Book Reviews

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Kate Theimer, ed. *Innovative Practices for Archives and Special Collections:*

Educational Programs. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015. 195p. ISBN 9781442249523. \$55.00

In her introduction to *Innovative Practices for Archives and Special Collections: Educational Programs*, Kate Theimer outlines a collection of case studies from a variety of institutions, targeting different audiences, all of which have “ideas that are transferable, even if the specific implementation might not be” (vii). This claim sets the bar extraordinarily high; but, happily, the case studies deliver. The institutions represented are large and small, age groups range from kindergarten to graduate students, projects target both students and educators, and collaboration abounds. A good many of the projects presented are truly innovative and interesting; highlights will depend on the reader’s personal focus and interest, but this reviewer found “Make Way for Learning” (a program that brings grade school children into special collections) and “Evocative Objects” (a program in which undergraduate design students create projects based on their findings in archives) to be standout examples of the exciting work being done in the field.

The structure of this volume is clear and concise. In addition to collaboration and pedagogy, two common themes emerge from the case studies. The first one is the short period of time between the initial idea for a program and the implementation. Several case studies cite a desire to get in and get messy, and then revise along the way. The theory is that a program in beta is better than no program at all and

that, without momentum and the willingness to take a risk, a project may stall and never come to fruition. Librarians and archivists working in large institutions will understand the challenges a bureaucracy poses to getting projects off the ground and should take inspiration from these examples. Several of the case studies track a program across two or three years, showing exactly how improvements are implemented. Readers can judge on a case-by-case basis, but there generally aren't any challenges in the first iteration of these programs that a longer planning stage would necessarily have prevented.

A second theme is evaluation, or perhaps a lack thereof. The structure of the case studies puts a strong emphasis on results and takeaways, with the final three sections of each study titled "results," "lessons learned," and "conclusions." The vast majority of the evidence, however, is anecdotal. Positive quotations from students and educators are plentiful, but rarely are these quotations actively solicited in a standard evaluation or questionnaire. The results section might mention that "a few" students returned to the library or archive over the course of the semester, but specific numbers (of either students or visits) are not given. This points to a crucial and timely problem in many special collections and archives—and many libraries in general—namely, how to tell an institution's story in a narrative bolstered by hard and quantifiable data. More and more, library and archival professionals are being asked to produce metrics that demonstrate quantifiable success in their programming, and these case studies reveal a field in transition. As several of the authors note, there is a strong desire to find more effective tools for evaluation. In the final case study, given by Robyn Katz about the planning and implementation of teacharchives.org, readers finally see a glimpse of what that solid assessment might look like. Drawing on Google analytics, Katz's "results" section has hard numbers to back up the effectiveness of her program. Katz's conclusion notes that "assessment data is especially vital to share," a strong sentiment with which to end (186).

I would strongly recommend this text to any special collections, archives, or even education professionals looking to shake up their approaches to programming or enrich their curricula. Taken individually, the case studies provide strong blueprints for education programs, and readers will benefit, as they are intended to, from the "lessons learned." Taken together, Theimer's compilation is exciting and inspiring, encouraging readers to jump into projects quickly and without fear and challenging us to find new and compelling ways to demonstrate our value.—*Dana Hart, Thomas J. Watson Library, Metropolitan Museum of Art*