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Conner, M. (2014). **The New University Library: Four Case Studies**. Chicago, IL: ALA.

In 2009, the President of the Librarians Association of the University of California asked Matthew Conner, an instruction librarian at UC Davis, to “design a system-wide conversation of the future of the UC library system” (p. ix). In the end, Conner elected to examine theories and speculations about the future and then test these ideas against the lived experience of UC librarians and, as the idea of this book took shape, against a set of libraries in the form of case studies.

Part 1 of the book, titled “History,” looks at developments in American university libraries through seven lenses: Reference, Personnel, Technology, Collections, Buildings, Campus Roles, and, finally, Library Culture. Obviously, there is nothing here on Technical Services only because, as Conner himself admits, “others are better equipped to discuss these topics” (p. xiv).

In the History section, Conner begins with a bird’s-eye view of the development of US libraries, taking the reader up to the arrival of the Internet in the 1990s when “technology broke its chains like Frankenstein’s monster to become a serious competitor to libraries in ways that are still unfolding. This vast exfoliation of library development can be understood more fully in terms of our seven trends” (p. 9). In each of the next chapters, he supplies quick overviews of developments and then speculates on what might happen in the future. In the Reference chapter, for example, he notes, “What seems certain is that new information technologies have contributed to the decline of reference,” (p. 14) and follows this with possibilities. “One idea calls for librarians not to sit at a reference desk, waiting for questions, but to move about looking for opportunities to be helpful” (p. 14). Another proposes “asynchronous communication to provide service outside of working hours.... The most significant idea in this area is chat reference....” (p. 15).

So how are all these bright ideas playing out in actual libraries? Part 2 of the book, “Case Studies,” explores this by examining four selected libraries with which Conner is familiar. The first, which seems a bit unexpected, is the library at the University of Hawai’i at Mānoa, chosen because Conner spent many hours there when he was growing up in Honolulu. The second library is at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where Conner graduated with his MA and PhD in English as well as his

MLS. Illinois, he writes “stands at the pinnacle of the profession and is the very paradigm of the traditional research library, with a vast collection and a decentralized departmental structure. Its efforts to grapple with change from the collection of print materials that has defined academic libraries to some new model will be instructive to any academic library” (p. xiii). The third library is the University of California, Davis, where Conner works; the fourth, at the University of California, Merced, is located within a couple of hours’ drive from UC Davis, but is, more importantly, “the first major university built in the twenty-first century in the United States, and its library, in accordance with the rest of the campus, was built as the library of the future” (p. xii). These all seem like reasonable choices—they are all set in publicly funded universities and they range from mid-sized to the relatively big, and from the relatively old to the relatively new.

Each of the case studies starts with a brief history of the library and dives into one or more of the various topics Conner has identified for study, although not necessarily under the headings he used in Part 1. For example, in the chapter on UC Davis, he certainly discusses reference trends in that library, but then moves on with headings such as “Heart of Campus” and “Go West.” While interesting, such headings are harder to reconcile with his stated goal: comparing developments in the seven identified areas. Each case study also contains a section on statistics, but the tables are not particularly informative. For example, the table titled “Vital Statistics UC Merced Library, 2009-2010,” (p. 92) includes a subheading for “Circulation.” Conner notes here the number of items circulated in that year—74,268—which is clear, but underneath the heading appears “-7.5% to 132% change in last 5 years.” How this helps the reader to identify a trend in circulation, much less understand that trend, is a mystery.

That said, this reviewer enjoyed the book, but for different reasons than perhaps he should have. Each chapter is well and engagingly written—Conner’s PhD in English has not gone to waste and, more to the point, readers in academic libraries will get some idea of the ways in which libraries are coping with various challenges. But the book misses its overall goal of identifying seven categories that are changing and then examining how four libraries are responding in each of these categories. To be sure, Conner acknowledges the problem in his conclusion: “While it is possible to apply the seven areas as a set of rubrics, this would be unnatural and would miss a lot of information” (p. 145). Fair enough—but that is not what he set out to do.

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