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Book Review

Review of The Community College Library: Reference and Instruction

Kaia MacLeod, *University of Calgary*

ABSTRACT

Review of Pinkley, J., and Casey, K. (Eds) (2022). *The Community College Library: Reference and Instruction*. Association of College and Research Libraries.

KEYWORDS

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The Community College Library: Reference and Instruction, edited by Janet Pinkley and Kaela Casey, has a simple goal of highlighting “[...] the research, innovative programs, and new approaches to reference and instruction implemented by community college librarians around the country” (p. ix). They succeed in this task, showing a variety of perspectives on information literacy in the community college landscape. Each chapter examines a different community college library tackling a problem, barriers they faced, and the impact on their students.

The book weaves references and instruction together as each chapter falls into one of these categories. The greatest strengths of this book are its accessibility of language and its clarity. Pinkley and Casey are aware that their audience, busy community college librarians, may not have the time to read lengthy articles to find something useful. Instead, most chapters offer a “how to adapt this for your library” section, giving you starting points and ideas to take what you learned forward.

A common theme throughout the book is the recognition that ACRL Framework for Information Literacy in Higher Education does not sufficiently account for community college needs. One author notes “A national survey of 1,201 community college librarians found that engagement with the adoption of the ACRL framework on two-year campuses are not widespread and appear to lag behind the larger academic community” (p. 19). An unseen benefit of this is that it motivates many community college librarians to reinterpret or make their own framework suitable for their work. Although the framework is molded to their specific institution, the overall ideas can be of use in creating your own framework.

Instruction sessions can range from memorable experiences that invoke creativity and stick to those that cause the dreaded death by demo feeling. Gamification can give instruction sessions that push towards the former. Digital scavenger hunts, escape rooms, and choose-your-own-adventure can be effective in teaching students how to use the library. Suffolk County Community Library created an online scavenger hunt connected with a popular book on campus (p. 125). Examples of gamification like this help engage students while teaching them important information about the library. Another example, Arapahoe Community College’s *Cite It*, a trivia-style game about research foundations, breaks down the fundamental steps of researching a topic for a paper (p. 209). In many instances, the reference desk offers a chance to connect on a deeper level. *The Community College Library: Reference and Instruction* includes multiple chapters that look at a whole-person and trauma-informed approach to reference interactions, suggesting “one should always keep in mind that people may have experienced traumatic situations in their lives [...] and therefore seek to be thoughtful about how we engage in our interactions with them” (p. 57). The book stresses that reference is all about relationship building to better help students. It also discusses that rebranding can sometimes be necessary and effective, like when Phoenix College librarians branded themselves as research coaches, which changed student expectations (p. 38). They described a research coach not as someone who will not research for you, but as someone who will help you figure out what you need to do.

Often librarians in a community college offer more than just reference assistance and instruction to their patrons. The authors stress that cultivating kindness with student is important; through soft skills and when necessary, doing a soft handoff when pointing a student in a new direction. By calling the office they are going to beforehand and ensuring that someone is there to receive them, going the extra mile helps students develop a positive association with the library (p. 70).

Information literacy is not a one size fits all concept. Throughout the book, the authors describe how to evaluate sources through a variety of tools, including CRAAP, BEAM, CART, DAPPR, and CREATE. The authors warn that not every tool will work for every assignment, and that there are notable gaps in some methods. Additionally, the book is filled with great ideas for assignments in collaboration with specific classes. In chapter 19 the authors discuss how media outlets often misinterpret medical information, so they created a layered assignment to help the students learn about information literacy and scientific literacy (p. 236). They start with a wide unfiltered search in Google and move to an evaluation of a scientific study on a topic that offers a lot more information than what they are researching. It shows them what bias looks like in a variety of sources, and how people can misconstrue information.

The Community College Library: Reference and Instruction is a valuable book for community college librarians who are looking for practical ideas and advice that they can incorporate into their practice. This smartly packaged book can spice up instruction and help us to look deeper at our interactions with patrons.