

10-1-2004

Developing Academic Library Staff for Future Success [Book Review]

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Recommended Citation

Holley, R. P. (2001). Developing academic library staff for future success (review). *portal: Libraries and the Academy*, 4(4), 537-538.

doi: [10.1353/pla.2004.0066](https://doi.org/10.1353/pla.2004.0066)

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This book review is the author's final version, previously appearing in *Portal: Libraries and the Academy*. Vol. 4, No. 4, October 2004, pp. 537-538 (The Johns Hopkins University Press).

Available online at:

http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/portal_libraries_and_the_academy/v004/4.4holley.html

***Developing Academic Library Staff for Future Success*, ed. Margaret Oldroyd. London: Facet Publishing, 2004. 184 p. \$95 (ISBN 1-85604-478-5)**

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Developing Academic Library Staff for Future Success looks at staff development from a decidedly British perspective. According to the editor, Margaret Oldroyd, “its aim is to consider the place of staff development in the current and future strategic management of academic libraries”; she then continues on to say, “and so its primary intended audience is current and future library managers.” (p. xiv) While as an American library science professor I did not recognize many of the authors, the section on “contributors” (pp. vii-xi) lists impressive credentials.

While this is an edited volume, Oldroyd obviously commissioned the papers to fit together as a unified volume since the ten offerings follow an orderly, logical sequence and complement each other. After a survey of the current situation in the UK, chapters focus on distinctive skills (information technology; management; the convergence of libraries, computing centers, and media service; the librarian as teacher), special groups (support staff, non-traditional staff), and delivery methods (virtual learning, collaborative training). Building upon these nine chapters, Oldroyd concludes with a summary chapter on “Taking the Strategic Approach to Staff Development.” Authors provide a list of references of varying length at the end of each chapter. There is no general bibliography. A four page glossary provides a list of acronyms. The index is adequate but not exceptional.

Since a work on staff development must identify which skills are needed, the most interesting part of many chapters for the general reader is the analysis of the current situation in higher education and libraries in the UK. In this way, the authors analyze the changes in the academic and library climate that require new directions in staff development. The concluding portions of most chapters then identify practical strategies to develop these skills. An exception is the more theoretical chapter by Jo Webb, “Development Routes for Academic Library Support Staff,” in which she goes beyond the general assumption of the volume that staff development is “good.” She states, for example, that “[t]here is little published evaluation of the impact of training and development activities on the work and motivation of library support staff., nor on the organization as a whole....”

(p. 108) The chapter by Patrick Noon, “Developing the Academic Library Managers of the Future,” also stands out for its treatment of the identification and evaluation of management competencies and for its focus on the need for succession planning to develop the next generation of library leaders.

The volume is resolutely British with extensive references to various British government bodies and reports and with British terminology that occasionally takes some effort to translate into American library practice. Overall, I came away with the sense that higher education is much more centrally controlled than in the United States and that staff development suffers from the absence of state library associations and from a less well developed network of local, state, and regional consortia. Oldroyd explicitly states and other authors imply that the United Kingdom is not as far along as Australia and the United States in implementing systematic staff development.

North American librarians interested in comparative librarianship may find this work of interest for its discussion of the current state of staff development in the United Kingdom. Those seeking practical pointers on implementing effective staff development in the United States should look elsewhere.