

Crowley, Bill. *Renewing Professional Librarianship: a Fundamental Rethinking*. Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited, 2008. 173 p. \$45.00 (ISBN: 978-1-59158-554-1)

You've seen the usage statistics. You've noticed the drop in the number of questions you get at the Reference Desk. You've bemoaned the fact that library users seem to be quite happy with Google search results and completely ignore your expensive online databases. Let's face it -- many library patrons just aren't using libraries (or librarians) for information anymore.

And just whose fault is it? In his book, **Renewing Professional Librarianship: a Fundamental Rethinking**, library professor Bill Crowley points the finger in three directions: at ALA-accredited library schools for eliminating traditional library courses and focusing instead on "information studies" courses; at ALA for deemphasizing the "library" part of its accreditation standards for Library and Information Studies programs; and at practitioners for buying into the idea that being a librarian is somehow not as important as being an "information provider."

Crowley explains that several decades ago, the closing of a number of ALA-accredited library schools left administrators scrambling for a way to make their schools and curricula relevant in the emerging "information society." They responded by developing courses to train librarians in the provision and management of information. This worked just fine until we discovered library users could find information on their own without us.

So, what's the solution? Crowley insists that instead of being merely "providers of information," libraries need to reclaim their role in reading, literacy and lifelong learning, and calls this new focus "Lifecycle Librarianship." He cites an OCLC study in which survey respondents saw the library's role as a place to learn, read, and make information freely available, to provide research support, and to provide free computer Internet access. Respondents were further asked how library services could be improved and suggested buying more books, providing hospitable surroundings, a friendly staff, plenty of parking and convenient hours. In other words, they "wanted a positive physical, not online, library experience."

I'll admit I was put off at first by Crowley's theories. I am the product of one of those "information provider" library school programs, and pride myself on my ability to help patrons with their "information needs." But, more and more I'm being asked, not for help with finding some obscure piece of information, but with finding a "good book" to read. I'm spending less time training patrons on our online databases and more time showing them how to apply online for unemployment. By the end of the book, Crowley convinced me that perhaps a radical rethinking of the library's role in our community is needed.

This book does not provide step-by-step solutions, but is intended as more of a conversation starter. It has a strong academic tone to it, but I still recommend it to anyone interested in the future of libraries and librarians. It would be a useful addition to

a library system's professional collection and definitely has a place in every library school's collection.

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