Case Studies in Collections and Technical Services
-- Case Study Three: The Ticking Clock of Tenure:
The Case of the First Article

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Little Red Herrings
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anomalies occur. Scholarship is important in librarianship; external funding, however, is not only more important, but is also much more to be preferred in these tight and declining budget times over obscure articles on so many extraneous statistics. If grant-writing is not of first-most importance, that academic library is still in denial about its status in its new information world.

Deans must not be shy about this process, or exhibit tunnel vision. Multiple fund-raising opportunities must be pursued, and in many ways, through many avenues. Each avenue must be more than self-supporting: each must achieve its own measure of funding success. Deans must lead their libraries in “branding” and selling their libraries and services, not just to students, faculty and staffs, but also to the community at large in which the library resides. Naysayers may complain that this cheapens the library, but those who do not “brand,” or something very like it, will find the sledding very tough during the often long budget winters of our discontent. Every community member is enriched by an academic library in its midst. But not every community has been made as fully aware of this as it must be. Once this is fully known, library budgets will begin to take as prominent a place financially, just as they do in general parlance.

Participatory, proactive, flexible, and fund-raising sum up for me four important activities to which a dean must turn his attentions first. By remembering these the dean can assume the challenges of 21st Century librarianship, confident at the very least that she will not be undone by them and may, with a strong supporting team, conquer more of them than not.

Of course I’m not benighted enough to think this ends the matter. Surely this is but the beginning of a much wider conversation. 🎨

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Case Studies in Collections and Technical Services

Case Study Three: The Ticking Clock of Tenure: The Case of the First Article.

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**Melissa** was worried. She had learned a lot during her first two years at her very first professional job at Big Southern Research University Library, and had gotten glowing reviews from her immediate supervisor Robert, for her work thus far. But since she was on the tenure track she still had some things to do before she felt secure in her first position. She had yet to publish one article. And she needed to have something to show for her promotion and appointment review coming up in 12 months. What could she do?

Multiple times Melissa had sat in front of a new blank document waiting for the ideas to come, yet so far, nothing had. She often woke up from a deep sleep, sat up in her warm cozy bed in her very own apartment worrying over her lack of publishing. Her supervisor had been encouraging when she had approached him on the subject, but had given her no ideas. Melissa was at her wit’s end and she knew that time was running out.

How ought Melissa get down to business and publish an article?

The experts speak:

**Melissa** is catching her problem in the nick of time. Luckily she still has a little while before she is in big trouble. We suggest a four-prong approach to getting started on her first article. First, she will need to find a writing partner/mentor. Second, they need to brainstorm about what to write about. Third, she and her partner need to think of various publications to send their article to and then contact the editor. Finally, she (they) needs to actually write the thing.

**Finding a Writing Partner/Mentor**

Obviously Melissa’s direct supervisor is not the person to look to for help. Melissa needs to do some background checking on her colleagues at Big Southern Research University Library. She needs to find out who and the library staff has published, and better, who has published recently. Once she figures out who the writers are among her colleagues, she needs to start networking. If there is no one on staff who has published recently who she might feel comfortable approaching, an alternative is to get on her library school alma mater’s listserv, and put out a call to her fellow alumnus for possible writing partners. Best would be if her prospective partner had published something before, and could therefore serve not only as a writing partner, but also as a mentor to help guide Melissa through the process. Once she figures out who to approach, the next step will be to initiate a conversation by phone or email. Something along the lines of:

“Sally, Hi. This is Melissa. I have a favor to ask, and if you can’t do it right now perhaps you could suggest someone who can. Here is my request: I am up for promotion next year and am struggling with the publishing part of...”

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Writing the article.

Writing with a partner brings all sorts of positive things to the writing experience. You have someone to share the work with; someone to work with, and against, for deadlines; and someone to bounce ideas off of. We find it easiest to split up the writing into chunks and then each partner takes some of the chunks to write the first draft of. Then drafts are shared and edited and then put together for a final read-through draft for both (all) partners. It works best if people don’t try to “own” their writing and focus on working together as a team, trusting each “editor’s” perception of how something reads. Leave your ego out of the partner-writing process and focus on writing a useful, readable article that you are both happy with. Finally, give yourselves both preliminary and drop-dead deadlines. That way you will leave yourselves plenty of rewrite, and editing, or “perfecting,” time.

Get started and have fun! Who knows—you may even write a book one day! 📚

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Lost in Austin 102 Books

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Last year I read a lot of books, more than I have ever read before in a single year, 102. Many (most?) will laugh at that number. Is that the best you could do? That isn’t even two a week. No, it isn’t and it would seem that two a week ought to be the absolute minimum if one purports to be a serious and good reader. But to get even close to two a week, I neglected my personal correspondence and I all but ignored The New Yorker Magazine (except for the cartoons), Atlantic, Harper’s, The American Scholar, and a couple of other magazines that regularly arrive in my mailbox if for no other reason than to prove to the postal carrier that I have a life beyond bills and promotional mailings. I still get the New York Times delivered every day and admit that it can take a chunk out of my reading day and often does.

But what I started to say was that among those 102 books, only one was ostensibly about librarianship but if I had to read just one book on my trade, I chose a good one. The book is Perspectives, Insights & Priorities: 17 Leaders Speak Freely of Librarianship, edited by Norman Horrocks for the Scarecrow Press. All royalties, by the way, go to ALA’s Spectrum Scholarships so you get not only a good read for your money, you are supporting library education.

This is a book that could be opened to almost any page and become absorbing. Before you do that, however, you might have to get past the table of contents and the list of authors. I can imagine someone looking at the names of former ALA presidents (that category is well represented here) and losing interest simply because of public opinions and limited knowledge of these leaders. You might be surprised. I was and I know many of the essayists in this book and spent some pleasant time in meetings with many of them last year. What surprised me — and it shouldn’t have — was the passion that each one brings to the book and the profession.

I liked each essay in the book but want to single out one of them because it describes the approach to the book that Norman Horrocks (I wish that he had written a chapter himself) had in mind when he approached his authors.

Gillian McCombs, University Librarian at Southern Methodist University, called her chapter “The Fog of My Career: Some Reflections and Lessons Learned [with apologies to Errol Morris and Robert S. McNamara].” With a title like that, do you wonder that this is the essay I began with and that I want to quote?

“...everything is personal — your career, your life, your lessons learned. The deeper part of this moral is that it is impossible to separate out the professional from the personal. I am who I am. I have made the choices I have made because of who I am. And by extension, the lens through which I look back on my career and ahead to the future of the profession is also exquisitely personal.” (p. 81)

McCombs’s words could be a jumping off place for any number of literary excursions for me but career aside, many of the essayists talked about the importance of libraries in their lives. I realized that outside of my career in libraries, beginning as a university student, I had not really given much thought to the libraries in my past. Were libraries even that important to me growing up? I think that they were but perhaps not in any exciting or profound way as they were to Richard Wright, for example.

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