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Book Reviews: Monographic Musings

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Book Reviews — Monographic Musings

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

Stielow, Frederick. *Reinventing the Library for Online Education.* Chicago: ALA Editions, 2014. 978-0-8389-1208-9. 378 pages. \$75.00.

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

For the past two years, I have been teaching a learning skills class via distance education. When I taught this course in a brick-and-mortar setting, we spent at least one — but sometimes two — class periods in the library covering topics such as interpreting search results, evaluating sources, and other information literacy concepts. Moving to the online environment has been difficult for me, and one of the biggest challenges that I've faced is determining how to effectively introduce students to campus services and resources (including, of course, the library), virtually. As any instructor strives to keep up with best practices in pedagogy, I have immersed myself in books, articles, and blogs about teaching and learning strategies in the “click classroom.” In the process, I have followed news and developments in higher education and savored the dialog struck between advocates and opponents of online education, MOOCs, for-profit institutions, and other *Opposing Viewpoints*-worthy topics.

Frederick Stielow has written a pivotal book addressing the way the library can and needs to remain relevant in the growing enterprise of online education. *Reinventing the Library for Online Education* offers an informative overview/history of online education, the library's role in this mode of course delivery, and the demands of online library personnel. He also gives what he calls “commentaries” on a variety of library services, methods of operation, and systems. **Stielow** breaks down these commentaries into three groups, subsequently defining services, systems, and modi operandi as those that should be eliminated, redefined, or constructed.

No doubt, **Stielow's** experience and credentials make him the perfect author to tackle the subject. He has served as department head, library dean, public library system director, and professor. He has authored numerous books on archives management and virtual libraries. Perhaps most impressive is his post at the **American Public University System (APUS)**, where he is vice president and dean of libraries, electronic course materials and APUS ePress. It should be noted that APUS is an entirely online enterprise, and **Stielow** has grown its library into a model for supporting and partnering with online learning endeavors. In fact, in February he was named as this year's **Routledge Distance Learning Librarianship Conference Sponsorship Award** recipient; his prize will be presented at the **ALA Annual Conference** in Las Vegas. In her letter of nomination, **Susan Hyland**, AVP of Library Operations at APUS, aptly summed up **Stielow's** accomplishments: “As head of APUS' virtual library services, this visionary has long been at the forefront of a revolutionary transition — successfully moving distance learning librarianship into center-stage in the new world of online universities... The APUS Online Library moved from marginal to a position of sustainability.”

Reinventing the Library is a bit richer and more philosophical than many books on library issues. It's also written with non-traditional formatting — not quite as dramatic as **Jennifer Egan's** Pulitzer Prize-winning

novel *A Visit from the Goon Squad* or **Mark Danielewski's** *House of Leaves*, but the pages are filled with kickers, text boxes, and bullets. **Stielow** explains that this is intentional: “it reflects the Web's unfolding impact on written communication” (xv). It forces the reader to think and learn about the library as it pertains to online education as though the reader has been dropped into online education's native habitat. “See also” references act as print hyperlinks and encourage the reader to explore content in a non-linear fashion. The only thing that would bring the reader closer to the native habitat would be to offer *Reinventing the Library* in online course format. Even **Stielow's** colophon is also creative. Traditionally, of course, the colophon is a simple closer, identifying the font, spacing, paper type, and other specs of a publication — the bones, if you will. **Stielow** lauds the bones of his publication: APUS, its library, and growth of Classroom/Research Information Services, Electronic Course Materials, and other initiatives.

Reinventing the Library for Online Education is a fascinating read. It is eye opening and thought provoking for library personnel supporting online education endeavors, faculty teaching online courses, and higher education administrators. In fact, it would be a good idea for all senior academic affairs administrators to take a look at this timely work, whether or not their institution's online education is currently booming — because if it isn't thriving now, it is likely that soon it will be. 🐻



From the Reference Desk

by **Tom Gilson** (Associate Editor, *Against the Grain*, and Head of Reference Emeritus, College of Charleston, Charleston, SC 29401) <gilson@cofc.edu>

Berkshire Dictionary of Chinese Biography (2014, 9781933782669 \$595) is a three-volume set structured using a chronological approach as it offers one hundred thirty-five biographies of influential figures in Chinese history. The set is edited by **Kerry Brown** of the China Studies Centre at the **University of Sydney** and draws on the knowledge and expertise of an international list of more than one hundred contributors. Coverage spans the time periods from the early **Xia Dynasty** (2100 BCE) through the **Tang** (618-907 CE); the **Song Dynasty** (960-1279) through the **Ming** (1368-1644); and the **Qing Dynasty** (1644-1912) up to People's Republic and the modern opening of China in 1979. There is also a



Volume 4 (2014, 9781614729006, \$175, pre-publication price) set for release later this year that will bring coverage to the present.

While this is a biographical reference, the focus is on more than biography. The goal of the set is not only to provide facts about the lives of leading figures. The attempt here is to use these biographies to provide readers an understandable context from which to view the whole of Chinese history.

The entries are substantial and range from shorter sketches of 1,000 words to full-blown essays that come in at close to 8,000 words. Coverage includes both well- and lesser-known figures and features scientists and inventors, philosophers and religious figures, dynastic rulers, statesmen and military leaders, as well as poets, authors, artists, and scholars. As one might expect, the vast majority are men but some prominent women are covered. Each entry has a similar structure that provides

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