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Working in the Virtual Stacks is an update to Laura Townsend Kane’s Straight from the Stacks: A Firsthand Guide to Careers in Library and Information Science (2003). This new volume focuses on developments in librarianship over the past decade through a collection of interview-based essays. The book features some recognizable figures in the library community, such as Jessamyn West, Sarah Houghton, and Michael Porter, but also focuses on other librarians and information professionals who hold fascinating positions and have important insights into the new landscape of librarianship. These essays together present a comprehensive look at current and emerging library roles, many of which are highly specific and technology focused.

The essays in the book examine librarians in roles as subject specialists, technology gurus, teachers, entrepreneurs, and administrators. While Straight from the Stacks used library type (academic, public, special) to organize essays, Working in the Virtual Stacks reflects technology and changes over the past several years that mean librarians’ professional lives are no longer well defined by the library where they work. This is especially apparent in the “Librarians as Entrepreneurs” section; most of the librarians examined in this chapter are not affiliated with a particular institution, but they are still doing important work to define best practices in the profession.

Many of the librarian career stories feature professionals who began their careers in the 1980s and 1990s as libraries began to embrace technology and who were drawn into leadership roles through their interest in and expertise with emerging digital skills. The book also features librarians who entered the profession much earlier and who have acted as advocates and change makers as libraries have adapted to the technology developments of the last 30 years. The importance of continuous professional development is emphasized here; many of the experienced librarians cited “staying up to date with technology” as the foundation of their success.

Working in the Virtual Stacks is an informative read for early-career librarians and library students. It features a hearty dose of historical context for the profession along with detailed career stories of librarians in leadership roles. The focuses are so diverse that most librarians will find role models and road maps among them. However, if the past 10 years have been any indication, these focuses will continue to shift as new leaders come of age in the virtual stacks.