
The authors, who have had practical experience in all types of academic libraries and have served as library directors or deans, have written an introductory text that covers virtually all aspects of academic librarianship. The four main sections—background and historic context, higher education today, campus and library commonalities, and the academic library today—are divided into numerous subsections with extensive bibliographies at the end of each main section. The bibliographies are divided into “references” and “launching pad”, although the difference between these two is not explained. To augment the bibliographical section, the authors contacted a number of library directors for their thoughts on academic librarianship in the 21st century, and the 21 essays that these directors provided are available at a website that is shown in the text. (This website appears to be compatible only with Internet Explorer, not with other browsers such as Firefox.)

The strength of this book lies in the breadth of its coverage, the very substantial bibliographies, the frequent use of “check this out” notes that direct the reader to an article that is particularly pertinent to the topic being discussed, and “From the authors” notes, where the authors describe specific events in their professional careers that reinforce the discussion. Clearly, the authors are offering a text that intersects with the day-to-day experience of academic librarians, rather than an abstract, theoretical text. In the chapter dealing with funding, for instance, there are substantial tables that provide detailed information to assist a library science student in understanding the data that a library administrator might have available when making management decisions.

There are also some weaknesses in the book that could be corrected in a subsequent edition or revision. The authors have chosen to write in a very conversational style, often addressing the reader as “you” and making references to courses that the reader might have completed during library school or thoughts that readers might have as they contemplate their first position in an academic library. This style is reinforced by a “key points to remember” section at the end of each chapter that seeks to summarize the preceding discussion. The key points may be helpful for some readers, but at times they are rather simplistic. One of the key points pertaining to collections development is that “Collection development duties, while challenging, can also be enjoyable, satisfying, and rewarding” (p. 237). One of the key points in budgeting is “Budgeting is more than managing this year’s allocation; it is thinking about what you will need in future as well as how well you managed previous allocations” (p. 157). Overall, the very conversational style and the use of “key points” run the risk of transforming the book into a text for first-year university students, rather than for students taking graduate level courses at library school. Sometimes the key points to remember introduce a topic that was not covered in the preceding
chapter. “Libraries can play a role in the recruitment and retention process” (p. 78) is a very valid observation, but it is not explored in the chapter devoted to students.

The book as a whole covers virtually all aspects of academic librarianship but it does so from a very strongly U.S. perspective. There is a long section on the evolution of universities in the United States, complete with discussions of land grant institutions and problems with student discipline, which has little bearing on academic librarianship in the 21st century, and there is virtually no discussion of the evolution of universities or university libraries in other countries, even other English-speaking countries. The discussion of the international acceptability of library science degrees is based solely on United States practices. At one point the authors ask “... what if the person is a citizen [of the United States] but her or his degree is from an Australian program? (p. 269). They do not ask, for example, “What if the person has a library science degree from the United States, but is applying for a position in Europe or Australia”. There is also no discussion of the challenges of providing library services to users whose first language is not English. Academic institutions throughout the world have students and faculty members from other countries, who are used to potentially different classification systems, different services, and different understandings of what an academic library is and does, but there is no entry in the subject index for “foreign students”, “international students” or ESL.

Some of the authors’ assertions are surprising: “Probably the second most common category of professional nonlibrarians in ARL and other large libraries is the subject/area bibliographer specialist” (p. 274). No source is provided to substantiate this claim and it contradicts the discussion elsewhere (pp. 219-231) of the practice of collections development and collections management and the central role of the academic librarian in this activity. Elsewhere, there is a discussion of the generational workplace values of librarians whose careers fall into different parts of the period from 1950-present: the Boomers, the GenX and the Millennials. No source is given for the table that describes each group’s values, but the information in the table is treated as definitive. In the discussion of the relationship between librarians and support staff, the authors state that “the environment where librarian and support staff tensions are most pronounced are [sic] those where the librarians are seeking to move from a non-faculty status to have such status” (p. 266). No documentation is provided to support this claim either. Surely the tensions that can exist between professional librarians and support staff can exist equally well in institutions where librarians have faculty status and institutions where they do not.

One of the surprising weaknesses of this book is the frequent occurrence of sentences with grammatical errors or sentences that do not make sense. “College [sic] and universities advertise an official tuition price …” (p. 65). “What the traditional curricular approach at a school acts as a significant brake on radical reform efforts” (p. 85). “Regardless of where the senate/council falls on
the continuum from functional to subverted, they [sic] are an integral part of campus governance.” (p. 113) “We know of few, if any, cases where the cost of desired activities were/are below the realistic amount of money you are likely to receive” (p. 143). “Rarely is it just a library concern than one of several concerns” (p. 201). In a revised version of the book, the text should be carefully edited to remove grammatical errors and to add words that appear to have been omitted.

The discussion of the academic library as physical space seems to be based on the assumption that an academic library is a stand alone entity. Academic libraries are not infrequently attached to other buildings on campus, which can have many implications. Food and beverage services may be located nearby; the library may be part of a campus service center, or it may be located close to other types of campus information services. In a revised edition of the book, these issues could be explored.

Overall, the authors provide a very comprehensive coverage of their topic. They deal in depth with the issues pertaining to libraries as physical spaces, as collections and as services. They discuss issues pertaining to large academic libraries, as well as smaller university and college libraries. They reflect on the relationship between librarians and teaching faculty, and they discuss many issues that graduating librarians should be aware of as they consider possible careers in an academic library. The contributed essays written by practicing academic librarians enhance the text by providing over twenty reflections on future trends in academic librarianship.

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