

The Academic Library and the Net Gen Student: Making the Connections. Susan Gibbons. Chicago: American Library Association, 2007. 119 p. \$45.00 (ISBN 978-0-8389-0946-1)

Many librarians have likely heard of the University of Rochester's experience with hiring a social scientist to study the work habits of their users. It provided UR with better data and information than they had anticipated, and we are all now beneficiaries of this work as it appears in our field's literature. The volume at hand is an excellent example of this. While not a report of the findings, it builds on information uncovered by the work, and provides a thorough and thoughtful overview of an area oft-discussed but equally often misunderstood or dismissed, namely, the profusion of new Web and other technologies that seem to dominate our culture. As Gibbons, recently named dean of the River Campus Libraries at the University of Rochester, herself notes "[a]t first I dismissed these technologies as ... little more than distractions from the core of the students' academic work," only later to discover that "these technologies have become essential to the students' academic tool kit." (p. viii). Her book is built on that epiphany, offering both a thorough overview of the tools and technologies as well as thoughts on their application in a library context.

Before embarking, however, on her tour of the digital and telecommunications landscape, she offers a chapter on the need for libraries to transform themselves and develop a vision of how they will remain relevant to their users. She presciently notes that the undergraduate students of today will soon enough be our faculty and

researchers. Not surprisingly, she envisions a bright future for libraries, but to get there she offers compelling arguments to transform radically how we operate and to embrace that at which we are best while relinquishing roles better filled by others.

Another framing chapter describes and defines the Net Generation. This is often done in the library literature, but too often is reduced to glib and general statements about generational gaps and us/them dichotomies. Gibbons offers an interesting and thorough review of the literature, resulting in a more nuanced picture of our undergraduates and their major motivations. For a profession that prides itself on protecting privacy and emphasizes tradition over trends, this section of her book should acquire the status of required reading.

The majority of the book is devoted to her tour of Web and telecommunication technologies used by Net Gen students, ranging from MMORPGs (massive, multiplayer, online role-playing games) to Facebook to del.icio.us, and everything in between. What marks it as different from a typical review of technologies is that her presentation draws on the points made in the aforementioned chapters. Moreover, Gibbons has a keen awareness that she is describing services that may well have already been passé by the time her book left the press. As such, she places the emphasis on what the tool offers at a core level and why students flock to it, rather than offering detailed analysis of a service's features and attributes. Many librarians roll their eyes, visibly or not, when someone raises topics such as gaming, blogging, and texting; Gibbons's book should help dispel that.

At the end of her technology tour, Gibbons outlines a set of practices and mindsets that libraries could adopt to maintain their relevance to their academic community. One such cultural change she suggests is developing a research and development culture, where experimentation and exploration are the norm. Other suggestions bear out the information she presents in the volume, such as noting that we need to rethink our views of authorship in a world where the lines between published and 'unpublished' texts is becoming quite blurry. Notably lacking from her conclusions is much discussion of our traditional practices, e.g.- maintaining our current collections. She emphasizes far more the relations we have with and our attitudes toward our users, rather than the objects we can offer them, which in itself is a fairly radical notion.

It is worth noting, perhaps as an endorsement, that this is one of the few library monographs that this reviewer has encountered that can be read, cover to cover, as an enjoyable and cohesive narrative. Gibbons avails herself of a style that avoids the pitfalls of overwrought academic prose. Furthermore, her text is informed by a set of profound insights that have emerged from her institution's research into the work practices of its users. This marriage of in-depth research with lucid and direct prose results in a text that should enjoy a wide readership and make a significant impact.

Dale Askey

Kansas State University

daskey@ksu.edu