

February 2008

Book Reviews -- Monographic Musings

Debbie Vaughn

College of Charleston, vaughnd@cofc.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg>



Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Vaughn, Debbie (2008) "Book Reviews -- Monographic Musings," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 20: Iss. 1, Article 21.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.2703>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

Book Reviews — Monographic Musings

Column Editor: **Debbie Vaughn** (College of Charleston) <vaughnd@cofc.edu>



Column Editor's Note: In the November 2007 issue of *ATG*, reviewer **Burton Callicott** explored a few titles germane to the research needs of the "Net Generation," born between 1980 and 1995. No matter what you call this population — *N Gens*, *Generation Y*, *Millennials*, *iGen* — members of this group are adept with computers, text messaging, *MP3* players, and all sort of gadgets and

technology. 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 Gibbon's *The Academic Library and the Net Gen Student***. Happy reading, everyone! — *DV*

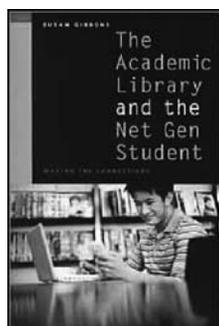
(1) The older generations are uneasy about the new technology—which kids are embracing; (2) older generations tend to be uneasy about new media—which are coming into the heart of youth culture; and (3) the digital revolution, unlike previous ones, is not controlled by only adults (18).

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 different kind of technology: online gaming, **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 **Gibbon's** and **Foster's** anthropological study of the library habits of undergraduates at the **University of Rochester**. 🌱



Gibbons, Susan. ***The Academic Library and the Net Gen Student: Making the Connections***. Chicago: ALA, 2007. 9780838909461. 160 pages. \$45.00.

Reviewed by **Debbie Vaughn** (College of Charleston) <vaughnd@cofc.edu>

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 anthropologist **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 unique teaching, learning, and research needs of their home academic institutions by actively participating in the creation, transmission, and dissemination of knowledge (90).

In chapter one, "The Mission of an Academic Library," **Gibbons** offers a thought-provoking portrait of the library mission, stating that it should "follow the needs of its patrons, even if it means changing some of the library's core functions and services" (xv). **Gibbons** draws on ideas from **Clayton Christensen**, author of *Innovator's Dilemma*, regarding disruptive technologies. She creates the analogy that digital photography is to film photography as

ATMs are to bank tellers. In the library world, this analogy can be extended to reason that the Internet can be seen as a disruptive technology to the academic library. Think of the number of services that are built on the Internet: **Google Answers**, **ChaCha**, **Yahoo! Answers**, **Amazon.com**, and **Google Scholar**. Students use these services as alternatives to information resources bearing the "library brand." When discussing academic libraries' mission, **Gibbons** also borrows **Jim Collins'** "hedgehog concept" from *Good to Great*. This concept allows libraries to explore their potential niches in the academic community and funnel activities into realizing their promise. Finally, **Gibbons** cites *The Social Life of Information*, by **Seely Brown** and **Paul Duguid**, to articulate the differences between information vs. knowledge. Knowledge, higher on the cognitive ladder than information, requires human interaction, and librarians are ripe for the part. Librarians also serve as translators between faculty steeped in the traditions of their discipline and students who are in the infancy of their disciplinary grounding. In order to be that human link and to translate between faculty and students, we must KNOW our students — we must do everything we can to understand the Net Generation.

Gibbons offers a solid overview of the different generations in American society, focusing (of course) on the Net Generation, in chapter two. Based on the prediction formula of **William Strauss** and **Neil Howe**, authors of *Millennials Rising*, Net Geners "will rebel against Generation X [pessimistic and selfish] styles and attitudes, correct for Baby Boomer excesses, and fill the [hero] role vacated by the G.I. [Generation]" (13). It is in this discussion of the Net Gen that **Gibbons** introduces the two-year study of undergraduate students that she and **Foster** lead at the **University of Rochester** libraries. Through her own observations and from others' writing, she looks at the gap between the Net Gen — digital natives — and other generations—digital immigrants. **Gibbons** refers to three fundamental differences that make up this gap: