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Xie and Matusiaks' "Discover digital libraries: Theory and practice" (book review)

Paul Hartog
Faith Baptist Bible College and Theological Seminary

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Book Reviews

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Digital libraries are "constantly changing" and "evolving," as well as continually proliferating (pp. xix, 4). Accordingly, "There is a strong need for a new book that addresses the changes that have taken place in the past five years in the field of digital libraries and that presents current research and developments in the world of practice" (p. xix). Xie and Matusiak have taken on this worthy challenge. They have provided a wide-ranging introduction that covers both theoretical concepts and practical aspects, both design features and end-user applications (p. xix). The intended audience includes "researchers, designers, librarians, archivists, teachers, and graduate students" (p. xxi). The work admirably serves as both a primer and review.

The first chapter presents a definitional and historical introduction to digital libraries. Chapter 2 discusses collection development and weeding, as well as copyright and legal issues. Chapter 3 describes the digitization process and the long-term maintenance of digital assets. The fourth chapter focuses upon audio and moving-image collections, including digital migration. "No digital format is expected to last forever" (p. 123). Chapter 5 considers metadata, "the foundation on which digital libraries are built" (p. 129), including controlled vocabularies and user tagging. Chapter 6 reviews both open source and proprietary Digital Library Management Systems. The authors wisely recommend considering the "total cost of ownership" and not just the initial purchase price (p. 183).

Chapter 7 examines interface design. Chapter 8 investigates empirical research on the "diverse needs" of users and their "unique information searching behaviors" (p. 247). The following chapter discusses digital preservation and digital repositories. Digital stewardship is not an "isolated event" but a "set of practices diffused throughout the information lifecycle" (p. 256). The tenth (and most robust) chapter covers the evaluation of digital libraries. After a thorough survey of numerous assessment models, the authors recommend a tenfold "Multifaceted Evaluation of Digital Libraries" (MEDaL) framework: interface design, collections, information organization, effects on users, system and technology, preservation, user engagement, services, context, and administration. The final chapter introduces new developments and challenges within

digital librarianship. Recent developments include the integration of social media applications (Facebook, Flickr, RSS feeds, Twitter, etc.) within digital librarianship. The looming challenges include mobility, interoperability, and sustainability.

Every chapter concludes with a helpful "References" list of up–to–date resources. For instance, of the eighty-one sources listed for Chapter 2, thirty-four were published since 2012. The closing appendices tackle digitization guides, standards, and best practices, as well as examples of metadata schemas. A subject index rounds out the volume. A few, very minor errors appear within the book as a whole (pp. 31, 33, 55-56, 235, 265, 291, 303).

In sum, Xie and Matusiak deliver a virtually comprehensive introduction to digital libraries. Perhaps the topics of services, context, and administration (the three final three facets of the MEDaL evaluative framework) could have benefited from lengthier discussions within the book's chapters. Nevertheless, digital libraries shine through this remarkable volume as "unique, multifaceted, and social phenomena that play an important role in knowledge construction" (p. 10).

Reviewer
Paul Hartog, Faith Baptist Bible College & Theological Seminary