Sources

Professional Materials

Karen Antell, Editor

College Libraries and Student Culture: What We Now Know. Ed. by Lynda M. Duke and Andrew D. Asher. Chicago: ALA, 2012. 191 p. Paper $60 (978-0-8389-1116-7).

How do college students use libraries? How can we develop services and facilities that respond effectively to their needs? Many libraries recently have turned to ethnography to find out how students do research and how libraries can best support them.

In 2008, a group of five university libraries in Illinois undertook a grant-funded project to investigate how students actually used their services and facilities. Inspired by a landmark ethnographic study at the University of Rochester in 2004, the Illinois universities aimed to make changes to their services based on their study findings. This book presents a succinct and easily readable summary of the project. The authors contextualize their results within the larger debate regarding the sometimes opposing pragmatic and idealist goals of higher education: Should student research serve the immediate objective of completing an assignment (to achieve a grade, a degree, a credential), or should it inculcate a love of learning for learning's sake? Are these goals mutually exclusive? In this process, do librarians function as service providers or as educators?

The study found that students often have an incomplete understanding of the services and resources available in academic libraries and of how librarians can help them. Many students, according to the study, seek help from faculty, friends, and even parents, rather than from librarians. Moreover, many students do not understand the difference between library databases and other pathways to information, such as Google. And yet, despite libraries' deep investments in their online presences, many students feel strongly attached to the library as place.

This is perhaps unlikely to surprise anyone who has worked in an academic library in the past ten years. But this book's great strength is in its compassion for the struggles of student researchers, particularly in two chapters that address the research processes of Hispanic and of first-generation college students. The authors acknowledge that libraries must make hard choices about "transformative changes" to services and facilities if they are to support students effectively.

The last portion of the book describes how Illinois Wesleyan University, one of the campuses involved in the study, implemented changes to its services and facilities in five areas: relationships with faculty and administrators, library web presence, marketing and assessment, information literacy, and training of student assistants. This section has many valuable practical suggestions. Overall, this book is essential reading for academic library administrators, educators, and public-service staff seeking to understand how students—their largest contingent of users on campus—use and perceive their services and facilities.—*Laura Braunstein, English Language and Literature Librarian, Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire*