Book Reviews

Norm Medeiros

University Libraries and Digital Learning Environments. Edited by Penny Dale, Jill Beard, and Matt Holland. Surrey, UK; Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2011. 278p. $114.95 hardcover (ISBN 978-0-7546-7957-8).

The purpose of this book is to discuss and evaluate the development of digital learning environments within the university library. Rather than perform a retrospective analysis of academic libraries that have implemented the digital learning environment (DLE), this book aims to provide a current snapshot and to provoke debate about the present state and immediate future of the DLE in higher education. The editors and chapter authors are current or former residents of the United Kingdom, and therefore bring a distinctive perspective to a global subject.

The editors, Penny Dale, Jill Beard, and Matt Holland, provide an insightful introduction, outlining the purpose, structure, and content of each of the sixteen chapters that constitute the book. Sue McKnight's initial chapter, "Here Today and Here Tomorrow," aptly sets the stage; each successive chapter explores the complexity of this multifaceted subject, illustrating the flexibility librarians must adopt to succeed while working within virtual learning environments. Peter Godwin's chapter on social media presents a broad and balanced look at the changes in computing habits of society at large, how college students are using Web 2.0 tools, and how librarians are implementing such tools into public services and workflows. Not surprisingly, a chapter on information literacy and the digital environment's effect on teaching strategies and learning habits also is included. Other topics include scholarly communication, balancing collections containing both digital and analog materials, and the methods and challenges of performance assessment within the digital environment. Institutional repositories are afforded two chapters. In the first, Alma Swan asserts institutional repositories (IR) are poised to take a significant role in the support and expansion of e-research. Swan discusses how IRs are being used, the benefits of their use, and where they are headed in the future. Within this context she touches on some technical matters, such as digital preservation. The second chapter on IR addresses its role within the larger organization, how to market its use, and how to increase community buy-in for the long term.

This book also probes less commonly addressed issues, such as services for the Further Education Institution (FEI) versus the Higher Education Institution (HEI) in the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), and online support for English as a second language (ESL) for study abroad students. For readers outside the United Kingdom not familiar with the terms FEI and HEI, they may be compared to the community college or vocational school, and the university or college, respectively. Under a variety of circumstances, the FEI often serves the nontraditional student by allowing them to pursue both short-term vocational diplomas and the traditional college degree. In this chapter, the author explores the challenges small FEI libraries face in filling information needs of their population, and how they are using consortium efforts with HEIs, and experimentation in VLEs, to overcome the shortfall in budget and material resources. Though readers may not recognize these terms, the theme of this chapter rings familiar. In his chapter, Frank Trew investigates another important but often-neglected topic: how U.K. libraries are providing support and resources in VLE for their ESL study abroad students. Strengthening such services should be of utmost importance to librarians who provide public service and administrators wishing to attract a larger international applicant pool.

This book achieves its goal of providing a broad snapshot of university libraries as they exist today, and their adaptations soon to the ubiquitous digital learning environment—a remarkable achievement given the speed at which the subject is evolving and expanding, and the length of time it takes to publish a book. The book's strength and weakness lay within the British-centric view from which this volume is approached. Some international readers may be alienated by the discussion of HEIs and FEIs; however, many readers will find the discussion valuable because it provides opportunities to contemplate matters from a perspective that previously may not have been considered. Nevertheless, a chapter that covered digital preservation in more depth, and some examination of cloud computing, would have been useful additions. This book will be of interest to those involved at all stages of creating and supporting service points in the virtual learning environment.—*Natalie Bulick (natalie.bulick@indstate.edu), Indiana State University, Terre Haute, Indiana*