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Book Reviews-Monographic Musings

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Book Reviews — Monographic Musings

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Column Editor’s Note: For those hearing a calling in librarianship, the variety of options for tailoring a career might not be immediately evident. Modern libraries are home to a plethora of services and resources, and even though libraries and those who keep them running are constantly evolving, patrons have a steadfast feeling of the library being “theirs.” Librarian and Inside Higher Ed blogger Barbara Fister explores this in her recent post, “What Can Higher Ed Learn from Libraries?” One of the commenters supporting her piece offers one reason for this loyalty: “libraries are about people.” How deftly put! With this in mind, imagine the multiplicity of people served by libraries, people whom library professionals can assist: students at different points along their academic continuum, genealogy researchers, book groups, and academics in a myriad of disciplines — including such diverse fields as literature, communication, STEM disciplines, and environmental sustainability.

How appropriate, then, that this month’s reviewers address titles that explore one of these diverse fields and those who might curate and disseminate its information and knowledge. Many thanks to reviewers Wm. Joseph Thomas and Burton Callicott for sharing their thoughts on these books. Happy reading, everyone! — DV


Reviewed by Wm. Joseph Thomas (Head of Collection Development, Joyner Library, East Carolina University) <thomasw@ecu.edu>

Working in the Virtual Stacks: The New Library and Information Science is intended to inspire people to consider librarianship as a career. It is a sequel of sorts to Kane’s Straight from the Stacks (2003), but is arranged differently and takes into account the significant changes technology has wrought on librarianship. Rather than being arranged by library and position type, as some other career guides are, Working in the Virtual Stacks is divided into five chapters that focus on librarian roles: Subject Specialists, Technology Gurus and Social Networkers, Teachers and Community Liaisons, Entrepreneurs, and Administrators. About half the book is devoted to the first two chapters, and four of the five chapters address the need for librarians to engage in educational activities with patrons. Indeed, Kane and several of the contributors note that teaching is becoming a “core professional responsibility” for librarians (99). Each chapter begins with roughly five pages describing the environments, skills, education and training, and relevant professional associations. The skills sections have bulleted lists with little overlap. Four of the five chapters have “all library types” in the environment. The chapter on librarians as entrepreneurs provides several options for work environment because it focuses on non-library jobs for “freelancers.” There is some evidence of entrepreneurship within libraries already, but librarians should hone the entrepreneurial skills Kane suggests: developing new products and services, marketing themselves, and most importantly, demonstrating how libraries add value to their institutions. Continued on page 42
The majority of each chapter is devoted to “Spotlights” on various librarians; these spotlights are the best part of the book. Many of the 34 spotlighted librarians are well-known speakers and authors in library circles, including Steven J. Bell, Meredith Farkas, Scott Walter, and Jessamyn West. These spotlighted librarians come from a variety of academic, medical, public, school, and special libraries, and in their spotlights address the type of work featured in that chapter. Many of them address what drew them into librarianship, and scattered throughout the spotlights are helpful tips, such as getting library experience prior to committing to library school. Several themes recur, including a focus on end users, innate curiosity, the influence of technology, and the need for librarians always to keep learning. Each spotlight ends with recommended Websites, and each chapter ends with a few notes. Although there is an index, a short section containing brief profiles of the spotlighted librarians would have been nice.

Overall, Kane and the spotlighted librarians do a good job showing that, even though librarians have changed how they engage with their users, the mission of librarians remains to “connect people to the right information” (152).

The most serious shortfall of Working in the Virtual Stacks: The New Library and Information Science is that it does not include technical services librarians, although the “New Library and Information Science” depends on high quality metadata and the efficient acquisition and management of library resources. Despite this omission, Working in the Virtual Stacks is well suited for incoming library science students, and a book you just want to see succeed.

though it is useful and valuable, this collection of essays is not quite so revolutionary. This is not to say that it is of poor quality, just that the concern is more about the business part of the equation and has more modest goals. Many of the essays begin with some cursory sustainability precepts before getting into the nitty gritty: “Sustainability is an important consideration in construction and the concept of sustainability in the context of construction is about creating and maintaining a healthy-built environment and at the same time focusing on minimizing resources and energy consumption, thereby reducing damage to the environment, encouraging reuse and recycling, and maximizing protection for the natural environment” (441-442).

This is an odd book in that it is clearly geared for people in sustainable management positions but it is written by academics. The editors are right to call it a reference book in that it covers a lot of ground — figuratively and literally. The scope is truly international and the topics range from supply networks to development policies. It would have been nice if the editors had made an attempt to group the essays by theme but unfortunately there appears to be little logic to the order of the essays. It is hard to imagine marketing this book. A few of the chapters, such as “Japan for Sustainability,” are more historical and broad based but, for the most part, the chapters are specific and deal with real world issues and approaches. Relevant chapters could be very useful for individuals who find themselves heading up what most likely is a new department or new focus to an established business or even government office. “The use of environmental assessment tools can help in delivering buildings better suited to their physical settings and that impact on their socio-economic and environmental context” (454). But it would seem excessive and…unsustainable to purchase this book just for one chapter or two chapters. At the same time, I do not imagine that there will be too many libraries that will want to add this title to their collection. Schools that have a program in sustainability or even environmental studies may want to have a copy so that students can see what kinds of things are being written for practitioners, but it would not be much value to anyone else. Writing a paper on sustainability or even sustainability management. All in all, this is a timely and professionally edited volume but its audience may be somewhat limited. ✪


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