IJIDI: Book Review

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B oth the academic and non-academic life of commuter students revolves overwhelmingly around the commute. Commuter students, loosely defined as students who live off campus and must travel for their studies, decide which courses to take; when to arrive and leave campus; where and when to study; and in which campus activities to participate, based on their commute. Whether by walking, cycling, busing, or driving to campus, the commuter student experiences unique challenges and pressures compared to their residential counterparts (e.g., the need to budget extra time for transit; worries about parking space; and so on). But what happens when the "nontraditional" commuter student becomes the majority student population (e.g., 87% in the U.S.) (p.3), while the overall campus life, including libraries, was designed with the "traditional" student in mind; one that resides on campus? *Academic Libraries for Commuter Students: Research-based Strategies* attempts to address this challenging and timely issue. Through its nine chapters, this edited book provides case studies of various American academic libraries engaged in ethnographic research to better understand the realities and lived experiences of commuter students and to ultimately improve library services and support to this population.

The first and final chapters are both written by the editors Mariana Regalado and Maura A. Smale. Chapter 1 ("Situating Commuter Undergraduates") effectively sets the stage for research on this overlooked group of students and Chapter 9 ("Lessons Learned from Our Commuter Students") provides a concluding summary of the key themes gleaned from the seven case studies outlined in the volume. It also offers suggestions for future research. For those with limited time to read, yet interested in or curious about serving this population, I recommend reading both Chapter 1 and Chapter 9 consecutively and then selectively reading case studies of interest covered in Chapters 2 through Chapter 8.

Chapter 1 provides a critical introduction to the different demographic characteristics of commuter students; broadly surveys research about commuter student experiences; and then looks specifically at studies on commuter student and libraries. The organization of the research into major themes (such as student engagement and academic success or student identity and multiple life roles) makes it easy to pinpoint particular topics of interest and to quickly navigate this extensive literature review. A bibliography at the end of each chapter, as opposed to the end of the book, allows for quick access to the cited sources.

The case studies presented in Chapters 2-8 cover research on undergraduate commuter students in a variety of American universities (Chapters 2-5) and community colleges (Chapters 6-8), including a commuter campus transitioning into a residential campus (Chapter 2) and a virtual campus (Chapter 6). Each case study provides an introduction to the institution; contextualizes the research question/problems; often provides a demographic breakdown of the student population (including race and ethnicity); describes research methods (with Chapter 3 and Chapter 8 mentioning the actual samples used); research results and outcomes; and the library's response to these research outcomes.

Of note were four case studies (Chapter 2, 3, 4 and 5) of institutions involved in the "A Day in the Life" project, which mapped the daily lives and movements of commuter students through their cell phone texts and completed surveys. Each of these chapters provides an overview of the project in varying details, and thus for readers reading the book cover to cover, this can be somewhat repetitive. As it stands, these chapters can be read as autonomous pieces. Nonetheless, since four case studies were based on this project, it would have been useful to have a comparative chapter on all of them, outlining the similarities and differences in results, as well as each library's response to the study. Overall though, this fascinating multi-institutional project is very useful for readers interested in employing innovative ethnographic research methods in their library.

A common thread throughout the case studies is the importance of learning the actual needs and expectations of the commuter population and of preserving the integrity and value of library services even while facing pressures from external stakeholders to cut or eliminate spaces and services that students genuinely care about and need. As such, some of the case studies found that, contrary to a popular belief, commuter students still desired quiet spaces (carrels) to study and desktop computers to complete their coursework between classes. Several case studies also discussed the importance of technology, specifically smart phones, during the commute and the challenges faced by commuters when accessing online resources on-the-go.

The book editors recognize that "supporting the success of our commuter students is integral to the mission of academic libraries and our commitment to social justice" (p. 139). Researchers interested in diversity and inclusion will find the book's focus on the experiences of commuter students, an under-researched population, useful in and of itself. Notably, one of the book's greatest strengths is the recognition that this student population is not a monolithic group, but is a group with complex characteristics, demographics, and diverse experiences and needs. This is exemplified in the study found in Chapter 3 ("Making Space in the Library for Student-Parents"), which focused on commuter student-parents at the University of North Carolina, Charlotte, and their specific needs as parents. The library created a family friendly study room for student-parents and their children. As a result, student-parents felt included and "seen" by the university, which acknowledged their whole selves and other roles beyond that of "student".

Inclusion is often described as not only looking at who is included at the proverbial table but also who is not. Chapter 3 provides a section directly discussing the theme of inclusion, while other case studies involve some degree of inclusive practice. The case study presented in Chapter 7 (co-authored by Nancy Fried Foster, an eminent ethnographic researcher), is of particular note, for using an "inclusive approach" (p. 103) to its ethnographic study on library use by students, faculty members, staff, and administrators. Traditionally most research on the academic library is conducted by librarians or other

library staff members. However, not only did the project include the typical team of library staff researchers; it also included anthropology students as co-researchers. Architect students also engaged in the project, redesigning the library based on the study's findings and as part of a credit course. Other unique features of the approach presented in the book was addressing faculty perspectives; collaborating with campus partners; and exploring student activities outside the library and off campus.

Librarians are known for their overreliance on the survey as a research instrument when studying and assessing library use and services. A key strength of this book is the diversity of ethnographic research techniques presented across all the case studies, including open forums, focus groups, mapping exercises, diaries, post-it note feedback, semi-structured interviews, observation studies, charrettes (design workshops), and experimental design. The diversity of methods covered in this volume is refreshing and makes for an engaging read.

Although the editors, Regalado and Smale, have written several articles related to commuter students, this text is unique as it is the first book which I could find that focuses entirely on commuter students and academic libraries. For this reason, this book accomplishes its goal of contributing to the literature on this topic. This is an excellent book for researchers and academic librarians who want to learn how other libraries and institutions are researching and responding to the needs of commuter students. Though only focusing mainly on undergraduate commuter students in the U.S., this book is important to readers interested in the applications of ethnographic research in libraries and for those seeking ideas on how to develop their own research to understand this group of students, regardless of geographic location. Presumably, many of the issues experienced by American commuter students are similar to those attending Canadian and other Western universities. Some of the interventions used in these case studies are perhaps more applicable to these Western countries than non-Western countries. However, the final chapter on lessons learned outlines a path to future research and ways to add to the conversation on this topic. Due to the dearth of research about commuter students and libraries outside of North America, there is a real opportunity for future research from South American, African, Asian, and other international perspectives. I highly recommend this book.

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