

Review of: Bilal, Dania. 2014. *Library automation: Core concepts and practical systems analysis*. Third Edition. Santa Barbara, California: Libraries Unlimited.

Despite the fact that libraries have been automated for more than a generation, library automation remains a daunting subject for many information professionals. There is a growing degree of fluency in the use of various technologies, but many librarians lack a fuller understanding of the technologies that form the basis for the computerization of processing or access services, a state of affairs that places sometimes sharp limits on responses to questions of purpose, design, and performance where information technology is concerned.

The third edition of Dania Bilal's *Library Automation* is a concise and well-organized introduction to library automation, focusing to a significant degree on workflow issues as well as technologies and situating automation within the framework of library management. It is written primarily for readers new to the information professions and has been designed to serve as an introductory text for a course on library automation or digital libraries. Its principal strength is its treatment of the planning processes associated with the installation of a new system or migration from an older system to a new one. Its principal drawback is that the treatment of more specific aspects of these subjects tends to be superficial.

Organizing the larger part of the book according to what Bilal calls the “Library Automation Life Cycle,” or LALC, is an effective device, providing a clear and linear sense of what is entailed by the processes that define the automation of a library. The presentation of some of the content in the description of LALC is less effective, however; for example, the descriptions of the integrated library systems, open source and proprietary, from which librarians must choose amount to little more than vendor boilerplate and fail to provide any sense of the qualitative differences among the systems.

The sections on the retrospective conversion of cataloging records and system migration, two issues that engender fear and loathing among library technologists, are clear and well-organized, affording, in the main, a great deal of useful information about the processes. But even in the book’s more successful sections there are problems, owing to the failure to provide more detailed accounts of a number of important subjects. The brief discussion of data cleanup as an aspect of the migration process is a case in point. There is no explanation about how or why the need arises, what automation librarians can do to prevent it, or what steps are required to make such data appropriately tidy. The reader, and especially the reader new to librarianship, is left to wonder.

Two final complaints: The section on cloud computing is cursory. While it is not clear about the extent to which library computing will be managed through cloud-based services, it seems likely that it will be an important factor in library automation in the years ahead, and perhaps especially for institutions and organizations seeking more economical ways

to put larger scale implementations into place. That Bilal does not treatment cloud computing and its uses by libraries, real and potential, as a more important aspect of the subject may serve to misrepresent the future of library automation, as well as shortening the shelf life of her book. Similarly, discovery services and discovery systems, which are arguably critical components of many current and presumably all next-generation library systems, are treated incidentally; more to the point, the treatment is almost completely at odds with other assessments of Web-scale discovery services and systems, including Marshall Breeding's recently NISO whitepaper, *The Future of Library Resource Discovery*, which emphasize the importance of these systems in the future of online library services.¹

If your library supports an LIS educational program or a program for staff development, the third edition Bilal's *Library Automation* is probably worth adding to the collection. Otherwise, owing to the aforementioned inclination toward superficiality, I recommend supporting the published efforts of a local poet instead.

¹ Breeding, Marshall. *The Future of Library Resource Discovery*. NISO. 2015.

