

Haycock, Ken and Brooke E. Sheldon, eds. *The Portable MLIS: Insights from the Experts*.

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Includes 12 appendices and notes.

Tony Fonseca, Nicholls State University

In *The Portable MLIS*, Haycock and Sheldon gather 18 authors who they consider leaders in various aspects of the library profession, writers who have in their lifetimes amassed a total of 1000 years of experience, to address issues such as competencies of librarians. Given that, and the statement in the text's Preface that the text would serve as a foundation for the creation and evolution of future Library and Information Science programs, filling the hole that exists because, according to the editors, there is no "published broad overview of the profession," my expectations for *The Portable MLIS* were set quite high. Unfortunately, about one-third of the essays in this collection are filled with cursory treatments of issues, generic information, and platitudes and truisms which offer very little new information or insight. Nonetheless, this new offering by Libraries Unlimited is an important addition to academic libraries, as it will serve well to acquaint undergraduates flirting with the possibility of an MLIS with the history and current realities of the field.

It should go without saying that there are bright spots in this book, which is divided into three sections—Foundations, Foundations, Values, and Context; Functions and Competencies, and Moving Beyond Boundaries. Unfortunately, the Introduction, an essay by Haycock and Sheldon titled "How to Think Like a Librarian," sets the tone for the first few essays in the collection. While the subject of how librarians think is a fascinating one if approached

psychologically or even sociologically, the editors here do little more than offer a brief, oversimplified explanation of what a librarians is and does, using and updating Raganatham's Five Laws in order to synthesize a definition. Richard E. Rubin's essay, "Stepping Back and Looking Forward: Reflections on the Foundations of Libraries and Librarianship," begins the text, and while Rubin is an accessible and erudite writer, the thirteen pages of his contribution offer only a cursory history of libraries, and because of its brevity, the essay seems to be lacking a clear thesis or argument. This is followed by Michael Gorman's "Professional Ethics and Values in a Changing World," which, despite its brilliant informing concept that "librarianship is concerned with the interactions of humans and the human record" (15), also comes across as a cursory study filled with the usual clichés one normally encounters in texts that portray librarians as the last bastion of intellect and the protectors of freedom.

The third chapter, "Human Rights, Democracy, and Librarians," by Kathleen de la Pena McCook and Katherine Phenix, is the first bright spot in the text. The two authors weave a readable and informative historical chronicle of important events to make the argument that librarians cannot serve democracy and be neutral simultaneously, that according to the tenets of the profession, "the realization of broader and more ethical ideals" (27) have to trump workplace concerns, as well as personal beliefs and interests. Using the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) as a backdrop on which to build their argument, McCook and Phenix avoid the platitude laden prose of the first three essays, presenting the complexities librarians often face when forced to decide between their patrons and/or stakeholders and the codes of the profession. The next two essays, by Donald O. Case and Laura Kane, respectively, read as broad generalizations of information seeking behavior (informed by George Zipf's Principle of Least

Effort) and types of libraries and librarian positions. Kane's effort does debunk a few myths associated with the profession, but it offers no new material.

Brooke E. Sheldon's "Functions and Competencies: Another Look at Leadership," is the first well-researched essay in the collection, and it goes below the surface, positing an overall argument that management does not equal leadership. Following a rather pointless collection of platitudes by Barbara B. Moran, Christie Koontz, in "Marketing: The Driving Force of Your Library," offers a good introduction to marketing for librarians, emphasizing the important concept that promotion and outreach are not synonymous with marketing. The trend towards essays which offer new and controversial readings of old issues continues in "Reflections on Creating an Information Service Collection," where G. Edward Evans discusses collection development theory, with special attention devoted to the differences between normative, felt, expressed, and comparative collection development needs, and the difficulties of brokering between them. More importantly, Evans keeps his argument at the theoretical level, making the essay more universal and applicable to all types of libraries. Arlene G. Taylor's good general overview, "Organization and Representation of Information/Knowledge," follows, and it is followed by my personal favorite in the collection, Judith Weedman's "Information Retrieval: Designing, Querying, and Evaluating Information Systems." Weedman's excellent essay looks at information retrieval not from the user end, which is typical of the literature, but from a deep understanding of the theories behind the storage of information, informed by concerns such as why, how, for whom, and to meet what need. She also offers specifics about search engines, including types and a discussion of the logic behind them.

The final chapters of the book deal with issues such as the diversity of functions encountered by the professional librarian (namely reference-related), the problems of becoming

search experts (especially expert Googlers), and the intricacies of readers advisory. Ron Powell's "Research" would have been a superior choice for the final piece in the collections, as Powell presents an excellent argument addressing the dearth of research in what is considered a program "primarily practical and professional in nature" (178), but the editors choose instead to end on another cursory (and rather predictable) note, with Haycock's "Issues and Trends." Despite its being filled with generalizations, Haycock deserves credit for bluntness and honesty, as he identifies the tension between LIS faculty and students, as well as theorists versus practitioners, as one of the biggest problems facing the profession.

While MLIS degreed librarians will likely find that *The Portable MLIS* pales in comparison to a similar and contemporary text, John Budd's *Self-Examination* (also reviewed in this issue), Haycock and Sheldon's collection may serve as a worthwhile introduction to the discipline, depending on one's knowledge level going in. Despite its adding only sparsely information not readily found throughout the literature, it can offer a decent broad general overview for the reader who comes in with little knowledge of the field. Libraries that service large undergraduate populations, especially students who may be interested in pursuing the MLIS, would do well to have this text as one of the basic options available to those students; by the same token, SLIS programs would do well to have a copy of *The Portable MLIS* on hand to supplement core and introductory courses.