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Review of *Reflecting on the Future of Academic and Public Libraries* by Peter Herson and Joseph R. Matthews

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Reflecting on the Future of Academic and Public Libraries, ed. Peter Hernon and Joseph R. Matthews. Chicago: ALA Editions, 2013. 242p. \$55 (ISBN 978-0-8389-1187-7)

A book about trends and issues shaping the evolution of American libraries by Peter Hernon and Joseph Matthews is almost self-recommending. The authors have many years of teaching, research, and service to the profession under their belts, and are recognized as significant and influential leaders. In this monograph they offer guidance to library leaders in how to anticipate and manage change. Hernon and Matthews fear that librarians who are reactive and only deal incrementally with today's profound challenges will preside over the withering of libraries into little-used warehouses of legacy collections. The authors are convinced that we can ensure libraries will play important cultural and educational roles well into the future if we embrace change and employ some tried and true strategic and scenario planning techniques.

After succinctly describing how libraries no longer play unique roles in their communities as an environment of information scarcity has been replaced by the Internet and new communication and learning technologies, Hernon and Matthews draw the inevitable conclusion that libraries are at a crossroads and must redefine their niches. The authors stress that there is not likely to be a one-size-fits-all solution, either within the academic or public library spheres. Library leaders are urged to engage their communities in careful examinations of possible desired futures, and one of the major values of this book is the presentation of processes for such engagements.

One of the first steps is the environmental scan, and the authors draw upon an extensive set of reports from the past several years. While only those with a superficial knowledge of the recent professional library literature will encounter unfamiliar resources within this review, I

suspect even the well read will appreciate having the findings of so many of the most groundbreaking publications brought together in such a compelling synthesis. In succeeding chapters, readers learn how “a library can move in an organized, straightforward process to consider the impact of trends, develop likely scenarios, explore the implications of each of the scenarios, and then develop the strategies necessary to achieve the vision of the library” (p.49).

In separate chapters devoted to academic and public libraries respectively, Hernon and Matthews present a stimulating range of scenarios based on their own analyses and the input of selected library directors from around the country. Not only do Hernon and Matthews discuss in detail the likely implications for developing the necessary leadership, identifying new library personnel skill sets, repurposing library facilities, etc., but they also include essays and appendices by several prominent librarians who provide case studies or extended analyses of key topics.

The writing is lucid, and the content is presented with little jargon and at a level that can be easily absorbed by readers from outside the profession. Anyone with an interest in the future of academic and public libraries will find a wealth of provocative thinking and practical advice in this book. Highly recommended.

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