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Book Reviews: Monographic Musings

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The relevance to modern librarians of political advice written by Niccolò Machiavelli, a bureaucrat from the early 1500s during a time of the feuding Italian city-states, might surprise. In *The Machiavellian Librarian*, editors Melissa Aho and Erika Bennett, along with 28 contributing authors, explain how Machiavelli’s political advice from 500 years ago, to the glee of liberal arts advocates everywhere, is relevant to librarians today.

When thinking of someone who is Machiavellian, we more likely think of a Francis Underwood of the recent American House of Cards series than we do a librarian. Despite the title, the editors and authors do not advocate for ruthlessness in the stacks. Instead, some of Machiavelli’s advice is repositioned to advocate for librarians to be personally assertive and high-achieving in the pursuits of preserving libraries in the midst of turbulent times and improving the profession’s services throughout our respective realms.

Rather than simply using Machiavelli as a gimmick in the title or introduction, he is quoted throughout to make salient points. These quotations reassert the theme—that librarians can influence those in power and ally with those who can share their influence with us—in this collection of 26 chapters. While a few quotes are repeated by multiple authors, making it seem that a list of quotes might have been provided to be worked into the chapters, this repetition is slight compared to the duplication of content and context by the many contributing authors in their respective chapters. Such duplication is outweighed by the diverse perspectives represented, which allow readers a walk through the trenches on the multiple fronts in the battle for the relevancy of libraries in today’s conflict-ridden, resource-scarce society. The inclusion of authors from large public and private universities to a small liberal arts college, a community college, and even one K-12 school library, authors accounting experiences as new librarians, middle managers, and library directors, and authors from both public and technical services shows how any librarian can have influence.

Each chapter begins with an abstract, and keywords then recount how the author(s) have had influence before concluding with specific practical recommendations and references. While many recommendations are not particularly revolutionary (e.g., “listen to your users” and “collaborate with other campus units”), having them collected into one tome and repeatedly explained and reinforced through the various authors’ experiences and phrasing greatly increases the likelihood that a reader will understand some of them and be able to apply them in one’s own situation.

Jorge Brown has a particularly instructive chapter on the relationship between satellite libraries and main libraries and advises that “you are your best public relations agent.” Leslie L. Morgan calls upon librarians to “take an assertive and confident approach in articulating who we are in the profession today.” Maggie Farrell explains, “politics is also the process of helping others get to yes for your initiatives.” Kacy L. Allgood shares about how to effectively network: “A Machiavellian librarian must constantly create opportunities to sell library services and build the client base” and can achieve support from others by being “the best informed, most polite, and nonthreatening stalkers.”

A concluding chapter by the editors would have been welcomed to summarize the various recommendations, but Eric Owen concludes the book with a particularly engaging chapter about the opportunities and pitfalls of transitions in campus and library leadership, reorganization, and shared governance.

A more convincing, more unified narrative advocating the thesis could perhaps have been achieved with less duplication by actually rewriting *The Prince as the Librarian* or by taking passages from *The Prince* and expounding on each from the view of a modern librarian. As written, though, *The Machiavellian Librarian* certainly inspires and equips librarians to become influential leaders. Useful advice on personal career advancement, networking, identifying one’s strengths, listening, and communicating is provided. Examples are provided of how to improve strategic planning, outreach to power brokers and influencers, provide services to underserved populations, and build alliances across campus and the greater community.

Todd Fenton, while explaining process mapping and needs assessment, encapsulates the book well. Like a prince, he writes, “being a librarian is about serving people” while reminding us that “service is not about martyrdom, nor is it without reward.” Throughout the book, inspiration is found in the wisdom of centuries-old political advice—that in the best cases through carefully planned and implemented strategies and interpersonal relations we can improve our personal station while also improving the conditions for our patrons and coworkers. If we fail, like a prince, our project, department, or library will be defeated, our realm divided, spoils distributed to the victors, and our works relegated to the pages of history or forgotten.

This book is highly recommended for all librarians seeking to have influence, particularly those with a proclivity for the liberal arts. Deceit and megalomania are optional.

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**Ward, Suzanne M. Rightsizing the Academic Library Collection.** Chicago: ALA, 2015. 978-0-8389-1298-0. 148 pages. $60.00.

Reviewed by Kristina M. Edwards (Acquisitions Librarian, Elihu Burritt Library, Central Connecticut State University) <kedwards@ccsu.edu>

After reading *Rightsizing the Academic Library Collection* by Suzanne M. Ward, I will admit that I felt like the weeding/de-selection project that I have on the horizon will not be an impossible feat. Ward presents one of the most feared and disliked aspects of librarianship in a way that can provide you the confidence and assurance necessary to “rightszie” your collections without feeling like you are betraying scholarship or ruining your library for today’s and future users. With planning, communication, and follow through anyone can “rightszie” their library collections regardless of format.

Ward introduces readers to the concept of “rightsizing” library collections and the creation of a “new vision” that “requires making tough decisions about whether, as opposed to how, to retain large portions of their physical collections.” (Ward viii). She provides a foundation for helping librarians understand continued on page 38
current trends in collection management, effects of digitization, and impacts on various library stakeholders. She even addresses the difficult topic of resistance to “rightsizing” by faculty and library colleagues.

Ward discusses and suggests that planning is the key to ensuring that the process of “rightsizing” your library collections runs as smoothly and efficiently as possible. The various aspects of the planning process are discussed from creation of the criteria that will be used to review the collection (withdrawal policy) to communicating and collaborating with colleagues throughout the project to disposal options for the materials that will be removed. She places emphasis on making sure that both the library and university administration support the process of “rightsizing” the library collections as well as collection retention partnerships among libraries.

After reviewing “traditional” weeding and de-selecting procedures, Ward moves on to provide sample workflows for “rightsizing” your library collection. Given the various types of library materials that need to be “rightsized,” she provides sample workflows for journals, books, and microforms with suggestions for other material types like DVDs, VHS tapes, Audio CDs, LPs, and government documents. She concludes with information on next steps, advocating for setting up a plan for continuous evaluation in the future and celebration.

Rightsizing the Academic Library Collection is an essential book for librarians working towards a plan for reducing the footprint of the physical library collection. Given the rapid nature of change in technology, education, and our everyday lives, many people have clung to the idea of the “traditional library” as that entity that can’t or shouldn’t change. We have expanded our electronic resources holdings to meet the needs of our students, but we need to open to the new vision of libraries as places for knowledge creation, collaboration, and interactive learning. Using the tools that are provided in this book can help any library move forward to reduce physical collections to allow more space for this new vision.

My only issue with this work would be, when comparing the amount of coverage given to journal and book de-selection, journal de-selection should be covered much more in-depth. Coverage for “rightsizing” book collections is covered but to a lesser extent. Unfortunately, for many of us the struggles that we have are with “rightsizing” our book collections not with journal de-selection. My hope is that after more librarians use the tools and suggestions within this book, more libraries will share their workflows for “rightsizing” their book collections so that we can eventually create a best practice that we all can adapt and use to address the uniqueness that each library has within their library collections. Also, finding ways for libraries to do this in-house without the cost of a consultant would be of great benefit to smaller libraries that cannot afford a consultant to provide the necessary data analysis.

Ward provides a great tool for libraries and librarians to plan and complete a “rightsizing” project. I hope readers of this book will take away that “rightsizing” does not mean libraries and librarians devalue books or that somehow we are abandoning one of our essential functions, to preserve scholarship, but that as academic libraries it is essential to evaluate and remove materials that are no longer helpful and accurate from our library collections for the sake of our students and faculty.

Ward is Head, Collection Management, at Purdue University Libraries in West Lafayette. This is her second book about collection management; she previously published A Guide to Implementing and Managing Patron-Driven Acquisitions for ALCTS.