Generative AI and Libraries

Claiming Our Place in the Center of a Shared Future

Michael Hanegan and Chris Rosser. *Generative AI and Libraries: Claiming Our Place in the Center of a Shared Future*. Chicago: ALA Editions, 2025. 160pp. $54.66. Paperback. ISBN: 9798892553100.

Since the publication of their white paper on "Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Theological Education" in November 2023 (now available in a second edition), Michael Hanegan and Chris Rosser have been prominent advocates for the central role of libraries and librarians in the engagement with and adoption of AI in higher education (and beyond). In their new book, *Generative AI and Libraries: Claiming Our Place in the Center of a Shared Future*, Hanegan and Rosser make an impassioned and compelling case for the key role of libraries in a future where AI is ubiquitous. Importantly, the authors view AI as an "arrival technology," meaning that "it [like electricity] will impact our lives and work whether we opt in or not" (57). For libraries, they suggest, engagement with such technology represents an evolution, not a revolution, consistent with traditional library values and practices (17), even while they urge libraries to move from "invisible support to visible guidance" (xvi) regarding AI. Since this book deals with generative AI and often argues for greater human-AI collaboration, it is noteworthy and significant that the authors acknowledge their own use of AI in writing the book (xi-xii). Interestingly, that use ranged from recording and transcription to ideation and grammatical assistance.

Generative AI and Libraries is divided into three sections: foundations; strategic implementation; and the futures of libraries in the "Age of Intelligence." Each section includes a significant number of lists, models, and frameworks. These can be useful, but one sometimes wishes for the detailed exploration of a single concrete example rather than the plethora of bullet-pointed litanies. Although this book aspires to address all types of libraries and all types of librarians, it seems mostly aimed at academic libraries and at reference/instructional librarians and library administrators. While the fundamental claim about the centrality of libraries in an AI-infused world certainly applies across the library ecosystem, a more sustained and even exclusive focus on a single element of that ecosystem (e.g., academic libraries) could enhance the book's readability and usefulness for readers.

Hanegan and Rosser emphasize the importance of embracing AI technologies, but they are not blind to the many concerns this technology raises. They repeatedly stress that our engagement with AI must be ethical and human centered. Yet, their laudable calls for ethical reflection and focus on the human often sound quite generic, abstract, and rather divorced from material realities. For example, when the authors write that "most state-of-the-art AI tools are public, free, and available on mobile and desktop devices" (54), they gloss over the tiered-subscription access offered by companies such as OpenAI and Anthropic that makes the actual "state-of-the-art" technology available only to those (individuals and institutions) who can afford it. They cite the important work of Kate Crawford (32, n.3), but they never really grapple with the ethical issues her work addresses. Of course, to do so might perhaps be seen as undercutting (or at least problematizing) the general thrust of their argument, as it might present libraries or librarians as obstacles to technological innovation.

A critical concept for Hanegan and Rosser—so critical apparently that they discuss it in several different sections of their book—is metaliteracy. As they define it, following Mackay and Jacobson, metaliteracy "is a comprehensive framework that empowers individuals to critically evaluate, create, share, and reflect on information in collaborative digital environments" (43). Metaliteracy thus

moves beyond (but remains connected with) traditional information literacy's focus on finding and evaluating information by including creating, sharing, and reflecting on information as part of literacy. In chapter seven, Hanegan and Rosser relate metaliteracy to AI literacy and to information literacy as articulated in the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education. Here, the lines or distinctions between the types of literacy are sometimes fuzzy—even overlapping; the authors already declared that metaliteracy actually is the same as AI literacy (42). Perhaps this proliferation of literacies is a testament to the complexity of the digital information landscape. Perhaps it is a rhetorical strategy for nervous librarians to communicate their relevance to cash-strapped institutional administrators. Sometimes, however, it serves more to obscure than to illuminate.

The governing metaphor that pervades this book is gravity or the gravitational center. As its subtitle suggests, *Generative AI and Libraries* intends to (re)establish the centrality of libraries in society and especially at higher education institutions, particularly in the context of a disruptive technology that might be seen as a challenge or even as a threat to the continued relevance of libraries and librarians. The metaphor suggests that libraries belong at the center, not the margins or periphery. For all its sometimes distracting models and frameworks (it is an ambitious work despite its relative brevity), this book ably demonstrates that libraries have regularly been at the vanguard (or center) of technological change and adaptation. Hanegan and Rosser see the meteoric rise of generative AI as a moment of opportunity for librarians. It is up to us to embrace the opportunity and to make the most of it.

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