Convergence and Collaboration of Campus Information Services, ed. Peter Hernon and Ronald Powel (Westport, Conn.: Libraries Unlimited, 2008).

In the world of organizational development, convergence and collaboration are concepts that form the basis by which organizations are structured in order to best meet the needs of their customers. Although these concepts are critical components in most innovative libraries, there are so many options to consider that it can easily be a real challenge to adequately study what has been done and what has worked in the profession. Therein is the premise of Hernon’s and Powell’s book—providing information on how innovative libraries align themselves with other campus entities in order to best serve their customers and provide exceptional academic support. A series of case studies from notable institutions looks at ways convergence and collaboration have happened and are happening right now in the academy.

Before getting too involved in these concepts, it is important to gain a good understanding of the concepts and differentiate between them. While convergence and collaboration are, as stated above, the foundation on which many organizations are structured to become more effective and possibly more efficient, they are different. Convergence typically is the merging of departments, units or services (such as the library and computer services merging to become information services). Collaboration, on the other hand, can and more frequently does occur both outside as well as inside departments, units, and services. Simply stated, it is the cooperation of department members to accomplish a common goal—which in the case of academic libraries is enhancing services to the students, faculty, and researchers. For the most part, in this study there is a blurring of the two concepts. Although some of the reporting libraries make a distinction between the two, it is clear that in many cases there is collaboration among campus services (such as the library working with the graduate school on providing access to both print and digital theses and dissertations) that certainly does not necessitate the need to consider converging the services or units.

Perhaps therein lies the wealth of this study: it looks at both convergence and collaboration simultaneously. Although more attention is paid to the actual convergence of services, it is possible to take each case study and discuss the merits of the convergence or collaboration to see more easily how that scenario could work in one’s own institution. Is convergence the answer or can collaboration better achieve the same result?

Hernon and Powell have tapped a wide range of notable library administrators to write about their first hand experiences in creating an environment of convergence and collaboration. This environment is one in which the library plays a central role and, in many circumstances, is the driving force. However, contrary to what one may normally assume, some of the collaborations are not centered within the academic campus proper. Instead they are products of interactions between and among other universities and colleges as well as community and other external entities. In other words, convergences and collaborations know no boundaries, nor should they when considering most academic libraries’ mission of supporting the teaching and learning activities of the university.

When it comes to organizational development and structure, there are dozens of choices and challenges that confront academic libraries. Although there are several articles in the professional literature on the concepts of merging departments and units, none provides a first-hand look at such a wide array of options as this collection of case studies does. Over the past ten-plus years, many libraries and academic institutions have spent a considerable amount of time addressing how to better meet the needs of the campus and its constituents. The vast changes caused by the transformation in teaching, learning, and research processes have made it imperative that campus entities investigate the creation of more synergistic departments and centers. The most common convergence of services tends to be the joining of the computing/information technology center with the library. However, as detailed in Hernon and Powell’s study, there are many other configurations to consider also.

The book uncovers advantages and disadvantages in convergence of services. Frequently, cost savings is one of the most prevalent reasons services converge but there are several other compelling arguments for merging units. Creation of new opportunities and approaches to academic support, such as those for student learning, creativity, and productivity are essential to student success. Among these new opportunities are those related to creating new and more effective services, becoming more involved in student
learning and student campus activities, reducing overlap and redundancy in services, leveraging expertise and thereby becoming more efficient and effective, and increasing the library’s visibility on campus. However, are these compelling enough to embark on what could be a major reorganization?

Forming partnerships among libraries is fairly common, but forming partnerships with other campus services takes thinking outside the box to another level. As mentioned, the most common partnership with the library is with information technology/computer services. While there are case studies included that describe these types of mergers or partnerships, there are several others that can be thought to somewhat push the envelope. Among these are partnerships with writing centers, the campus student information system (SIS) departments, campus media services, and various student academic support centers. Finally, there are case studies that look at those libraries that changed their services internally, rather than form a formal collaboration. For example, moving from the traditional services of reference, instruction, and circulation to digital services including the production of campus-born digital information resources and other virtual learning initiatives created a sort of internal collaboration of services addressing and supporting the library’s changing role as repository.

However, as one would assume, convergence and collaboration are not without their drawbacks. The merging of services has been seen, as might be expected, as resulting in a unit more difficult to manage, and budgets and personnel considerations always seem to involve another level of deliberation. The potential for loss of flexibility and the amount of time spent on the convergence activities were noted by the authors, as were many of the political issues, such as which group really has ownership for the program and project. In fact, in one case it was noted that building a collaborative or cooperative venture was overshadowed by the political issues surrounding the convergence. In another, there were mergers that did not work out, which left misgivings about the money and time spent on the failed endeavor. Nonetheless, as has been said by some library administrators, notions of traditional libraries are no longer sustainable either from an economic or an intellectual standpoint. Therefore, investigating and discussing the possibilities of convergence or collaboration very likely is a wise strategic move in order to better leverage fiscal and human capital.

Divided into twelve chapters, each telling a somewhat different story, *Convergence and Collaboration of Campus Information Services* contains a wealth of information pertinent to all academic as well as many large public and special libraries. However, what may seem on the surface to be a simple collection of how-to’s—what works, what doesn’t—and lessons learned, is really a thoroughly researched, in-depth study of library activities representing the many types of convergence between academic libraries and other campus units. Out of the fifty libraries responding to a query requesting information from those with collaborative activities, eleven were selected for inclusion in this volume. It is unfortunate, however, that among the criteria for this selection was the proximity of the library to one of the investigators (Hernon or Powell), because the reporting libraries are not as geographically disparate as one would want in a study of this magnitude. Nonetheless, there is a wide mix of library types ranging from both American and Canadian ARL libraries to the smaller, but still notable, institutions such as Suffolk University in Boston.

While chapters two through eleven contain the case studies, chapter twelve provides a different viewpoint of convergence and collaboration—that from non-librarians. As Hernon and Powell state, there are many reasons for campus services to want to have a positive, close working relationship with the library. However, there actually is one end result—to improve and enhance the academic experience. Academic libraries are no longer an afterthought, nor a silent partner in the teaching and learning of our students. Instead, the campus library is an essential partner in these activities.

To sum up the message of the book, the reasons to collaborate with the library are many, and all campus units want to improve and enhance the services they offer. The wealth of information contained in these case studies reinforces the need to not only continually assess the library’s services, but to also keep in mind the ultimate goals—to support the academic mission of the university and to ensure student success—in order to advance the library as an integral part of the academic experience.—Review by Teri Switzer

*A New Book Gives the Motivation To, and Supporting Information for, Practicing the Library Profession. It Is Designed as an Introduction and Reference Manual for the Profession of Librarianship, and Answers the Question, What Does the Librarian Actually Do? Its Contents Are Constructed Around Core Competencies as Defined by Professional Associations, Along with Foundational Principles and Context. Experts Contribute in Each of These Areas to Provide the Insight, Although the Text Is Written Without Excessive Jargon, and When Any Chapter Necessarily Has Li-
brary lingo it is thoroughly explained. Twelve appendices contain statements, policies, or competencies as put forth by various library associations, and the last of these lists the professional associations.

The book does an excellent job of laying out to the uninitiated what librarians do and, more importantly, why they do it. It is divided into three parts and each is enthusiastic, informative, and encouraging. The first section, “Foundations, Values and Context,” serves to motivate and ennoble the future librarian, while also suggesting the importance of libraries within society and its impact therein. The authors cover areas from the history and previous use of libraries, how librarians have taken a stand on principles (as codified in the American Library Association’s Bill of Rights), why people seek information and how they go about it (lazily), and finally to options for a career. These chapters are written not just to encourage, but also to frame the role of the library profession within a just and productive society. The authors suggest how an individual in the profession can fit their own personality and energy into a library position.

The second section, “Functions and Competencies,” which comprises most of the book, is a guide for the new librarian along the professional path post-graduation. From traditional services such as cataloging, access services, and reference, it also covers more advanced duties in management, marketing, research, and evaluation. There is a chapter on readers’ advisory, but no companion for instruction, whether for a tutorial in a public library or a more rigorous session in a specialized academic setting. This is an aspect of many librarians’ jobs that needs the same kind of insight demonstrated in other areas and would have been welcome in this volume. Even so, the chapters are fresh overviews of what these functions and duties mean to librarians and how they can be effective in serving our users.

The final portion of the book, “Moving Beyond Boundaries,” sets out a path for librarians as they engage in their future careers, thinking about where to take the profession as society and information continue to transform and evolve. These chapters touch on how traditional library values and core service missions will continue in our increasingly globalized society, but note an increasing focus on understanding the communities served and greater global awareness. As the world changes so also do libraries, but the librarians’ quest to create a safe, free place to get information for any need will stay the same, even if methods to accomplish this change.

This book functions partly as a modern snapshot of how libraries and librarians operate today. The middle section, eleven of the eighteen chapters, focuses on the various types of duties librarians encounter in all the different types of jobs available. This is some of the practical information library school students crave. Beyond theory, it provides the actual, day-to-day expectations and real-world situations that many students wish they had access to. The experts who contributed to this volume appear to have a total of almost a thousand years of experience. Their insights are not staid however. These professionals, with the wisdom of experience, are very forward-looking and just as fresh and enthusiastic about the future of libraries as a newly minted graduate. They bring a lot of advice and hope to these topics.

In the last chapter, author Ken Haycock mentions briefly the theory and practice divide commonly discussed in library schools and among professionals. He correctly affirms the need for theory to provide an understanding of what librarians do, why it is important, and how it works, but he also reminds readers that these school programs offer internships and practice upon which to hang theory in the real world. To this reviewer, the book is a foretaste of that. Too often library school students get exhausted with the theory and are frustrated with a lack of experience, despite much effort in the curriculum to place it in context. Most do try to put the relevance of theory into assignments. However, this book is so honest and hopeful about what professionals are doing and will continue to do in their daily lives that it can only help these students to understand what is in store for them.

Some suggestions for future editions: add a chapter on instruction and beef up the collection building pieces. A large part of creating collections is the bargaining for electronic resources and navigating the licenses required to get your community access to them. The practical side of dealing with big corporate vendors would be a perfect fit to the kind of practical information this book doles out. Also, end notes for each chapter are included at the back of the book, just before the index. These might be more useful at the end of the chapter instead.

While this may not be the official guide to the MLIS, it is close to it. For a seasoned librarian, it can work to re-invigorate interest in the many wonderful pieces of the profession. It is also of use to the student or library assistant who might be a future candidate for the MLIS degree.

—Review by Jeff McAdams

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