grade is reserved for students whose work consistently goes **above and beyond** the stated expectations for a course or individual assignment. In this course, that might mean that you engage frequently and deeply in the class discussion forums (beyond the required posts); you ask and/or answer questions in the general discussion forum or in our weekly meetings; your assignments are especially thorough; and your final project is exceptionally comprehensive and polished.
- **P:** This grade is earned for work which meets all established assignment and course requirements adequately. If you follow the guidelines for each assignment as they are shared with you on the syllabus and in class, you should expect to earn a P.
- **L:** This grade represents work that is substandard in at least one major way. If you are in danger of earning an L for the course, I will let you know as soon as possible so that you can improve your performance.
- **F:** Work that falls significantly short of expectations.

ASSIGNMENT #1: ASSESSMENT LIBRARIAN INTERVIEW

Assessment (or evaluation, as it is called in some settings) may vary significantly from library to library. For this assignment, you will interview a librarian who works in a setting of interest to you about their experiences with evaluation work in their setting. A list of librarians who have already agreed to be interviewed will be provided to you, however you are also welcome to go outside of this list if you would like. I have secured SILS funding to offer each interviewee a $20 Amazon gift card as a thank-you for their participation, which I will send to them after you have confirmed that the interview has happened. If more than one student wants to interview the same person, you may work together to do so (but please, no more than 2 students per interviewee, and you will each still write up your reflection papers separately). A list of sample questions will be shared with you in Sakai, however you are also encouraged to develop questions of your own based on your own interests and professional goals. Interviews should last approximately 30-45 minutes and can take place via Zoom or over the phone.

After the interview, you will write a 2-3 page (double spaced) summary and reflection document, which you will post to our course Sakai forum. This document should communicate both what was discussed in the interview and your personal reactions and takeaways. This post is due by **9/30**. Over the following week, you should read and comment on **at least 3** of your classmates' posts, to get a better sense of the range of assessment experiences communicated by these librarians.

ASSIGNMENT #2: CRITICALLY EVALUATING EVALUATION WORK

One of our major course goals this semester is to "critically evaluate all stages of the library assessment cycle and its impacts on both dominant and marginalized stakeholder groups." One way that you will work toward that goal is by critically evaluating a published article that describes an assessment or evaluation project. A list of sample articles will be provided in Sakai, however you are not limited to this list.

What does "critical evaluation" mean? It does **not** mean that I want you to trash the paper, its authors, and/or its methods. Instead, I'm asking you to adopt a *critical theoretical lens*: one that involves reflective critique aimed at identifying and challenging power structures that create and maintain inequalities. Critical theorists approach their work through different lenses and may primarily focus on one power structure, for example whiteness (Critical Race Theory), heteronormativity (queer theory), ableism (Critical Disability Theory) or capitalism (Marxist theories and others). Intersectionality is another critical theoretical framework that seeks to explore the complex interactions of multiple forms of oppression and advantage that occur because of our multifaceted identities.

If you have previous experience using one or more critical theory lenses, you should feel free to employ them for this assignment. If not, or if you want to use a more general critical lens, use the questions below as a starting point for evaluating the paper you have chosen:

- What justification is offered for the value of this assessment project? Which stakeholder voices were considered or not considered?
- Whose voices, perspectives, or experiences were centered in this project? Who was left out?
- What assumptions were made about users and their needs? By whom, and on the basis of what evidence?
- What methods were used to design, implement, and/or evaluate the project, and who was involved in these decisions? Are there ethical concerns with these methods, and if so, how were they handled by the authors / researchers?
- What power structures were at play in this project?
- Who was supposed to benefit from the work and how, and does the evidence suggest that benefit was actually realized? Was anyone harmed by the project (individuals or communities)?
- What biases or assumptions can you identify among the authors or others involved in this project?

Keep in mind that the answers to some of these questions may indicate strengths of the project, while others may indicate weaknesses. It's OK to note both in your review (remember, "critical" in this sense doesn't necessarily equate to criticizing).

When you have read and evaluated your paper, you will summarize your review in the form of a **Canva infographic**. You can use any Canva template to create your graphic, or you can design one of your own. You can register for a free education account (which will allow you to access Canva's premium features and templates) at https://www.canva.com/education/. Your infographic should include:

- the title and authors of the paper you reviewed along with a link to the original article;
- a brief summary of the evaluation project described in the paper;
- 3-5 text blocks that communicate the main points of your critical review.

When you're done, share a link to your graphic in our class Sakai forum (you can get this link using the "Share a link to view" option in Canva). This assignment is due **10/14.**

ASSIGNMENT #3: TOOLS FOR LIBRARY ASSESSMENT

Collecting, analyzing, and reporting assessment data has become a major activity in many libraries, and both professional organizations and vendors have taken notice. In class on **9/23**, we will have a "jigsaw discussion" focused on various tools that libraries use to conduct assessment work. Before that date, you will **individually** explore one of the following assessment tools (Dr. Rawson will let you know which one):

- tableau (https://www.tableau.com/)
- LibQUAL+ (https://www.libqual.org/home) and ClimateQUAL (https://www.climatequal.org/home)
- National Public Library Survey (PLS) (https://www.lrs.org/data-tools/public-libraries/national-statistics/) AND Library Statistics Program (https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/libraries/)
- Google Data Studio (https://datastudio.google.com/)
- Project Outcome for public libraries (https://www.projectoutcome.org/) AND Project Outcome for academic libraries (https://acrl.projectoutcome.org/)
- Ithaka S+R (https://sr.ithaka.org/)

Some of these sites and tools are freely accessible or accessible with free registration, while others are paid services. Thus, the information available from these websites might vary. Explore the websites themselves plus any other information you can find about these systems and services (Google, search Twitter or library Facebook groups, reach out to librarians who work with these tools, etc. - be creative!). Create a one-page handout-style document that summarizes the resource and post this document to our course Sakai site before class on 9/23. In addition to basic information about the tool, your document should include what you believe to be its strengths and weaknesses (to the extent that you can tell based on freely available information).

We will start that day's in-class discussion in groups of 3-4 people who all explored the same resource; you will share what you found with each other and make note of anything your classmates found that you did not. Then, we will split into three larger "jigsaw groups," each containing one person who looked at each resource. In these groups, you will share the highlights (or lowlights!) of your resource and learn about the resources that your classmates explored.

ASSIGNMENT #4: ASSESSMENT PROJECT VIRTUAL POSTER SESSION

The final assignment for this course will require you to develop a comprehensive, realistic evaluation plan for one aspect of library services or systems in a library context of your choice. Before COVID-19 happened, it was my intention to have you all work in real library settings to develop these projects, however with many libraries still closed and others greatly restricting access, the project you design will probably be hypothetical, although based on actual library needs as communicated to me by current practitioners.

Possible focus areas or "problem statements" for these assignments (contributed by practicing librarians) will be shared in our course Sakai site, however as with our other assignments, you are not limited to those prompts if there is another project you would like to explore. To keep the scope of this assignment manageable, projects will be focused on only one element of library services within a single (real or hypothetical) library: space, collections, policies, instruction, or staff.

Your task will be to develop a comprehensive plan for evaluating this system or service, using the methods we have learned in class and keeping a critical, equity-focused stance in mind. Your final product will be a conference-style poster, similar to what you might create to present at the Library Assessment Conference. Examples of posters from the 2018 conference are available at https://www.libraryassessment.org/program/2018-poster-schedule/. In addition to the poster itself, which you will turn in as a PDF file, you will also record a short (3-5 minute) video summarizing your work, similar to what you would share if you were presenting at a conference poster session. We will talk more about guidelines for this part of the assignment later in the semester.

To scaffold this project, you will be required to turn in two shorter documents earlier in the semester that should help you develop your ideas (this will also be a chance to get instructor feedback before you have put too much effort into a project idea that might not work). The first is an **initial proposal** that summarizes your early thoughts about potential project focus questions and methods as well as your initial thoughts about what stakeholder groups might be involved in the project you develop or interested in its outcomes. This document can be very brief (a couple paragraphs is fine) and should be emailed to Dr. Rawson no later than **9/9.**

The second is a **summary of related work**. When we undertake assessment projects, it is important not to "reinvent the wheel" or try interventions that have already been shown not to work. Therefore, as you develop your assessment plans, you will need to search the literature for similar projects. "The literature" in this case includes both scholarly articles and more informal forms of sharing like blog posts, webinars (often available after the fact on YouTube or Vimeo), or even Twitter threads. For the summary document, I would like you to write a brief (<1 page, single-spaced) overview of what others have done to address similar assessment needs in their libraries. In addition to summarizing these reports, you can also feel free to note their strengths and weaknesses. The second page of your document should consist of a reference list citing the reports you have found in APA format. This is due on **10/28** and should be submitted in the Sakai forum. After your classmates have posted, you may find it helpful to review the findings of your peers who are tackling similar topics.

Groupwork option: While these projects can be completed individually, you may alternatively choose to complete this work in a pair or small group of 3-4 students. To ensure that students in groups complete roughly the same amount of work as their peers doing this assignment individually, there will be some additional requirements for groups, namely:

- a requirement that the group meet at least twice via Zoom (or another web conferencing tool) to discuss their work,
- a document submitted to Dr. Rawson with your initial proposal that outlines the division of labor for your project work, and
- a brief individual reflection document turned in with your final poster that asks you to evaluate the group's effectiveness and your own role within it (a template will be provided for this).

CLASS PARTICIPATION

This class will combine participation expectations for online and in-person class formats. Participation expectations for our synchronous Zoom meetings are communicated in a separate document (Zoom Student Tips and Expectations). Participation in asynchronous course components will look different from lesson to lesson. Lesson pages in Sakai will include instructions for how to fully participate in that week's asynchronous activities.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Readings, asynchronous activities, videos, and other materials for each week will be shared in the Lessons area of Sakai. Some of these materials will need to be reviewed before our synchronous meetings, while others will be done after. This will be indicated in Sakai for each week.

Date and Topic	Learning Outcomes	Assignments Due
8/12 Why do we assess?	**Students will be able to:** 1. compare and contrast assessment/ evaluation and research. 2. distinguish between "assessing to improve" and "assessing to prove." 3. describe the organizational contexts in which library assessment work takes place.	
8/19 Theoretical foundations of assessment work *Ebony Magnus, guest speaker*	**Students will be able to:** 1. compare and contrast neoliberal/positivist and critical theory based approaches to library assessment. 2. articulate a personal rationale for engaging in assessment work.	
8/26 Practical Foundations of Assessment Work	**After completing this module, students will be able to:** 1. define and differentiate among inputs, outputs, and outcomes. 2. describe the steps of the Outcome-Based Planning and Evaluation model. 3. critically evaluate the "practicality imperative" in library assessment work.	

Date and Topic	Learning Outcomes	Assignments Due
9/2 Understanding our Stakeholders and Communities	**After completing this module, students will be able to:** 1. list and describe the needs of stakeholder groups relevant to their specific library context (public, school, academic, special, or archive). 2. describe strategies for learning about the needs and wants of library users and non-users.	
9/9 Assessing For, Assessing With *Dr. Kawanna Bright, guest speaker (Dr. Bright is now a professor at ECU's MLS program)*	**After completing this module, students will be able to:** 1. analyze the benefits and drawbacks of involving library users, especially those from marginalized communities, in assessment work. 2. describe the Participatory Action Research framework and suggest specific applications for this framework within library assessment work.	**Initial ideas for final project emailed to Casey by this date.**
9/16 (More) Participatory Methods for Library Assessment *Eamon Tewell, guest speaker*	**After completing this module, students will be able to:** 1. describe how Photovoice and Concept Mapping methods can be used in participatory library assessment. 2. generate additional ideas for including users in library assessment projects.	
9/23 Library Assessment Tools	**After completing this module, students will be able to:** 1. describe the features of commonly used library assessment tools. 2. evaluate the benefits and drawbacks of commonly used library assessment tools for a specific library setting.	**Assignment # 3 (Library assessment tools)**
9/30 Holistic Library Evaluation *Elaine Westbrooks and/or Monica Figueroa, guest speakers*	**After completing this module, students will be able to:** 1. describe various interconnected systems that collectively form the library as an organization. 2. analyze the UNC Libraries' "Reckoning Project."	**Assignment #1 (Interview reflection)**
10/7 Assessing Library Space	**After completing this module, students will be able to:** 1. critique published examples of library space assessment projects. 2. generate ideas for library space assessment projects that center equity and inclusion.	**Respond to at least 3 peer interview reflections**

Date and Topic	Learning Outcomes	Assignments Due
10/14 Assessing Library Collections	**After completing this module, students will be able to:** 1. critique published examples of library collections assessment projects. 2. generate ideas for library collections assessment projects that center equity and inclusion.	**Assignment #2 (Critical assessment review)**
10/21 Assessing Library Services (e.g. reference, ILL, tech services)	**After completing this module, students will be able to:** 1. critique published examples of library services assessment projects. 2. generate ideas for library services assessment projects that center equity and inclusion.	
10/28 Assessing Library Programming and Instruction	**After completing this module, students will be able to:** 1. critique published examples of library programming and instruction assessment projects. 2. generate ideas for library programming and instruction assessment projects that center equity and inclusion.	**Summary of related work for final projects**
11/4 Project work time	***No synchronous class today. Work on your final projects.***	
11/11 Assessing Library Staff / Staff Development	**After completing this module, students will be able to:** 1. critique published examples of library staff / staff development assessment projects. 2. generate ideas for library staff / staff development assessment projects that center equity and inclusion.	

UNIVERSITY HONOR SYSTEM

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill has had a student-administered honor system and judicial system for over 100 years. Because academic honesty and the development and nurturing of trust and trustworthiness are important to all of us as individuals, and are encouraged and promoted by the honor system, this is a most significant University tradition. More information is available at http://www.unc.edu/depts/honor/honor.html. The system is the responsibility of students and is regulated and governed by them, but faculty share the responsibility and readily commit to its ideals. If students in this class have questions about their responsibility under the honor code, please bring them to me or consult with the Office of the Dean of Students. The web site identified above contains all policies and procedures pertaining to the student honor system. We encourage your full participation and observance of this important aspect of the University.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill facilitates the implementation of reasonable accommodations, including resources and services, for students with disabilities, chronic medical conditions, a temporary disability or pregnancy complications resulting in difficulties with accessing learning opportunities. All accommodations are coordinated through the Accessibility Resources and Service Office. See the ARS Website for contact information: https://ars.unc.edu or email ars@unc.edu.

SILS DIVERSITY STATEMENT

In support of the University's diversity goals and the mission of the UNC School of Information and Library Science, SILS embraces diversity as an ethical and societal value. We broadly define diversity to include ability, age, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, gender expression, immigration status, national origin, race, religion, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status. As an academic community committed to preparing our graduates to be leaders in an increasingly multicultural and global society we strive to:

- Ensure inclusive leadership, policies, and practices
- Integrate diversity into the curriculum and research
- Foster a mutually respectful intellectual environment in which diverse perspectives and experiences are valued
- Recruit and retain students, faculty, and staff from traditionally underrepresented groups
- Participate in outreach to underserved groups in North Carolina and beyond

The statement is our commitment to the ongoing cultivation of an academic environment that is open, representative, and reflective of the concepts of equity and fairness.

~The Faculty and Staff of the UNC School of Information and Library Science