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Book Reviews-Monographic Musings

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Column Editor’s Note: I’m always up for changing things. So for this month’s column I have a comparative review on the same topic but from different authors and format. This book on Metadata superbly reviewed by Maurine McCourry gives us an excellent overview of the subject and how it is being used not just by libraries, archives, and museums but publishers as well.

As a book review editor, I’m always on the lookout for small LIS publishers who don’t have a wide access to a marketing machinery that big publishers have. So for this issue, I have a book reviewed on Critical Information Literacy. Melissa Cardenas-Dow provides an insightful review of how it means to provide critical information literacy that focuses more on the evaluation and the understanding of the social value of information.

These are just some highlights from this issue. Read on for more and of course if you’d like to be a reviewer for ATG, just let me know.

Happy reading. — RG

Zeng, Marcia Lei, and Jian Qin. Metadata. 2nd ed. Chicago, IL: Neal-Schuman, 2015. 9781555709655. 584 pages, $84.00.


Reviewed by Maurine McCourry (Technical Services Librarian, Hillsdale College, Mossey Library) <mmcourry@hillsdale.edu>

Publishing regarding metadata has increased significantly in recent years. The field, though, is still very new. The fact that two books reviewed here are both already in second editions, the first editions having been published in 2008 and 2012, respectively, reflects the rapid pace at which developments in metadata production and storage are advancing. They are two very different books, aimed at two very different populations, but together they still cover but a fraction of the scope of the metadata field in its current state.

Zeng and Qin’s Metadata is a textbook designed for use principally in graduate programs in library and information science (LIS). The advisory board for the publication is made up entirely of LIS faculty. The authors, too, both serve on the faculty of LIS programs, Zeng at Kent State University, and Qin at Syracuse University. Their approach, therefore, is academic and highly technical. It is a comprehensive introduction to the use of metadata in libraries, archives, and museums (LAMs), giving future information professionals a clear and up-to-date picture of both historical and procedural aspects.

This substantial text is divided into five parts. Part One covers the “Fundamentals of Metadata,” beginning with a brief history and basic definitions and examples. Chapter one, in fact, would stand well on its own as an introduction to LAM metadata for practitioners or students in other fields. Additional chapters in the section delve into more detail regarding the use of metadata vocabularies and the actual construction of metadata descriptions. Part Two deals with “Metadata Vocabulary Building Blocks,” explaining how metadata vocabularies and schemas are actually developed and implemented. There is also extensive explanation of why so many of these structures exist, both in this chapter and in those following.

Part Three is primarily an overview of various metadata services of interest to LAM professionals. The first chapter introduces the concept of “linked data” in the LAM metadata context, and includes what might be the clearest explanation of exactly what linked data is and what it means to this audience. The authors not only clarify the concept in terms easily accessible to LIS students and professionals, but also provide concrete suggestions for the LAM community’s next steps in actually making use of linked data principles and becoming a truly interactive part of the wider information universe. Their recommendations are basically prerequisites for bringing LAMs to a level at which they can adopt Tim Berners-Lee’s principles for linked data (p. 277).

Part Four is a fairly brief but thorough summary of the “Metadata Outlook in Research,” a topic which these two authors are exceptionally well-suited to address, both having contributed to the literature themselves. And Part Five expands in greater detail on the specific “Metadata Standards” mentioned briefly in earlier chapters. The authors state that it is “not meant to be an exhaustive list of standards” (p.401), but it comes pretty close, especially for this volume’s readership.

The only potential problem with the use of this book by LAM practitioners may come in Part One with what may be considered evidence of limited understanding of the history and practice of traditional library cataloging. Specifically, the first chapter includes the statement, “the Internet and the Web have in many ways become the new library catalogs” (p. 7), and in the third chapter, there is an assertion made that metadata creation is so different from traditional cataloging that those who perform it “should have knowledge that far exceeds applying rules specified by the structure and content standards,” and that these professionals “must now be involved in decisions beyond descriptive cataloging, beginning at the very outset of a digital collection project” (p. 85). Metadata professionals who began their careers as library catalogers may contend that this has always been the case, regardless of the format of the data being created or the material which it describes.

The subtitle of Register and McIlroy’s The Metadata Handbook describes it well. It is written by and for publishers, serving a practical ready reference and guide to the use of metadata in the publishing industry. Although there is helpful reference throughout to other types of metadata, particularly those produced and used by libraries, the focus is on ONIX data produced by and for use by publishers. The insight offered into the connection between publisher-provided metadata and that provided and used by libraries comes primarily from Register’s background as a professional librarian previously employed by OCLC as well as by Ingram Book Group. Her company, DataCurate, in addition to publishing this volume, “is focused on products and services to help publishing professionals meet the information demands of the 21st century marketplace.”

McIlroy, a publisher and author, manages the Website www.thefutureofpublishing.com. He writes and lectures extensively on the direction of the publishing industry in the digital age. Both authors write with some urgency here on the need for publishers to commit resources to producing quality metadata that interacts with the larger information world in the fullest way possible. Their text is very practical and accessible, although surprisingly plagued with some typographical errors.

This text, too, is divided into five parts. Part One gives an excellent overview of the “players” in the publishing industry which participate in the creation and/or use of metadata. Part Two gives the basics of the metadata standards used in the publishing industry. Included is a brief description of the MARC format, and an exceptionally succinct explanation of the need for the library community to transition away from the format to something like BIBFRAME. Part Three outlines the metadata elements important to the description of books and eBooks in the publishing world and the worlds, like libraries, with which they must share data. Part Five provides feedback from the authors and several other industry leaders regarding the current state of metadata in the field, in some cases simply reiterating the statements the same individuals provided for the first edition.

It must be noted here that this review was prepared using a print copy of Jeng and Qin’s textbook, and an electronic copy of Register and McIlroy’s guidebook, read using iBooks on an iPad. These two formats suited the two texts well. Since a student participating in a metadata course would need to spend hours with close study of the textbook’s content, the printed format might be most useful. The use of the

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handbook would be more as a reference tool, though, which use would certainly be facilitated by the electronic format. Both texts, though, are available in both formats, and will be useful to students, scholars, and practitioners throughout the information community in any version.


Reviewed by Melissa I. Cardenas-Dow (Social Sciences Librarian at California State University, Sacramento) <melissa.cardenasdow@gmail.com>

After the November 2016 U.S. presidential election, many news analysts, commentators, and authors have referred to our present time as “post-truth,” a descriptive word used to indicate when “objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.” This author agrees with such portrayals of the current political climate, the pervasiveness of false news pieces, euphemisms such as “alternative facts,” and propaganda remains.

As academic librarians continuously claim that the propagation of information literacy is a core centerpiece of our professional purpose, writings on library instruction, nurturing discerning information habits, and stimulating students’ critical engagement with information and knowledge production, distribution, and consumption, such as Annie Downey’s Critical Information Literacy: Foundations, Inspiration, and Ideas, have gained increased and urgent importance. The author is the Associate College Librarian and Director of Research Services at Reed College Library in Portland, Oregon. She is a liaison librarian for anthropology, history, and linguistics. Her current research interests include women in librarianship, student research, and critical information literacy. Downey’s book focuses on critical information literacy (CIL) as it is understood, discussed, and practiced by academic librarians. This book brings together issues, concerns, and conversations about CIL that have been occurring among library instruction practitioners.

Downey stresses the purpose of information literacy instruction, familiar to instruction librarians: the support of an informed citizenry who must deal with a networked, information-bloated environment, filled with varying types of information with differing levels of reliability and authority. She begins her inquiry into information literacy instruction by establishing the link of the ACRL information literacy standards with the tenets of natural sciences. Downey provides a subtle, yet important description of the ACRL information literacy standards here. The allegiance to natural sciences places the practice and goal of information literacy squarely on practical, rational skills. Theoretical and pedagogical perspectives will necessarily focus on measures of effectiveness, cognitive and behaviorist conceptions of information and education focused on the search for information. As Jessica Critten notes in her introduction to Downey’s book, if we consider information literacy instruction a social science, we need to go beyond our understanding of information literacy as merely cognitive and behavioral descriptions that characterize progression in a series of discrete steps, which serve to illustrate growth in understanding. Critical information literacy not only counters the notion that information literacy instruction is a natural science, it provides the alternative that librarianship is a social science, that information literacy instruction should focus on the evaluation and the understanding of the social value of information. In sum, the crux of developing an information literate citizenry rests on its ability to evaluate, winnow, and discern truth from falsehoods, facts from their “alternatives,” and move towards asking their own questions.

The practice of critical information literacy as pedagogy, likewise, needs a context. Downey writes about librarianship’s heavy emphasis on practice without theory. This echoes my own experiences in teaching information literacy one-shot sessions at the university undergraduate level. From my position, I often saw my role as an information literacy instructor reduced to a mechanical trainer, one who points out features of a database in order to extract information pieces that serve a particular end. Knowing that information is contextual and knowledge springs from understanding the nuances of information as embedded in a grander scheme of communication, grounding our pedagogical footing on evaluation is an important shift towards critical information literacy and identifying library information science as a social science.

Downey’s text, though not prescriptive, is an important introduction to the conversations many are having regarding the significance of critical information literacy in our professional work as educator and librarians. It is a significant aspect of the ACRL Framework versus Standards debates, as we collectively grapple with how to apply the ACRL Framework into our library instruction practice. Reference and instruction librarians, educators, and supervisors of public services in academic library settings will find Downey’s book highly useful and relevant.


Reviewed by Corey Seeman (Director, Kresge Library Services, Ross School of Business, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor) <cseeman@umich.edu>

As we explore the future of libraries, we are often focused on collections, space, staffing, and scholarly communication among many topics. While all of these elements of librarianship are critical for our success, I believe that sometimes we do not focus as much on customer service (or patron service if you are not into the whole customer thing). At my library, customer service is critically important — especially since we really do not have student space or a large physical collection. So seeing how other libraries respond to the constant challenge of serving their communities’ information needs is always useful. And with that, we have a nice addition on the subject from Stephen Mossop as part of the Chandos Information Professional Series. Mossop is the retired Head of Library Services at the University of Exeter (United Kingdom) and has pulled together interesting case studies from a diverse set of international academic libraries from Hong Kong, Turkey, the United Kingdom and Australia.

As Mossop points out, the front line (in the context of our users) is where we connect with our users. This might be circulation, reference, directional assistance, etc. These are not our favorite explorations in the library literature, but what our patrons seek out when they interact with us. There is also a stigma associated with using methods learned from business and calling those services never find their audience. This book can be part of our toolkit to ensure that we don’t replicate those failures in academic libraries.

The opening chapter, written by Mossop, focuses on some of the stigmas that academic libraries have when considering that our users are customers. This strong essay talks about what is in a name. How can we help treat our customers as customers when we cannot even call them that name (though that sounds too much like the speeches of our President Trump about who is behind terrorism). Instead of thinking of them as customers, Mossop asks us to focus on having an empathetic approach (the cornerstone of user-centric design) as we build services that we would want to use ourselves.

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Interviewing for a job can be scary, anxiety provoking, and sometimes daunting. So many questions come to mind during this process: what is the interviewer looking for? how should the interview be prepared? what things can one learn from those who have been interviewing in the field for years? is this job for me? Robin O’Hanlon, Public Services Manager at the Levy Library at Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, wrote Ace the Interview, Land a Librarian Job to help and serve as a practical guide to navigating the librarian interview process.

O’Hanlon jumps right into the practical applications as she outlines what a librarian needs for interview success. Her real-world advice spans all types of librarianship. Whether looking for a job in a public, academic, or special library, O’Hanlon lays out how to prepare, interview for, and follow up from the unique process that is the librarian interview. In addition, she brings in other perspectives on the interview process by interviewing four library directors from different types of libraries regarding their views of the librarian interview. The advice from these four seasoned librarians outlines additional thoughts on the librarian interview. By bringing in various viewpoints, those in the process of looking for, or interviewing for a librarian position will gain insight into the other side of the table.

This book is divided into three main parts — preparing for an interview, the interview process itself, and after the interview. O’Hanlon jumps right into the practical applications as she outlines what a librarian needs for interview success. Her real-world advice spans all types of librarianship. Whether looking for a job in a public, academic, or special library, O’Hanlon lays out how to prepare, interview for, and follow up from the unique process that is the librarian interview. After the big picture of the process, she goes into the details of the interview preparation. Illustrating practical ways to prepare for the interview, including appendices of spreadsheets, checklists and questions, she shows ways to stay on top of the pre-interview process. Both while searching for a position and after the interview date is set, preparation is key. O’Hanlon writes about ways to research the library, its community and mission. She illustrates how to effectively communicate one’s value to the library as much as possible, knowledge of how their own skillsets fit with the position, and successfully communicating that to the interviewer.

Shifting to the actual interview itself, O’Hanlon writes about the many things to keep in mind during the in-person interview. There is a chapter dedicated to the interview and how one can increase their chances of landing the position. By covering questions and the presentation, she goes over the basics of the interview. In addition, she writes about the typical look of the interview, how one should keep in mind their fit and purpose within the library, the different departments one might interview with, and red flags to watch for as the interviewee.

The last section goes into the follow up from the interview. The follow up is just as important as the preparation and in-person interview. There are various reasons one might get or not get a job, and O’Hanlon discusses these reasons. Aside from getting closure on the position if an offer was not made, one can always have positive takeaways from any interview. It may take many interviews to land a librarian position and if the first doesn’t work out, then there are things to do in the meantime to increase the odds of finding the best fit. She wraps up with ways to stay focused and things to keep in mind when an interview has success.

Ace the Interview, Land a Librarian Job is a very practical guide to help navigate the librarian job interview process. This book would be great for anyone looking to land their first librarian job, or gain insight into the interview process with words of wisdom from various perspectives from different types of libraries. In addition to providing resources within the book, each chapter contains references that point to great works to help with this topic. O’Hanlon writes in a clear, linear way about the librarian interview process. By providing various perspectives from librarians that have been interviewing and hiring for decades, as well as drawing on her own knowledge, she makes navigating the librarian interview process a little less daunting. 📚