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Review: The Engaged Library: High-Impact Educational Practices in Academic Libraries

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***Book Reviews* edited by Jacquelyn Ann Williams**

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Review: The Engaged Library: High-Impact Educational Practices in Academic Libraries, edited by Joan D. Ruelle

As colleges and universities seek initiatives to improve student success and retention, academic libraries are under increasing pressure to demonstrate their value and support of institutional learning outcomes in innovative and measurable ways. This pressure is likely to become even more pronounced in the face of budgets that are stagnating due to the coronavirus pandemic and the anticipated student enrollment crisis of the mid-2020s. Research has shown that engaging in high-impact practices (HIPs) that foster deep learning through student engagement enables academic libraries to provide critical support to student success and retention initiatives. For academic librarians and library administrators interested in exploring HIPs, *The Engaged Library: High-Impact Educational Practices in Academic Libraries*, edited by Joan D. Ruelle, offers a timely investigation into how academic libraries are using high-impact practices to support their communities through both collaborative and independent endeavors.

While HIPs encompass many learning practices that educators have considered highly effective for years, the term “high-impact practices” gained popularity in academia after George Kuh included it in the 2006 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) annual report and then explored it more thoroughly in the subsequent Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP) initiative, which identified ten high-impact educational practices (Kuh, 2008; Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2007). Since that time, researchers have explored these practices and their applications within higher education, often by analyzing the use of a single high-impact practice or by more broadly studying the impact of HIPs on student learning and success. However, *The Engaged Library* is unique in pulling together case studies and research on all ten of the original high-impact practices and examining them specifically within the context of academic libraries. Aside from the introduction and final chapter that detail the history, context, and value of high-impact practices, each chapter focuses on a specific high-impact practice: first-year seminars and experiences, common intellectual experiences, learning communities, writing-intensive courses, collaborative assignments and projects, undergraduate research, diversity/global learning, service learning and community-based learning, internships, and capstone courses and projects.

This volume does not include ePortfolios, which the AAC&U added as a high-impact practice in 2016.

In the introduction to this edited volume, co-authors Joan D. Ruelle and Deandra Little provide a brief history of high-impact practices and detail the primary goals of *The Engaged Librarian*: to investigate how academic libraries are engaging in each of Kuh's high-impact practices and "to foster a shared language around HIPs within academic librarianship that will highlight and articulate how libraries have been and can increasingly become integral to the success of these engaged learning practices across academia" (p. 4). Rather than encouraging engagement with a single high-impact practice or a one-off commitment, Ruelle and Little challenge academic libraries to develop a framework that supports strategic and systematic participation across the body of HIPs. They argue that centering library services around high-impact practices will better equip libraries to demonstrate their value. Because high-impact practices have become integral to initiatives to improve student engagement and retention, librarians need to become intimately familiar with these practices in order to engage in conversations about student success with college administrators and stakeholders.

Mirroring the collaborative nature of high-impact practices, many chapters of *The Engaged Librarian* are co-authored by librarians and other university faculty and lecturers, predominantly from disciplines within the humanities, and follow the development of selective programs and outreach from conception to assessment. The authors begin each chapter with an introduction to a specific high-impact practice and a literature review situating the practice within higher education and LIS research. They then highlight relevant institutional information, including active campus partnerships and specific problems that their practices aimed to address, in order to provide additional context for their work. Some authors focus on one or two major initiatives, like the development of an 8-week summer program for undergraduate researchers at Bucknell University. Others, however, showcase a range of small-scale initiatives and programs that support a specific high-impact practice. For example, Ruelle and Lundeen's chapter on learning communities explores multiple library outreach opportunities that engaged students living in Elon University's residence halls. As part of this outreach, librarians offered support for book clubs, provided on-site office hours, and developed a human library project. As a conclusion to each chapter, authors explain how they assessed their practices, often referring to the

AAC&U VALUE rubrics or including rubrics that they designed for specific programs, as is the case in Ward et al.'s chapter on collaborative assignments and projects.

In the final chapter of *The Engaged Library*, Gretel Stock, Dean of University College at University of Wisconsin-Steven's Point and the previous Executive Director of Academic Affairs and the Library at Viterbo University, provides an institutional view of high-impact practices. With her unique experiences and perspectives as a dean and administrator, Stock advises academic librarians on how to approach and frame requests for institutional support for the development of HIPs. Her insights include tips that some readers may expect but are nevertheless worth remembering. For example, she suggests communicating the worth of a new initiative in terms of institutional goals rather than only library goals. She also stresses the importance of selecting campus partners with a reputation for completing projects. Stock's advice will be especially useful to academic librarians who are new to this type of collaborative work. She concludes with a reflection on major and minor themes of the preceding chapters, which she sees as including the application of information literacy instruction to traditional and nontraditional contexts, the role of librarians as full partners (rather than simply service providers), and the power of collaborative relationships. Her reflections offer a brief but effective close to the volume by stressing that HIPs are the "gold standard" for effectively supporting student success and retention, especially for first-year students and students from underrepresented groups (p. 171).

The diversity of backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences of the authors is one key strength of *The Engaged Library: High Impact Educational Practices in Academic Libraries*. The volume includes contributions from university librarians, professors, lecturers, and administrators engaged at public, private, and community colleges and universities. Elon University is rather heavily represented, with four of the ten chapters focused on practices and programs at Elon. As is perhaps expected, many of the authors have roles within their institutions that focus on instruction. However, others have positions that include scholarly communications, electronic resources, and outreach and user experiences, emphasizing that participation in HIPs for librarians and campus partners extends beyond the college classroom.

The Engaged Library presents a wide range of diverse initiatives that vary in scope, time investment, and necessary resources (space, personnel, partnerships, etc.), which should allow all readers to come away with practical insights and inspiration for their own institutions. This range, furthermore, demonstrates the value of both large and small-scale

initiatives. The case studies in this volume reveal that, while major initiatives can be transformative to student learning, smaller initiatives can also be highly impactful and lay the groundwork for future collaborations. The inclusion of small-scale initiatives is particularly useful for academic librarians who are seeking inspiration for their own work but may still be developing campus partnerships.

The primary weakness of *The Engaged Library* is a problem that Ruelle and Little anticipate in their introduction: academic libraries have extensive experience with some high-impact practices but have adopted others more slowly. While the volume presents all ten of the original high-impact practices throughout the text, the authors explore some practices in greater depth than others. The chapters on learning communities, writing-intensive courses, diversity/global learning, and undergraduate research offer particularly detailed case studies of how librarians transformed and aligned specific library services, programs, and outreach with a single high-impact practice. Other chapters, like those on common intellectual experiences and first-year experiences and seminars, focus primarily on a single high-impact practice but briefly mention and explore other HIPs that the libraries supported. While this approach sometimes lacks the rich detail that is so prominent in chapters focused on a single high-impact practice, it does provide valuable insight into how academic libraries can support multiple HIPs simultaneously.

Unfortunately, a couple chapters struggle to match the detail and innovation of others within the volume, either because the practices are underdeveloped in libraries or because they are ubiquitous. For example, the chapter on internships primarily presents research that others have done on internship programs in academic libraries rather than focusing on the author's institution, Belk Library at Elon University. The author admits that her institution currently lacks a formal internship program, although it is considering developing one in the future (p. 146). As part of a volume that includes such detailed case studies in every other chapter, it is unclear why another university was not chosen to highlight this high-impact practice, particularly since Elon University is already represented so heavily in the other case studies. The chapter on capstone courses and projects, on the other hand, focuses on a high-impact practice that library services have traditionally supported. This same chapter introduces six case studies that predominantly highlight similar services and outreach, such as research consultations and information literacy instruction sessions. The content comes across as somewhat redundant when one considers

that these are likely to be initiatives that most academic librarians are already familiar with and practicing.

Despite these shortcomings, *The Engaged Library: High Impact Educational Practices in Academic Libraries* provides a welcome exploration into how academic libraries are participating in high-impact practices through collaborative campus partnerships and, occasionally, independently. Filled with robust case studies of recent initiatives, this volume will be a valuable resource for academic libraries seeking to expand their outreach through sustainable high-impact practices in order to demonstrate the value of libraries within their communities.

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