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Review of Working in the Virtual Stacks: The New Library & Information Science

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WORKING IN THE VIRTUAL STACKS: THE NEW LIBRARY & INFORMATION SCIENCE

WORKING IN THE VIRTUAL STACKS: THE NEW LIBRARY & INFORMATION SCIENCE. Laura Townsend Kane. *Chicago: American Library Association, 2011, 167 pp., ISBN 978-0-8389-1103-7*, $47.00 (ALA members: $42.30).

Judging by the title, you might be expecting a treatise examining the enormous changes that recent technology has brought about in library and information science. Although technology is discussed at some length in Laura Townsend Kane's new book, this is no treatise. Instead, it falls under the heading of vocational guidance. *Working in the Virtual Stacks: The New Library & Information Science* is a sequel to Kane's 2003 book, *Straight from the Stacks: A Firsthand Guide to Careers in Library and Information Science*, which was intended to "provide an overview of all the different career choices available to those in my field." In the new book, Kane's goal is again to "inspire two groups of people: those considering librarianship as a career and those considering a mid-career change." At the same time, she hopes to "illustrate how changes in technology have affected the work of librarians and the vision of libraries."

Kane, the assistant director for information services at the University of South Carolina medical library, has divided her new book into five chapters, each devoted to a professional "role": librarian as subject specialist, as technology guru, as teacher, as entrepreneur, as administrator. Each chapter begins with an overview, where Kane briefly describes the job responsibilities, employers, skill sets, and educational credentials associated with that role. The overview is followed by several profiles of librarians whose careers are illustrative of the role. Kane calls the profiles "spotlights." To create the spotlights, Kane interviewed librarians from academic, public, school, and special libraries across the United States. And to illustrate the broad range of professional possibilities open to librarians, she also profiles a professor of library science, an information broker, an indexer, and library consultants. A spotlight starts with a librarian's name and job title, and moves on to a description of job duties, principal

clientele, challenges, and rewards. It also contains a capsule biography and an opportunity for the spotlighted librarian to advise prospective colleagues. The advice varies, but it is generally earnest and thoughtful; not surprisingly, it often touches on the relentless need to keep learning. One librarian sums it up: "We must all continue to hone our technological skills throughout our working lives."

In Kane's previous book, she bemoaned "worrisome predictions about the future of our profession. In few years' time, the bulk of the workforce will have retired and there will not be enough librarians to fill the vacant positions." (As of 2012, those predictions have not come to pass, but the *2010-11 Occupational Outlook Handbook* continues to forecast that "a large number of librarians are likely to retire in the coming decade.") In the new book, Kane's spotlighted interviewees are generally positive about the future of librarians and librarianship, while acknowledging that change – neither slow nor particularly gradual – is unavoidable. "Being a librarian today means something entirely different than it did even five or ten years ago," says one. Kane herself takes an enthusiastically upbeat perspective (she likes exclamation points!) about librarianship – "those of us in the field must do our part to help with recruitment by being more vocal about our fantastic profession" – and also about the job market. "When librarians keep up with technology, adapt to change, and match library services to current technological trends, they reinforce the fact that librarians are more invaluable than ever," she says.

All in all, Kane has succeeded in her goals with this book. Librarians and MLS students who are gathering information about different career paths will find plenty to think about here. Anecdotal examples of how technology is transforming librarianship also abound. *Working in the Virtual Stacks* includes a table of contents, notes at the end of each chapter, and an index.

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