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A Review of "Library Analytics and Metrics"

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LIBRARY ANALYTICS AND METRICS. Edited by Showers, Ben. London: Facet Publishing, 2015. 176pp. ISBN 978-1-85604-965-8.

If you hear the phrase “library analytics and metrics” and immediately think of the monthly Google Analytics website usage report, then this book will undoubtedly broaden your thinking. Libraries are certainly no strangers to statistics and data and how they can better inform decisions. The aim of the book, to “explore the potential of analytics at an institutional and organizational level: how analytics can unlock a better understanding of your users, inform decision making and help drive new services” (xxv), seeks to help libraries make the most of the data that they collect.

Library Analytics and Metrics comprises seven chapters. Chapter 1 examines “big” and “small” data in libraries; big data refers to large datasets, e.g., those generated in the physics or astronomy disciplines, while small data can easily be stored and processed on a single machine. Chapter 2 considers collection management driven by data. “Patron-driven acquisition” is mentioned as a “just in time” approach. Chapter 3 discusses how data is used to demonstrate the library’s value and whether the library plays a role in student success. Chapter 4 presents qualitative data and how it is used to enhance the user experience; understanding the behaviors, motivations and needs of users is crucial. Chapter 5 looks at web analytics and social media metrics for cultural heritage institutions to try to assess user engagement. Chapter 6 explores legal and ethical issues surrounding analytics; it is important to remember that technology will likely always outpace the development of legal and ethical policies. Chapter 7 briefly describes the data-driven future. The author states that “analytics provides us with something concrete to hold on to . . . in a rapidly evolving technological, social and economic ocean” (170).

The real heart of each chapter, however, consists in the case studies contributed by numerous authors and researchers. These provide real-world examples of projects and research that exhibit the use of data and analytics to develop and enhance services in libraries and cultural heritage institutions. Case study topics include: building a personalized recommendation system at the Open University Library; an analytics toolkit at Harvard Library; student retention and academic engagement at the University of Minnesota Library; and qualitative research methods to develop an engaging user experience (OCLC Research). My favorite case study is “Ethnographic techniques and new visions for libraries,” by Donna Lanclos at the University of North Carolina, Charlotte. Ms. Lanclos describes how the library used her expertise as an anthropologist in the redesign of the library’s ground floor. Working with two students from the department of architecture, she conducted observations of students using the space for studying, talking, and eating.

Without the case studies, this book would have been rather deficient in interest to the average library professional. The variety of projects and research endeavors described make for fairly interesting reading. Library managers and directors will benefit most from reading this book, as

they are best positioned to drive new services and policies informed by examining their library's analytics and metrics.

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