Innovative Solutions for Building Community in Academic Libraries

Sheila Bonnand and Mary Anne Hansen. *Innovative Solutions for Building Community in Academic Libraries*. **Hershey, PA: IGI Global, 2015. 376 pp. $160.00. Hardcover. ISBN: 9781466683921.**

Innovative Solutions for Building Community in Academic Libraries is about librarians taking an active role in engaging with the community they are supposed to serve. The editors recognize that "[m]any students and faculty alike do not turn to the library first for either their research or their social needs" (xvi). The challenge for libraries in the new century is to be more visible and active. Outreach has become more and more the focus of academic libraries. In the introduction the editors present their view that academic-only outreach alone is not sufficient. Bonnand and Hansen want to move the understanding of outreach beyond more technology or coffee shops to building relationships. Social outreach to students is now part of what libraries must do; this engagement is what creates community. This book presents a wide variety of projects that academic libraries have undertaken to build community, expand the borders of engagement with library users, and broaden what the library understands as community.

Editors Sheila Bonnand and Mary Anne Hansen are library faculty at Montana State University. Sheila Bonnand is the Instructional Services Librarian. Mary Anne Hansen is the Research Commons Librarian. Both women have advanced degrees in education and cumulatively over fifty years' experience in libraries.

This book is seventeen chapters, divided into four sections. Each section focuses on a particular aspect of outreach: information literacy instruction, targeted outreach to specific groups, library events, and library as space. The chapters, for the most part, follow the writing pattern of scholarly articles found in most peer-reviewed journals for a discipline in the social sciences or information science: statement of the problem, literature review, methodology, assessment and evaluation, and then conclusion. It will be a familiar type of writing for the librarians for whom this book is intended.

This book provides case studies from academic libraries, but the exact type of academic library varies. From private liberal arts colleges to large public universities to community colleges, the outreach contexts include learning communities, college and K-12 partnerships, online graduate programs, and community partners outside the campus.

Since one goal of the book is to move outreach beyond an academic orientation, many chapters talk about projects that focus on student groups and organizations not normally associated with the academic functions of the library, or about how outreach becomes a basic principle around which the library organizes its activity and mission. For example, in Section Two on targeted outreach, there is a chapter on collaborating with a student government association. Chapter Nine in Section Three discusses collaboration with an academic department to promote civic engagement. Section Four focuses on library as place. Two of the chapters in this section discuss community involvement in renovation plans. While not always directly involving students and faculty in the planning, the renovations had community outreach as a guiding principle.

Some chapters are more detailed than others in how to do an outreach project or event, laying out each step of the project from conception to formal assessment. Some include establishing relationships with internal partners as well. For example, in Chapter Two, the section titled "Gaining Library Administration Support" provides a useful list of insights on how establishing a relationship with other academic support departments prior to individual projects or initiatives helped ensure support and success for library outreach.

A particular strength of the book is the different types of assessment described by the contributors. A big part of any librarian's work, feedback even on mundane or routine library activities can become data that is used as evidence of the library's value to the academic community. In the area of service this is especially important because it involves affect and soft skills like relating well to people and the ability to respond positively to user needs. Unlike the hard numbers of acquisitions or circulation statistics, our perception of user experience of the library may not line up with the actual user experience: "... an idea that seems innovative and fun to library staff might not hold the same appeal for college students" (97). The forms of assessment used varied. In some cases it was informal, capturing student participation with a cellphone camera, sign-in

sheets with comments, or a simple headcount. Other outreach programs used more formal means of evaluation like post-event surveys or evaluation forms. Others used both.

One difficulty with *Innovative Solutions* is the inconsistency in writing style. While grouping the chapters according to broad themes provides some cohesion, the different writing styles of so many different authors is somewhat jarring. Another weakness found in the writing is that since the intended audience is other academic librarians, in many of the chapters the contributors could afford to assume some degree of prior knowledge of the topic. There is a tendency to engage in the librarian equivalent of "mansplaining" about libraries. For example, in one chapter there is a longish expository section on the importance of libraries in American civic life. For sharing information librarian-to-librarian this kind of explanation is not necessary. It makes otherwise good chapters tedious to read.

While mining information from *Innovative Solutions* is a worthwhile endeavor, this book left one wishing that there was a similar book focused solely on theological libraries or the types of students we serve. Though the projects are good in and of themselves, and it may be possible to adapt some of these initiatives for a seminary or theological library, only the first chapter discusses a student cohort likely to be encountered in a theological school or seminary setting: online graduate students. The overall focus is on programs that are most appropriate for undergraduates. The projects in the book miss the mark in terms of the library patron most likely to come into a seminary or theological library. This means *Innovative Solutions* will not be helpful to the theological librarian looking to find ideas for outreach specific to the needs of a library serving seminarians.

Given its cost and focus on undergraduates, purchasing *Innovative Solutions for Building Community in Academic Libraries* for a standalone theological or seminary library is not recommended. It would be worth the wait for a book that takes an approach to building community that reflects the context and characteristics of the library users encountered in a theological library.

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