Book Reviews -- Monographic Musings

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You might have read about Susan Gibbons in Library Journal or The Chronicle of Higher Education; she is a mover and shaker who connects with and learns about all of those tied to the academic library—faculty, students, and librarians. Working with a team of researchers, including Nancy Fried Foster, a few years ago, she spearheaded an investigation of how University of Rochester faculty use the library. Recently, the team examined students’ paper-writing processes using anthropological research methods; the results of this project provided groundwork for The Academic Library and the Net Gen Student: Making the Connections. In her book, Gibbons explores the ways that academic libraries can meet students’ needs a propos technology. She asserts that there is a “real, vibrant future for academic libraries,” but she cautions that it “requires a realignment of the services, collections, and resources of academic libraries with the academic needs of…undergraduate students” (xv). She discusses the framework of libraries with respect to their missions; the basic ideas about and characteristics of the Net Generation; how this generation uses different kinds of technology and why; and, perhaps most importantly, what academic libraries can do to ensure that they are continually in step with their students while fulfilling their mission to be the best in the world at serving the needs of the “Net Generation,” born between 1980 and 1995. No matter what you call this population — N Gens, Generation Y, Millennials, Gen — members of this group are adept with computers, text messaging, MP3 players, and all sort of gadgets and technologies. For many librarians, their ability to quickly search the Internet, as well as their tendency to jump straight to Google, can be challenging. A wealth of information regarding this generation and their research habits, needs, and expectations can be found in Susan Gibbons’ The Academic Library and the Net Gen Student. Happy reading, everyone! — DV


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(1) The older generations are uneasy about the new technology—which kids are embracing; (2) older generations tend to be uneasy about new media—which are coming into the heart of youth culture; and (3) the digital revolution, unlike previous ones, is not controlled by only adults (18).

Interestingly, Gibbons writes, students feel only moderately comfortable with online library resources. Furthermore, she states that students want technology to be present in their academic pursuits, but mainly for the purposes of convenience, course activity management, and time management — students do not necessarily see the pedagogical benefits and instructive potential of technology.

The next four chapters focus on the use of digital technologies and informatics with respect to the Net Gen patrons. Scads of books and articles delve into the Web 2.0, tagging and social bookmarking, and communication tools such as mobile phones, instant messaging, and social networking. Each of these chapters introduces the reader to the technological genre, reviews the literature of the genre (which often comes from a variety of disciplines), and suggests “how an academic library could change in order to adapt, accommodate, and remain relevant to its students as they weave technologies into their academic and social lives” (xvi). Her commentary on each genre is comprehensive, and she deftly and economically used figures and examples. Gibbons’ ideas about said genres viewed through a library-focused lens are stirring. One can’t help but to think of all the exciting possibilities that exist to better serve our Net Gen patrons.

In her concluding chapter, Gibbons reassures readers that adaptation to new technologies’ rate of change is not only a challenge for the academic library; rather, all aspects of the university — from the adoption of course management systems to in-class pedagogies — are slow to change, while traditional students make up “one of the most adaptive, flexible segments of the American population” (92). She proposes a handful of suggestions for libraries and librarians wanting to step up and adapt to such a dynamic generation.

Scads of books and articles delve into the characteristics of Millennials, this new generation of technologically savvy young adults; however, few sources provide such in-depth coverage of this generation and their library behaviors. The Academic Library and the Net Gen Student is a natural follow-up to Frances Jacobson Harris’ I Found It on the Internet: Coming of Age Online. Gibbon’s book is a must-read for those working in an academic library that serves the 18- to 24-year-old demographic, especially public service professionals and library administrators. I can only hope that a second edition is on the way, complete with unforeseen technologies and the full report of Gibbons’ and Foster’s anthropological study of the library habits of undergraduates at the University of Rochester.