

Schiller, Dan. *How to Think about Information*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007. 267p. \$35 (ISBN 0252031326). LC 2006-011275.

It would be almost impossible to imagine any book title whose fulfillment could possibly be more different than just twenty years ago. The production, array, and consumption of information right now are enormously more complicated and confusing than they were then, and no one knows exactly in which directions these will go in the near and more distant future. Twenty years ago, "information" was more exiguous and certainly harder to come by, and often more effort was put into finding information than in digesting it. In contrast, today the problems begin with determining in which of numerous formats one wishes to have information brought to his or her attention. Even so, digesting is still an issue, and the question is: does this encourage more or less careful interpretation of it?

As befits a member of the School of Library and Information Science and the Institute of Communications Research at the University of Illinois, Dan Schiller operates at a rarefied level and does not really address the kinds of contexts with which librarians must grapple on a daily basis ("libraries" barely makes the index). Rather, he is concerned with, as he puts it, "information as a commodity." Indeed, Schiller expresses his focus almost at once: "[h]ow, when and why does information become economically valuable?" In these circumstances, it is surprising that he fails to discuss one information-as-commodity issue of supreme consequence to libraries—the increasingly high costs of information (would that it were also always knowledge!) to both libraries and individuals.

Instead, the present work is aimed at technocrats, macroeconomists, and others who are interested in developing abstracted notions of information. Working librarians, faced with an overwhelming tidal wave of both information and ways to gain access to it, will probably not find it

possible to "think" about this information beyond trying their best to ensure that the most and the best of it reaches the user. And then, of course, the users themselves will need to learn how to domesticate this mass in whatever ways appear to suit their particular purposes best.

Nor does Schiller spend any time ruminating about another, admittedly only epistemological, concern—the effects of the information explosion on our ability to comprehend, in both senses, the results. One concept that will perish as a result of these new sets of circumstances is the very notion of "definitiveness." With information now changing kaleidoscopically, and being measured in terabytes (one terabyte equals 1,000,000,000,000 bytes), and with our individual and collective gray matter continuing blithely along imperceptible evolutionary paths, it will soon become impossible—if it isn't already—to capture the totality of even the thinnest slice of the universe of information. Like astronomers who, while developing newer and better instruments, recognize that they are falling behind the curve, librarians increasingly are finding themselves able to provide more in absolute terms but less in relative terms, and there seems no way out of this impasse.

In sum, while most libraries should have a copy of *How to Think about Information*, there seems to be no pressing reasons why librarians need to assimilate its arguments for themselves, given all the other concerns that coping with "information" now puts on the table—*David Henige, University of Wisconsin–Madison*.

Stueart, Robert D. *International Librarianship: A Basic Guide to Global Knowledge Access*. Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow (Libraries and Librarianship: An International Perspective, No. 2), 2007. 247p. alk. paper, \$45 (ISBN 0810858762). LC 2006-22209.

Robert D. Stueart's *International Librarianship: A Basic Guide to Global Knowledge Access* is the second in an ambitious series entitled *Libraries and Librarianship: An*

International Perspective, edited by Stueart himself (the first installment in the series is *Impact of Technology on Asian, African, and Middle Eastern Library Collections*, edited by R.N. Sharma). Stueart is in a unique position to comment on international librarianship. Former dean and professor in the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at Simmons College, Stueart has published widely and has served on the executive board of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) as well as the International Relations Committee of the American Library Association (ALA). Even more important, Stueart's work in Vietnam and Thailand (among other places) has been critical for the development of libraries and librarian education in these countries.

Briefly put, Stueart's *International Librarianship* is a reference book. In the forematter, Stueart makes direct claims about the book's primary purpose as a "guide," but each of these claims is slightly different in scope and description. The book "attempts to provide important background directions so [comparative research] can be undertaken more expediently"; the book is intended "as a basic guide for those interested in... the concept of universal librarianship, as well as an aid to professors and students"; the book's goal "is to provide basic background information for those seeking to study libraries and librarianship in the global arena." Stueart's book, then, is called upon to serve the diverse needs of students, professors, researchers, librarians, and the scattered few with a general interest in the subject. It is a kind of signpost in the road, directing interested researchers in appropriate directions. As the author himself makes clear, one would not stop here to do serious research.

Stueart's five main subjects (and chapter headings) are international library associations, national library associations, governmental and nongovernmental organizations, national libraries and bibliographic services, and information policies. A comprehensive and alphabetically arranged list of organizations is provided for

each of these subjects. The entries for each organization include information about the organization's founding, its mission, publications, and contact information. For national libraries and bibliographic services, the entries also feature summaries of the organization's "cultural responsibilities," most often including collecting all nationally produced publications, and often (but, sadly, not nearly always) providing access to those publications.

Stueart has excelled in assembling an amazing amount of basic information about his five primary subjects. One cannot help but be stunned at the number and variety of libraries, library associations, and information centers that dot the globe, sharing certain elements but still as unique as a fingerprint. Among the diverse entries in this volume are those for the Croatian Library Association (Hrvatsko Krjizicarsko Drustvo), the Library Association of Trinidad and Tobago (LATT), and the National Library and Archives of the Republic of Kiribati (a cluster of Pacific islands near the equator with a population nearing 100,000). This assembly of nations will be incredibly useful to area studies librarians who often seek colleagues to provide advice for collection development.

Although Stueart's professional experiences have been deep and far-ranging, the introductory prose sections of *International Librarianship*—that is, the preface and Chapter 1 ("Trends and Issues in International Librarianship")—do not provide the rich, textured background that readers often need and look for in the introductions to such volumes. The reader is left wanting some evidence for Stueart's claim that we are entering a "global knowledge society" and that "the internationalization of librarianship" is both *actually occurring* and necessary. Stueart's introduction lacks context, because it makes no mention of international politics, for example, or the influences of regimes or administrations on information exchange, or exactly which technologies have thrust librarianship into a "vital" role in an international society and how.

Similarly, since Stueart has endeavored to “provide basic background information” for students and researchers, a bibliography or suggested background reading list for such topics would have been an appropriate inclusion. Indeed, Stueart insists, “The primary purpose of this guide is to identify basic background sources, in whatever format, for the study and teaching of international librarianship.” Yet no such summary or literature review is included in the book.

A second edition of *International Librarianship* could, with some imagination, look quite different. Librarians are among the first to recognize that reference books reach their fullest potential when they migrate online; dictionaries and encyclopedias and biographical sources have all attained a greater breadth, greater flexibility for updates, and greater usefulness in their move from paper to pixel. While Stueart may have fallen short in properly contextualizing the information found in *International Librarianship*, it remains an important reference resource for those among us who recognize that information (and, by extension, librarianship) has become increasingly borderless. To maximize the impact of this collected information, Stueart should allow *International Librarianship* to evolve by placing it online. Only then will it be truly international in its utility; only then will it be the perfect “guide” for contemporary and future information professionals. —David Pavelich, University of Chicago.

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Teaching Information Literacy Skills to Social Sciences Students & Practitioners: A Casebook of Applications. Eds. Douglas Cook and Natasha Cooper. Chicago: ACRL, 2006. 289p. alk. paper, \$39 (ISBN 0838983898). LC 2006-19905.

This collection of articles is a guidebook, consisting of twenty-four case studies based on the ACRL *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education*. With suggestions and outlines of teaching scenarios, most of the lesson plans are assignment driven, with goals and objectives coordinated with one or more of ACRL's *Standards*. The *Information Literacy Competency Standards*, first published in 1992, needed a practical, tested set of applications for teaching librarians; this casebook illustrates ways to incorporate the standards into basic lesson plans and reports on the results experienced, demonstrating that information literacy standards are applicable to all disciplines. Each narrative includes a lesson plan and a description of what happened in the instruction session, followed by a reflective paragraph about lessons learned during the classroom experience. Additional pertinent information follows in a “Notes” section.

Patricia O'Brien Libutti, who wrote the “Foreword” for this book, edited its predecessor, *Teaching Information Retrieval and Evaluation Skills to Education Students and Practitioners*, published in the mid-1990s. The editors of the current volume propose that this newer version has a wider scope, covering the disciplines of communications, management, political science, psychology, and international law, as well as the other social sciences. The ACRL *Standards* are widely accepted in academia as skills for lifelong learning, and each chapter outlines desired student outcomes, some in original ways, suggesting that critical thinking about images or visual literacy and numerical or data literacy is indicative of information literacy.

Basic themes pervade the book. Collaboration and team teaching is