

BOOK REVIEWS

College Libraries and the Teaching/Learning Process: Selections from the Writings of Evan Ira Farber, edited by David Gansz. Richmond, IN: Earlham College Press, 2007.

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When I agreed to review *College Libraries in the Teaching/Learning Process*, I steeled myself to wade through very dry prose, in search of innovations and ideas for improving my own information literacy classes. I had no idea how pleasantly disappointed I would be. I had forgotten that the information literacy instruction that one gives as part of students' specific courses and that one customizes to fit professors' assignments has not always been standard operating procedure. In fact, it grew from one or more innovations. I did not know and had never considered that it had taken the promotional efforts of Evan Ira Farber to put the style of information literacy instruction practiced as second nature today onto the proverbial map. I did not even know who Evan Ira Farber was. It is to Mr. Farber's credit that his ideas have become such standard practice that one takes them totally for granted. *College Libraries in the Teaching/Learning Process* reminded me that, "it has not always been thus."

I also did not know that Mr. Farber is an excellent storyteller, especially in the interview in Appendix (A). He lets this reader, who was born the year that he began working as director of the library at Earlham College, get a clear picture of what academic libraries were like before she experienced them as a student during the summer of 1979. Mr. Farber tells not only of his efforts to publicize bibliographic instruction, but also his views on and efforts to promote such ideas as faculty liaisons (Chapter 7 and 29), browsing libraries/popular book collections (Chapter 18), and college librarianship as a distinct specialty (Chapter 1 and 15). He repeatedly stresses that a college librarian's first job is to support his/her institution's "teaching/learning mission" (Chapters 7 and 8) through both judicious collection development (Chapter 3) and instruction (Chapter 1).

Interestingly enough, Mr. Farber takes great pains to explain that he did not invent information literacy. Chapters 14 and 27 in particular feature lengthy literature reviews that reveal information literacy instruction's deep historical roots. Course-related information literacy instruction, similar to what is widespread in academic libraries today, could well have developed simultaneously at a fairly large number of diverse institutions.

Farber, however, was an ace networker. He thanks his mentors and speaks about his mentees (see Appendix A). Farber also became chair of the College Libraries Section of the ACRL in 1967 and was elected ACRL President in 1977. Needless to say, Farber was in a unique position to make sure that other librarians heard about information literacy instruction.

Given Evan Ira Farber's historical importance, Gansz has done the profession a service putting together Farber's speeches and book chapters in one easy-to-access place, because most of these writings, no matter how readable, are by their nature, not the sort that library school students are likely to find through *Library Literature* or *LISA*. Many of the older essays are also too old to be indexed electronically, and book chapters, manuscripts, and articles in obscure and regional newsletters, often fall through databases' cracks.

Farber's voice is clearly an administrator's. As I read of how he made a science librarian and successor out of a recent Earlham graduate with a biology degree (Appendix A and Introduction), I thought about the possible external candidates probably brought in for a pro forma interview. Farber's confession about how he wanted to fire one of his subordinates (Appendix A) also made me shudder.

In addition, I disagree with Farber that student research should be efficient and orderly to be productive (Chapter 4 and 12). A keyword search on the catalog or a general bibliographic database lands most students with multiple credible sources to compare and exposes them to reputable, reasonable quality information as long as they just don't grab the first two items at the top of the page or only the book for which they initially searched. My motto for most student research is "just start somewhere."

More interesting, Farber has several notable blind spots. He naively believed that the internet would make nearly all information universally accessible (Chapter 19 and 25). Copyright, publishers, vendors, and aggregators, as well as tight budgets have created a world of academic libraries divided into database and periodical haves and have-nots. Not quite everything may be available on the net for the right price, but not quite everything is affordable to many college libraries.

Likewise, Farber makes no note of the digital divide (Chapter 19 and 25). He never noticed the students who had not yet mastered basic office software due to not having a computer at home or adequate access prior to arriving on campus. He has no idea that computers and internet at home are still out of financial reach for many students from low income backgrounds.

Finally, Mr. Farber is simply plain wrong when he suggests that librarians by and large will not be dealing with interface and usability issues (Chapter 28). He did not foresee a world where librarians manage web pages, do usability research, and create online tutorials with Perl, Php, Java, Camtasia, and Flash.

Still for any librarian or library school student who has ever wondered about the history of information literacy instruction or academic libraries in general, or alternatively, for anyone who wants to know how library administrators think, *College Libraries and the Teaching/Learning Process* is a pleasant and informative read.