
ALLISON, Dee Ann. *The patron driven library: A practical guide for managing collections and services in the digital age.* Cambridge: Chandos Publishing, 2013.

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As the title of this book suggests, it is truly a practical and straightforward handbook for navigating issues in the 21st century library. Author Dee Ann Allison takes a “need-to-know” approach with this broad scope, offering readers concise yet useful information about what today’s users expect from the library in terms of technology, collections, and services.

The book is divided into two parts. Part 1 briefly covers broad, contemporary challenges in both public and academic libraries. For example, reduced budgets and number of staff, and the rising cost of resources. It then discusses the strategies libraries have taken in response, including but not limited to consortial collection development, “big deals,” and shifting from print to online subscriptions and purchases. Part 1 also explores common characteristics of today’s library patrons, such as increasing comfort with technology and reliance on mobile devices. Part 1 acts as a preamble to Part 2, which surveys the landscape of modern library services. Some of the major topics covered in Part 2 include data-driven decision-making, library promotion and outreach, allowing for experimentation and the possibility of failure, expanding electronic and digital collections, the library’s role in changing publishing models, skills and talents required of librarians entering the workforce, and the library as a facility for research and active learning. Each chapter includes its own helpful abstract and set of keywords, and both the reference list and index are detailed and thorough.

Perhaps the most useful aspect of this book is also my biggest complaint: the breadth of topics is so wide and shallow that at times the book almost feels too general. The intended audience is defined by the author as simply “librarians” who could use this book as a guide to “develop a new relationship with technology that preserves the core mission of libraries while responding to the needs of a new generation of library clients” (Allison, 2013, xxii).

But this general approach is also extremely helpful for learning about or being reminded of issues that I do not encounter day-to-day in my job. I never have to think about things like NISO’s Shared Electronic Resources Understanding, or SERU, but the topic may come up in a collection development meeting, and this book covers just the right amount of detail on the topic for me to have an informed conversation with my colleagues who license our electronic materials. On a more philosophical note, I suppose I cannot think of any single library department or function that has remained untouched by the expectation to meet evolving patron demands. This book is recommended for academic and public librarians, particularly those who work directly with patrons.

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