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Inspired by *The Library Instruction Cookbook* (2009), Aaron Dobbs has compiled this assessment cookbook, comprising 80 “recipes” submitted by 122 “chefs.” Each recipe is between one and three pages long and consists of the following parts: nutrition information (justification for the assessment), dietary standards (professional standards like the ACRL *Standards for Libraries in Higher Education*), cooking time, cooking technique (methods and tools), ingredients, preparation, assessment steps, allergy warning (caveats), chef’s note (ways of extending or adapting the assessment to other spaces or services), references, resources (citations of publications describing methods or online tools), and further reading. As appropriate, recipes also contain sample rubrics, data sheets, questionnaires, etc., necessary to carry out the respective assessment. Dobbs has grouped the recipes into nine sections addressing data preparation as well as assessment of collections, instruction and instructional programs, outreach and programming, assessment, strategic planning, service points and services, equipment, building, and space; and website and web services. Each chapter contains between three and fifteen recipes. Traditional areas of library assessment, i.e., collections, instruction, and service points, represent the quantitatively and qualitatively most plentiful chapters, offering both more assessments and a greater variety of techniques and tools than other chapters.

This work is a rich source of assessments covering a wide variety of library services and service areas. It supports planning, implementation, data collection, and analysis of assessment plans. The cookbook is particularly helpful in suggesting ways in which the different stages of assessment, which can be labour intensive for librarians, may be streamlined and/or delegated to other stakeholders. For instance, “Lazy Susan: A Continuous Improvement Cycle of Learning and Assessment” proposes a holistic improvement cycle that streamlines planning, focusing on “ensuring meaningful learning experiences for students” (55). “Measuring the Ingredients of a Good Bibliography: A Recipe for Citation Analysis” offers simplified citation analysis that yields valuable data for instructional change and collection development. The author of “Who’s at Your Table? Planning for Success through
Community Engagement” points out that librarians don’t necessarily have to take complete responsibility for assessment. This review of community needs is overseen by librarians but implemented by students, decreasing librarian workload while empowering community members (113–14). Numerous recipes make use of traditional assessment practices and tools in novel ways. For example, “Patron for a Day (PFAD): A Space Assessment” employs usability testing of library spaces to enhance staff empathy with users (135–36), and “Order Takeout: Virtual Usability to Meet Your Users Where They Are” implements virtual usability testing of a library website in order to identify accessibility issues of distance learners (183–84). The recipes are “loaded” with practical tips that can enhance the scalability and efficacy of assessment, e.g., using online standards such as the US Department of Health and Human Services’ Research-Based Web Design and Usability Guidelines (179), assessing programs and services utilizing the helping professions’ notion of implementation fidelity (133–34), as well as useful tools like sample rubrics, questionnaires/surveys, and data sheets. Especially valuable in these days of mandatory data collection are homegrown assessment tools, e.g., an online reference statistics-collection tool and a library user-satisfaction survey, that can serve as surrogates for “time-consuming and burdensome,” expensive, commercially available tools like the LibQual+ survey (129–30, 137–38). Several assessments point out the importance of communicating assessment results both in-house and to stakeholders. For instance, in “Measuring the Ingredients of a Good Bibliography,” mentioned above, the “chefs” stress holding conversations with faculty about the results of citation analysis in order to build enhanced teaching relationships to support student learning (49). A truly unique section treats assessment of assessment, suggesting ways in which librarians can determine whether previous assessments have given rise to successful interventions and how often they need to assess or repeat assessments. The most appealing assessments employ the conceit of the cookbook consistently and convincingly, in both the language and form of their assessment plans, and are quite engaging to read.

While this work offers valuable contributions to librarians’ assessment practices, its usefulness is hampered by some issues of organization and content. First, there seems to be an over-reliance on certain types of assessment methods, i.e., surveys, sweeps, and usability studies, which are already very prevalent in library research and assessment. For instance, in Section 9, “Website and Web Services Assessment,” six of the nine assessments employ usability testing of a library’s website, with or without an accompanying think-aloud protocol, and a seventh treats communication of the results of usability testing. Second, assessments are uneven in their explication of methods and requirements for performing assessment, especially in academic libraries. For example, several assessments call for coding of qualitative data, yet they provide few instructions for coding, establishing inter-rater reliability (norming), and avoiding drift (52, 57, 74). Authors are also inconsistent in reminding librarians to
obtain research-ethics approval or exemption for assessments and to employ human-subjects best practices and observe privacy regulations (e.g., not using student ID numbers as identifiers) in their assessments. Some “recipes” such as “Methods Mash” and four of the “Ethnography Stud[ies]” are actually collections of social-science research methods rather than assessment procedures per se (121–22, 141–49). This unevenness could be resolved with the addition of an appendix containing methods, terminology, and restrictions, policies, and legislation that librarians should observe and apply to their assessment work. Finally, the organization of “recipes” within sections is not always consistent, e.g., “Ethnography Study Recipe G: Google Analytics,” located in the section on “Equipment, Building, and Space Assessment,” is actually a usability study of a library website and thus should be found in the section on “Website and Web Services Assessment.” This organizational issue would be less of a problem if the book had an index.

The Library Assessment Cookbook, despite some weaknesses, is a valuable resource for initiating and propagating a culture of assessment and evidence-based practice in academic libraries. It represents an important and timely addition to the Library Cookbook series. Libraries will surely benefit by the future addition of cookbooks addressing further library services.