2009

People Profile: Narda Tafuri

Editor

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Recommended Citation

Editor (2009) 'People Profile: Narda Tafuri,' Against the Grain: Vol. 21: Iss. 5, Article 20.
DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.2656

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How do librarians explain the fact that titles go out-of-print?

We really don’t have any easy answers from either a collection development or an information literacy standpoint. What we do know is that publishing is a business that depends upon supply and demand. Libraries alone as customers cannot generate enough demand to keep titles from becoming out-of-print. In addition, competition from the Internet ( Aren’t most literary classics reproduced in some version or other?) and streamlining publications ( How many versions of Romeo and Juliet really need to be published yearly?) contribute to the growing out-of-print status. We know: things are upgraded and replaced with new features that often make obsolete all previous editions. Students are used to things being replaced and naturally updated. Whether we’re discussing iPods, phones, computers, or even library resources, the philosophy of dates in the Information Age dictates that the current is king and will continue to be so. In an age of live streams, blogs, and tweets, an older publication date almost instantly eradicates a source’s worth. As mentioned before, how do we impart that there is still value in out-of-print books?

Some last thoughts about Out-of-Print resources?

It seems today that out-of-print is a dated concept. When resources are not available or easy to locate, then students and even instructors suggest turning to other sources — the thought of asking the collection development librarian to purchase an out-of-print item rarely, if ever, comes up. Locating out-of-print resources is really not an issue anymore — at least not at our university. In the classroom, students want access immediately; and the mentality is that, if it were important, it wouldn’t be out-of-print. This reasoning has some logic behind it, right? Rarely are there requests for out-of-print materials; and if the event ever arises, collection development has to question whether using funds to obtain these resources is a better use than purchasing newer materials.

As more companies, such as Google Books, produce items on demand and book sellers, such as Barnes & Noble, venture into the used and out-of-print market, libraries now have easy access to and sources for acquiring hard-to-find items. But, how much of our time and money will be spent in this pursuit? We believe that each library will have to answer that question for itself. Demands of faculty researchers, doctoral students, and classroom instructors will all factor into that decision. In an age when disappearing shelves reveal a diminishing physical collection, libraries are transforming themselves into a world of virtual resources, accessible anywhere and anytime.

Buying Out-of-Print Books on the Internet, Where the Old is New Again

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I work at the Mina Rees Library of the City University of New York (CUNY), the Graduate Center, in the heart of Manhattan. The Graduate Center is the PhD granting campus of CUNY. The students are required to do extensive reading in their disciplines, which often entails finding older and out-of-print titles.

Despite the research level of classes, the Mina Rees Library is not a research level library; nor was it ever meant to be one. When the Graduate Center was founded in 1961, it was on 42nd street, across from the New York Public Library (NYPL) (<http://www.nypl.org/research/chss/index.html>). Having a premier research institution so close by meant it was unnecessary even to try to duplicate its rich and deep resources. In 1999 the Graduate Center relocated to Fifth Avenue at 34th street, still only blocks away from NYPL. The southeast corner of the same building that now houses the Graduate Center is where New York Public’s Science Industry and Business branch (SIBL) (<http://www.nypl.org/research/sibl/>) is located; so again, proximity befits the need for Mina Rees to attempt, with limited tax levy money, to be a research level library. Of these two branches, only SIBL has a circulating collection. However, there are many resources, online and in print, available to our students and faculty at NYPL.

The collection at the Mina Rees Library is built on the reserve requests of professors at the Graduate Center. As clearly stated in our collection policy: “Course reserves and departmental reading exam lists are the primary determinants for Library purchases. Additional desiderata lists are compiled by selectors in

continued on page 32