
As Editor Amanda Gluibizzi states in the Introduction to The Handbook of Art and Design Librarianship, art and design students differ from other types of academic library users, and meeting the information needs of these creative researchers poses unique challenges for librarians. This work brings together essays on a wide range of topics that are intended to guide art librarians in their day to day work, including carrying out their administrative responsibilities, developing and maintaining collections, designing innovative and relevant programming, and creating usable space. While the focus is on American libraries, the work is intended to have an “international purview” and seeks to maintain a “global focus” through its inclusion of chapters dealing with libraries in the UK, Qatar and Canada. Although not explicitly stated, this book is intended for art and design librarians at all stages of their careers, from recent graduates to experienced professionals. Authors come from a range of institutions and hold a wide variety of positions. Most chapters include useful bibliographies for further research.

The book is divided into four sections. Part I, “Roles and Responsibilities,” includes chapters on governance and administration of art and design libraries, trends in art librarianship based on an international survey, accreditation for art and design libraries, and the evolving role of visual arts liaison librarians. This section exemplifies what is perhaps one of the greatest weaknesses of the Handbook: while serving as a good starting point, many chapters are just too general to be very useful for the more experienced art and design information professional. For example, Judy Dyki’s chapter “Accreditation and Visual Arts Libraries” fails to provide sufficient detail with respect to the unique requirements and challenges of accreditation reports relating to art and design libraries to assist librarians who are charged with preparing such “formal self-study” reports. In addition, surveys are alluded to in a number of chapters throughout the book, including in this section, but the methodology is not described in detail and the actual survey is neither included nor referenced in the bibliography at the end of the chapter.

The chapters in Part II, “Materials and Collections Management,” focus on “the opportunities and difficulties art libraries face in the current collections environment and include discussions about art library special collections; working simultaneously with print and digital collections and strategies for de-accessioning; the risks and possibilities of digital prospects; scholarly communication and art publications; and cataloguing with the visual user in mind” (p. 49). Included in this section is one of the strongest essays in the volume, “Beyond the Monograph: Transformations in Scholarly Communication and Their Impact on Art Librarianship” by Patrick Tomlin. It provides an overview and examination of the “changing nature of scholarly communication and the burgeoning impact of those changes on the art and design library” (p. 92). As Tomlin points out, up to this point art librarianship has not been actively engaged with issues of open access and scholarship in the arts.

In Part III, “Teaching and Learning,” the chapters explore “the notion of visual literacy as an essential part of an art librarian’s position; methods for weaving information literacy
instruction into a studio class; working with image databases as sources of information; culturally sensitive art information literacy in societies with religious restrictions on image and media consumption; targeting multiple literacies— including visual and tactile learners—in art library instruction; and the art history student’s special research and information needs” (p. 131). The highlight of this section is “The Art of Evidence: A Method for Instructing Students in Art History Research” by Catherine Haras which “discusses a unique method of engaging undergraduates in a series of guided research steps as these enlighten student observations of an artwork” (p. 198). It provides excellent insights into how art and design librarians can play a collaborative role in assignments.

Part IV, “Learning Spaces, Promotion and Sustainability,” addresses the three topics of allocating physical space for optimal use, promotion and sustainability. Chapters provide “proven techniques and strategies for creating inviting, functional, comfortable and safe library space, for promoting programmes and services and for reinventing a dynamic professional image” (p. 214). This section includes the only two essays that provide a Canadian perspective on art and design libraries. The first, “Beyond the Ivied Walls: Outreach to the Art Community,” by Patricia Eaves-Brown, Judith Wanner and Linda Graburn deals with the “possibilities of using the academic art library space as a centrepiece for community outreach” at the University of Guelph (p. xvi). The second is “Creative Space,” by Daniel Payne of the Ontario College of Art and Design, which “explores the complex ways that creativity is intertwined with issues of space” (p. 277) and how, using Henri Lefebvre’s “vision of space, librarians can produce creative environments by actively understanding how studio-based learning occurs and creating information literacy programmes that facilitate intersections between the two realms” (p. 291).

There is a risk in today’s digital age in producing a print monograph that becomes obsolete almost as quickly as it is published, and it must be noted that this is one of the downfalls of this work. The chapter by Catherine Haras in Part III provides insights and strategies for instructing students in art history research that will prove useful for many years to come, but Paul Glassman’s chapter in Part IV on creating classrooms for library instruction already seems dated as it offers no specific insights into the particular instruction needs of art and design students that would have made it more enduring. The book concludes with profiles of the libraries with which the writers are affiliated, which are intended to give readers an indication of the “diversity of place, setting and focus of international art libraries” but which will appear out-dated in a few years’ time. An index is included at the end of the volume which upon closer examination reveals itself to be somewhat selective. A search for “ARTstor” yields no entries, yet ARTstor as a digital image database is discussed several times in different chapters. A “handbook” for art and design librarians was long overdue. This work provides many insights and will be useful as a starting point for many of the topics covered; unfortunately it falls short of meeting the needs of more experienced art and design information professionals working in the field.

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