
We live in the information age, but what information is, how it is created and used is only beginning to be explored in earnest. This exploration is generating new sub-disciplines, with theories, methods and applications. How then do we attempt to tie up all this activity with a bow and present it comprehensibly to our students? This is the ambitious task that Lester and Koehler have attempted with *Fundamentals of Information Studies*, now in its second edition.

The scope of this survey work is broad as surmised from the six LC subject headings attached to the work, covering the science of information, information in society, information resources, services, technology and policy. Not surprisingly, the text itself spans fourteen chapters and over 400 pages. It includes a detailed table of contents, index and glossaries of terms and acronyms. Each chapter includes a reference list, and additional helpful resource lists. These references and resource lists are by necessity representative and the authors do not state why they include certain works and not others.

For those familiar with the previous edition, there are several additions. There is a new chapter on information needs and information seeking behaviour and a chapter on analyzing power and information. Aids to teaching have also been added to each chapter as “learning guide” and “information idea” components. We are told that this is intended to be an introductory textbook for undergraduate and graduate information courses thus accounting for the layout of the chapters. The new learning guides introduce key ideas and learning outcomes for each chapter. Most of these outcomes relate to foundational knowledge (understand, define, identify) and only a few relate to application (analyze, assess). There are discussion questions at the end of each chapter that do encourage reflection and synthesis. I found the style of writing to be accessible and the book itself was a relatively quick read.

The authors stated that they attempt to trace several themes throughout the book but identified the most prominent as the “impact of the development of technology on the access and use of information” (p. xv). Other themes which surface later are information as commodity and information authorship. I did find that technology issues loomed large and even when dealing with interpersonal information or policy, a discussion about technological influences was rarely more than a page away. At times I found the chapter divisions in the book to be somewhat arbitrary. For instance, I found it baffling that the printing press would merit only a sentence in “History of Information Technology” (Chapter 4) but received detailed coverage in the chapter on “Societal Institutions” (Chapter 6). In social science survey texts it can be difficult to separate concepts into distinct topics resulting in overlap and repetition. This was the case here. The instructor will need to note the interconnections within these chapters lest the student be left thinking “didn’t we already cover this?”
Although I commend the authors for including the new chapter on “Information Needs and Information Seeking Behaviour” (Chapter 3), I found it somewhat thin. The authors introduce several key figures in the field, but I felt they failed to present a clear overview of the field’s history, theories and directions before departing into a discussion of information organization. Likewise, the “History of IT” (Chapter 4) seemed to move too quickly over a substantial history toward the chapter on “Current Information Technology” (Chapter 5). In Chapter 7, they note that defining an information professional is not a straightforward task, and this is especially the case when information and information work is defined as broadly as it is here. Information professionals here run the range from computer programmers, librarians, information managers, journalists, researchers, storytellers, shamans, intelligence agents, etc. How the authors conceptualized the field was helpful (p. 152) and this gave structure to the chaos of possibilities. The conclusion of this chapter seemed to be that information work, and the skills required, were in a state of continual change. I felt it left the topic on an uncertain note.

Where the authors’ work shone for me was in the latter half of the book; the chapters dealing with information and society, information regulation, economics of information, information policy, and, particularly, information ethics. I could see that Lester and Koehler’s expertise is in these areas. One aspect that set these chapters apart was the structure. Chapter eight, for instance, progressed with guiding questions like “what does it mean to be an information society?” and “how do we know if we are one?” (p. 188). The authors would then present research that moved to address questions such as these from different perspectives, each raising new questions. The other chapters, though not using this format, seemed to progress in a more linear fashion. The chapter on “Information and Ethics” (Chapter 13) was an excellent introduction to philosophical questions of ethics, their practical out-workings through codes and legislations, and future trends that will raise ethical challenges. This was one on the highlights of the book for me. Throughout these chapters the authors made an effort to include international examples, though the U.S. context is still dominant.

The first edition is already on a number of reading lists for introductory courses, and I anticipate the second will be as well. There are few texts in this area and none that could rival its scope. It has much to offer particularly from the noted chapters, though the instructor will undoubtedly wish to supplement the readings with other works from the “additional resources” or from their own selections. The price is comparable with other texts in this area and this would be an excellent addition to any academic library’s collection both as a reference tool and introduction for the curious.

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