

McAdoo, Monty L. *Building Bridges: Connecting Faculty, Students, and the College Library*. Chicago: American Library Association, 2010. 167 pp. ISBN 9780838910191. Softcover, \$55.00.

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This ALA editions softcover by Monty McAdoo, who brings his knowledge and experiences not only as an academic librarian, but as a scholar with a doctorate in education and leadership, suffers from the same weakness inimical to other ALA editions this reviewer has encountered—the depth of content and comprehensiveness of research hardly merits the priceyness, particularly for the softcover (6x9 inch) edition. Despite the sometimes excellent scared cow slaying that goes on in McAdoo's text, it seems unreasonable that a scholarly monograph with a rather slight list of works cited should cost \$55.00. McAdoo is a careful enough writer, but with the exception of the ALA and ACRL websites, he cites eleven sources, with not a one dated more recently than 2007. And although the text does offer three appendices, they seem to add little value as well: Appendix A is a reproduction of the ACRL Information Literacy Standards, which are so commonly accessible as to be ubiquitous. Appendix B is a chronology entitled “Defining Moments in Information Literacy,” but this turns out to be an overview that is easily accessible in various sources. Appendix C, an overview of library Information Literacy instruction in American Libraries, is also related as a chronology. It is the strongest of the three appendices, and well worth the reading.

And in a nutshell, *Building Bridges* can be summed up similarly—a combination of invaluable, cutting edge information juxtaposed against information so common as to have made its way into the realm of platitudes and cliches. While McAdoo slays some sacred cows (which

this reviewer applauds, having faced many an occasion of unsuccessfully attempting to drag those beasts to newer pastures), he just as often bows to others, cow towing to, if you will, too readily accepted visions. Technically, the book is well-written. It is divided into five parts: “The Need for Bridges: Creating a Context for Success” ; “Building a Foundation: Librarian-Faculty Collaboration” ; “Building the Bridge: Effective Library Assignments” ; “Bridge Collapse: Assignments that Fail” ; and “Crossing the Bridge: Working with Faculty-Developed Library Assignments.”

The first two sections, “The Need for Bridges” and “Building a Foundation,” are both basically standalone chapters. Unfortunately, Chapters One and Two, “Information Literacy and the Need for Effective Assignments” and “Working with Faculty and the Curriculum,” get the book off to a rather slow start. They contain mainly rehashed material, the aforementioned sacred cows to which it seems nearly every academic library text concerned with Information Literacy must pay homage. The text begins with an assertion with which we all agree, the importance of Information Literacy (hereafter referred to as I.L.), but then goes into oft charted waters, with the typical need of the author to immediately delineate the problems with defining I.L. How refreshing it would be to pick up a text or article that, rather than pay homage to this rite of passage, would offer some basic theories to which we all agree, rather than waste readers’ time with the quibbling arguments over exactly what minutiae I.L. modules should impart. Perhaps the problem here is that the author (and publisher, more than likely) try too hard to reach diverse demographics in one text: new academic librarians, teaching faculty, and seasoned academic librarians. The problem is that the latter are very likely well-versed in ongoing I.L. and collaboration discussions.

Fortunately, McAdoo recognizes the need to depart from the typical dialogue on I.L. by

the book's third section, which begins with a chapter titled "Common Reasons Assignments Fail." Here, he throws caution to the wind and makes a solid argument for academic librarians' being involved at all stages of a research based assignments, rather than only at its initial phase (termed here The Development Phase). Borrowing from education theory, he identifies the various stages of assignments, and although he continues to show a tendency to treat issues in a rather surfacey or cursory manner, McAdoo does identify issues that are too often left off out of academic librarianship discussions, such as the role that the politics of a university's structure plays in helping or hindering I.L. initiatives (hopefully ALA Editions will note this is the kind of issue that deserves its own book-length treatment, rather than a cursory paragraph length mention). Chapter Four, "Using Information Technology," is easily the weakest discussion in the third section. Here McAdoo glosses over the challenges presented by Information Technology (I.T.) issues, something which also deserves a lengthy discussion, void of platitudes, if we are ever to improve the I.T. relationship with I.L.

The author recovers well in Chapter Five, "Writing-from-Sources and Essay Assignments." Like the other chapters included in the third section, this discussion is an example of the true value of McAdoo's text—that he, despite expressing apologies to teaching faculty in advance, pulls no punches in presenting what he considers to be a real problem, in this case poorly designed/worded assignments. He notes three main reasons that assignments fail: They have an unclear purpose (or in more useful language, have no clear sense of outcomes). They are expressed in unclear, dated, or inappropriate terminology. And they come across as unaware of missing or limited resources and access. To his credit, McAdoo spends some time in consideration of the reasons that teaching faculty make these mistakes, with emphasis on psychological, technological, and structural/political issues. He also includes a chart emphasizing

how many of these ineffective assignments stem from misconceptions that faculty may have about students' abilities to use the library. Chapters Five and Six will specifically be of interest to teaching faculty in that the author offers concrete examples of poorly designed library assignments, and follows these with revised versions that would make those assignments much more effective. Each of these chapters ends with a "Dos and Don'ts" chart, aimed at the academic librarian's role in assignment design.

The third section ends with Chapters Seven and Eight, "Citing Sources and Information Ethics" and "Assignments in the Online Environment." The former is useful more in its subtext than in its actual language. Here McAdoo implies that teaching faculty are ultimately responsible for the documentation and ethical use of the information aspects of I.L. (although he pulls his punches a bit), which is a refreshing change from the usual (ineffective) argument that the academic librarian can somehow impart this knowledge and skill set to students in the miniscule amount of time in which they typically interact. Here the author argues that teaching faculty are the best models for and teachers of documentation issues, as their own knowledge and expectations will dictate how effectively students master these skills.

In Chapters Nine and Ten the author sets off to slay two of the largest sacred cows in academic librarianship—the library tour and the scavenger hunt. These two types of assignments, which he places under the subheading "Library Assignments that Fail," are taken to task because generally they offer little to no context for students, and they are usually designed for their own sake, making them "busy work," lacking all sense of outcomes assessment. Tours are found particularly lacking because they show students "where," but never offer any learning as to "how." In addition, the author points out that in most academic libraries, tours become rote for librarians, who repeat the same lecture, year after year, with little or no acknowledgement of

recent changes in access issues. Scavenger Hunts in general are taken to task as being busy work, with little relevance. The only problem with these two chapters is that McAdoo again seems to pull his punches. What would have been a refreshing change here would have been an in-depth, consciousness raising discussion of the possible datedness of tours and scavenger hunts. In fact, it may be time for the discipline's literature to begin in seriousness these lines of questioning, rather than equivocating (as is done in *Building Bridges*) and falling back on the conditional “if there is no context” stance. What would have been more useful in this text would be a questioning of whether tours and scavenger hunts (and for that matter one-shot sessions) actually can be made to address both context and learning outcomes. McAdoo flirts with this, but unfortunately pulls back.

The final section of the text, “Crossing the Bridge,” contains three chapters, “In the Classroom,” “In the Library,” and “Some Final Words.” These chapters may prove helpful for young academic librarians and/or teaching faculty unfamiliar with recent procedures for librarianship collaboration with faculty. In general, they offer information that any seasoned academic librarian will know. This brings me full circle, to the point that perhaps by producing a text that seems unsure of its demographic, ALA editions has produced a chimera. Perhaps more useful would have been a series of three texts on faculty-librarian collaboration, one for teaching faculty, one for newbie academic librarians, and one for seasoned academic librarians. This would allow for a more thoughtful, less cursory approach to the real problems that consistently prevent true collaboration from occurring. After all, if it were as simple as this text makes it out to be, we'd all be doing it already.