2014

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Recommended Citation

Hedreen, Rebecca (2014) "Review of Collaboration in Libraries and Learning Environments," *Collaborative Librarianship*: Vol. 6 : Iss. 1 , Article 9.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.du.edu/collaborativelibrarianship/vol6/iss1/9>

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Review of *Collaboration in Libraries and Learning Environments*

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Maxine Melling and Margaret Weaver, eds. *Collaboration in Libraries and Learning Environments* (London: Facet Publishing, 2012) 224 p.

The problem with this book is that it is unfortunately titled. This book is not about librarians collaborating with faculty in online courseware, or even the merging of library and IT desks (alone). This book is a collection of interesting and relevant case studies, many involving what are often called Learning or Information Commons on a grand scale. Not all of them involve libraries, and for many that do, the library is not the focus. Most of the chapter authors are non-library, or more-than-library, administrators. I suspect that, given the title, many librarians will pick up this book and be disappointed in the lack of library focus, and many others in higher education will not pick this book up at all. It is not a book for the average librarian or, despite the “learning environments” in the title, an online courseware administrator or instructional designer.

I did wonder if the phrase “learning environments” was part of what misled me upon initial viewing of this book. Perhaps the UK uses the term differently than we do in the US? But a quick Internet search provides plenty of examples of “learning environments” as online learning systems as I am familiar with the term. The other use of the term to generally describe the entire ecosystem of the university student would naturally include the library, and therefore the “libraries and” of the title would lead me away from that interpretation, though, in fact, that is more of the intended meaning.

Chapter 1 is written by a Pro-Vice-Chancellor at Aberystwyth University, Rebecca Davies. As a high level administrator with a library background, she describes the trends and pressures on higher education and offers some key points to consider. She mentions the “edgeless world” which describes the problem with the focus of

the book—in an edgeless world, the library becomes a fluid part of the university as a whole, and not a discrete entity, and so discussing collaboration from the point of view of the library is not particularly relevant.

Craig Gaskell is Principal of the Scarborough Campus of Hull University. In Chapter 2, he describes the process and outcome of creating a campus wide “one-stop” center, based in his campus library. The library is the setting, but not the focus, of this incredible effort to streamline student services. A new desk serves not only as a library circulation desk (loans, fines, returns, etc.) but as an IT helpdesk, a financial account desk, and pretty much any other student support front-line service offered at the university.

Chapter 3, by Andrew West and Raegan Hiles, takes a different tack in covering collaboration efforts among professional associations in British higher education. West is a university administrator and Hiles is an association administrator. They raise intriguing scenarios for saving resources and expanding services.

Michael Ridley (former CIO and Chief Librarian at University of Guelph) offers one of the few library-centric chapters, Chapter 4, with a reflection on cultural change in three library consortia in Canada. The shift from individual control to consortial collaboration can be painful, and Ridley identifies a number of characteristics that helped these consortia deal with that shift.

Margaret Weaver, Head of Library and Student Services at the University of Cumbria (and book co-editor), discusses another library consortium in Chapter 5. However, she uses the library as an example of the process of establishing collaboration among a large group of diverse institutions. There is little specific to libraries, and the project plans are described as “embryonic” at the time of writing.

Chapter 6 brings Sue Roberts, CEO and State Librarian for the State Library of Victoria, Australia and Rachel Esson, Associate Director for Library Academic Services at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand, to discuss the leadership skills needed for collaborative efforts to succeed. They also use a library-based “one-stop” center, but as a case study to describe such leadership skills and development.

Chapter 7 is a truly library-centric chapter addressing how data can improve student success when collected and/or used collaboratively. Graham Stone and Dave Pattern of the University of Huddersfield, UK, discuss how analyzing searching, borrowing, and access patterns led to an improved discovery layer, a multi-institution project firmly connecting library usage and student success, the establishment of a roving librarian program, online library skills programs for researchers and students, an open access publishing endeavor, and the development of a library management system unburdened by the “legacy baggage” of most LMSs.

In Chapter 8, Liz Jolly, Director of Library and Information Services at Teesside University, UK, emphasizes the evolution of the library into a true “learning space” and the need to think outside the traditional space concerns of a library.

Maxine Melling of the University of Gloucestershire, UK, (and book co-editor) discusses the factors behind a successful “super-convergence” of services in Chapter 9. While the university library (the site she references is from her previous job as Director of Library and Student Support at Liverpool John Moores University, UK) is often the site of such services, due, she says, to the convenient location and existing hours of the building, the success of merging service desks is much more complex than just putting people at a convenient desk.

Chapter 10 brings us back to North America and to libraries. Ruth Kifer, Dean of the University Library at San Jose State University, details the planning and outcomes of the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library, a joint academic-public library serving the students of San Jose State and the community of the City of San Jose. Over years of planning and a decade of operation the collabo-

ration of university and city has weathered budget cuts and political opposition and now faces new challenges related to changes in library services, such as ebooks, space usage, and the ever-present challenge of weeding a diverse collection.

The book as a whole particularly emphasizes leadership and staff development, and the best audience for this book is the upper level university administrator. This is big picture stuff, but with enough detail to see the size and shape of some of these efforts. There are libraries a-plenty in this book, but they are mostly settings or examples for the increasing need of universities to function in a more fluid fashion. It’s a book for those trying to see where the university is going, and for those who want some clues on how to get there.