

Critical conversations: A dialogue on assumptions, biases, and power in library assessment (Panel).

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Assessment is not neutral. Evidence is not infallible. Data are not immune to oppressive structures of power. In the proposed session, we will take up these principles as a starting point to frame a dialogue about how librarians might meaningfully engage critical perspectives to interrogate the structures of power and methodologies that both motivate and facilitate assessment work in academic libraries.

Work on critical assessment has largely taken place in the context of library instruction or in critiques of library assessment that highlight the dominance of quantitative approaches and neoliberal trends in higher education. Over the last two years, we have conducted research on critical methodologies employed in social sciences, data studies, and educational research, culminating in the publication of the article “Towards a Critical Assessment Practice” in *In the Library with the Lead Pipe* (<http://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2018/towards-critical-assessment-practice/>). In this work, we shared professional and personal experiences that led us to explore structures of power inherent in our assessment work and we posed a number of questions to readers with which we have grappled, including:

- How do our own identities, institutional positions, and perspectives shape our work?
- What is the purpose of the assessment, who decides what to assess, and who benefits from the work?
- What are the histories and contexts of the methods we choose, and how do these shape our work? Do these methods risk alienating or silencing other voices?
- What is considered “evidence” and who decides?
- Are we working in ways that enable power sharing and engagement with user communities at all stages of the process, from question formulation and data analysis, to decision-making?

We will begin by sharing the framework for critical assessment that we continue to explore and interrogate, and then we will draw on the tensions we have uncovered in our own work in order to facilitate a dialogue with attendees. We look forward to posing the above questions to participants and engaging with them in an open dialogue about critical library assessment.