

2006

Review of The Successful Academic Librarian: Winning Strategies from Library Leaders

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Original Citation

Mentch, Fran. (2006). Review of The Successful Academic Librarian: Winning Strategies from Library Leaders. *Technical Services Quarterly*, 24(2), 91-107.

Repository Citation

Mentch, Fran, "Review of The Successful Academic Librarian: Winning Strategies from Library Leaders" (2006). *Michael Schwartz Library Publications*. 59.
https://engagedscholarship.csuohio.edu/msl_facpub/59

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1-1-2006

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Repository Citation

Mentch, Fran, "The Successful Academic Librarian: Winning Strategies from Library Leaders" (2006). *Library Faculty Publications*. Paper 1.
http://engagedscholarship.csuohio.edu/msl_facpub/1

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Fran Mentch

THE SUCCESSFUL ACADEMIC LIBRARIAN: WINNING STRATEGIES FROM LIBRARY LEADERS

This article was originally published in:

Mentch, Fran. (2006). Review of The Successful Academic Librarian: Winning Strategies from Library Leaders. *Technical Services Quarterly*, 24(2), 91-107.

Post-print prepared by MSL Academic Endeavors, the imprint of the Michael Schwartz Library at Cleveland State University (2012)



THE SUCCESSFUL ACADEMIC LIBRARIAN: WINNING STRATEGIES FROM LIBRARY LEADERS. Edited by Gwen Meyer Gregory. *Medford, NJ: Information Today, Inc., 2005, 256 pp., ISBN 1-57387-232-6, hardbound, \$39.50.*

This book came to me at the right time. After a long career as a social worker and the six years it took me to return to school and transition to the field of library and information science, I was fortunate enough to be hired as a librarian in the local state university library. So, I read this book from the perspective of a seasoned bureaucrat, but a novice librarian. The editor promises in the introduction that the book “is not meant to be a research study of academic librarianship, but rather a readable guidebook.” And that it is.

The book is composed of three sections. The first section addresses “the basics.” It has chapters on job responsibilities, establishing relationships with faculty, research and publishing, service commitments and a discussion of the benefits and drawbacks of faculty status. The second section deals with the interview process, mentoring, unions, continuing education, documenting your career, and a discussion of Canadian libraries. The final section, “Tales from the Trenches” includes narratives from three librarians and a chapter “A View from the Top,” delineates what directors look for in hiring academic librarians.

The book gets off to a rather slow start. The cover is unappealing. It has a photograph showing a woman climbing a ladder, apparently making a concrete and uninspiring reference to readers climbing their career ladders. Then, the book begins with a weak first chapter, or maybe just a chapter out of place. Although the authors of this chapter are no doubt well intentioned in their efforts to explain acclimating to the workplace, their advice is very elementary, and seems more appropriate for readers who

have had absolutely no professional work experience. Some examples of things covered in this chapter are the suggestions that you “maintain a healthy lifestyle” and “having several files for papers of various degrees of importance.” The book picks up quickly from there, however, and becomes increasingly interesting, ending with a series of wonderful, earthy narratives.

A repeated theme is the need to find the right “fit” in a job. The book does a thorough and intelligent job of describing the nature of academic librarianship, and the tasks and activities that are used in the evaluation and tenure process.

The resources (organizations, websites, and listserves) described in the articles, the accompanying works cited lists, and the book’s annotated bibliography all help make this a concise and useful reference.

Much of the focus is on the tenure process, and this book would be a wonderful “hand to hold” for anyone at any point in that process. The authors also give clear, sophisticated advice about choosing your approach to mentoring, publishing, service, and continuing education.

Although the book is clearly directed to academic librarians, the chapters giving advice on the interview process, publishing, and the differences between Canadian and U.S. libraries are very strong and useful to anyone. The chapter about the Canadian libraries would also be of practical use to anyone trying to relocate to Canada or Mexico, as the author refers to the legal issues that involve employment and NAFTA.

The final third of the book includes narratives of librarians and is wonderfully written, entertaining, and effective in weaving all the facts and recommendations with actual experiences. Mary Malloy’s contribution is particularly strong. It is refreshingly

honest in describing the competitive and nasty process that a tenure review can be, sometimes resulting in what she calls “enforced mediocrity.” I’m certainly glad that this book and I found each other when we did, but I think it can be interesting and helpful to others further along in their careers. The veteran will enjoy the perspectives of their peers, and the academic librarian going through the tenure process will find it indispensable. All librarians will enjoy the cogent and concise chapters about Canadian libraries, interviewing, publishing and service.

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