April 1996

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Jerry Seay
College of Charleston

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Recommended Citation

Seay, Jerry (1996) "You Gotta Go to School for That?," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 8: Iss. 2, Article 41.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.2047>

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You Gotta Go to School for That?

Library Uniforms & Nifty Accessories

by Jerry Seay (College of Charleston) <seayt@cofc.edu>

The groundswell of ideas and excitement is staggering. I am, of course, talking about the library uniform concept for members of our august profession. Nearly all of the four people who read this column have sent in ideas for a uniform. As I indicated in my last diatribe, there is a vital necessity for such an identifying garment. I for one am getting tired of having to answer the question, "do you work here" with, "what? do you think they let just anybody sleep at the reference desk?" So, in response to my call, you, my public, have responded.

Jey Wann, Acquisitions Coordinator at **Oregon State Library**, who, by the way, is wearing a nice sweater, a nice wool skirt, and a beat-up pair of Birkenstocks considers the multi-tiered approach. She writes, "I can't come up with an official uniform suggestion, but it reminds me of a former employee here who was concerned that patrons have trouble telling who's on the staff and who's not. Her suggestion was a 3-tiered uniform system: librarians would wear blazers, paraprofessionals would wear (I think) vests, and pages would wear beanies. Whether or not the beanies should include propellers, I don't know. The person who suggested this was a former Army band member, and perhaps that accounts for her coming up with the idea in the first place."

Now this has possibilities, I mean, besides the great propeller idea. Why not distinguish different staff positions by particular dress code or color? Hey, just think of **Star Trek**. (Why do all ideas eventually go back to **Star Trek**?) Remember? Scotty and all the engineering crew wore red uniforms. Most officers wore gold, and medical personnel wore blue. Of course, Spock wore blue as well and that was because ... er ... well, no one really knows. But, with just a glance you always knew how these folks fit in to the grand scheme of things. Imagine such a system in a library ... "No Sir, I'm sorry, but we here at circulation wear green uniforms and that question is obviously one for a blue uniformed reference librarian. Please direct your question appropriately or I shall be forced to beam you out."

Though I grant that the idea of sleek librarians strutting around the library in tight fitting nylon coveralls of various colors is enough to drive one wild, I submit that sensible shoes and a well-placed hair bun would give this

ensemble just the right balance of sexy professionalism. Of course, this assumes that one is trying for sexy professionalism. Alas, not everyone is comfortable with such bold assertions of raw librarian power. Note that this suggestion came from a former employee. Great minds are rarely appreciated.

So, for those seeking a more down to earth look, if somewhat less flashy, **Joan Bartram** of **Salve Regina University Library** in Newport, Rhode Island gives us this idea. She writes, "In the summer of 1968 I received my first appointment as a Collection Development Librarian, I was at the time working at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia. My boss was an Englishman, superb bookman, and exemplary eccentric named **John Robert Turner Ettlinger**. Based on his experience as a rare book librarian at Brown he set up an exhaustive training program for me. The first three parts of this training program included work on fermentation (his hobby -- we fermented anything and everything), abandoned schoolhouses in Nova Scotia (he collected them), and the designing of a library uniform."

Joan goes on to say that Mr. Ettlinger put her in charge of designing a library uniform. "The brief he gave me to design the uniforms must be put in further cultural context," she writes. "The man was an old Etonian and graduate of Magdalen College, Oxford who had one dozen Eton ties which he wore in rotation with his three identical navy blue suits. Further, he had been in the RAF during World War II. Predictably, the Public Services Uniform echoed the British school girl look -- white shirt, gray flannel skirt, and "old school tie." The Technical Services uniform was reminiscent of the RAF -- coveralls with the institutional crest emblazoned on the front and the wearers name and position on the back." In the end, disagreement on the right colors to use "torpedoed the entire project," writes Joan. "I continued to wear my Mary Quant minidresses to work and the Reference Department never looked like Victoria Station with its alligators of schoolgirls. Over two decades later I'm still not sure if I'd rather look like a gray poupon bottle, as you suggest, or an English school girl as my mentor envisioned!" Well, though I would tend to think twice before donning English school girl attire, I must admit that the "RAF coveralls"

look does hold a certain appeal to those of us who consider speed-in-dressing when choosing our wardrobe. You can get into and out of those things in seconds, even while wearing sensible shoes. It would combine practical fashion and identifiability for the librarian on the go.

While the above uniform ideas address the problems of librarian and position identification, there is still the problem of our uniform getting across what we do and who we are. Construction workers wear hard-hats and firemen have big boots. These garments are readily identifiable trademarks of their profession. What about librarians?

Erik N. Anderson, Director of **Hanford Technical Library** at the **Pacific Northwest National Laboratory** has come up with a uniform that goes far toward addressing this dilemma. Erik writes, "We know that the age of specialization is gone; we are all generalists. Therefore, to hold our profession together, I propose the Good Librarian's Uniform, Eclectic (**GLUE**). It starts off with smartly tailored khaki pants to express our down-to-business attitude. Add a European cut linen shirt in startling red, reminding one of overseas journal prices. Round off with a corduroy blazer (with elbow patches, of course), demonstrating our strong academic foundation. To tie our rich history to the electronic age, it's topped off with a green eye shade that disguises a 3-D virtual reality headset, which allows us to look into cyberspace and find those non-catalogued electronic-only serials. All unisex, of course."

Eric brings up a great point: **accessories!** What a great way to round out our uniform: a **librarian utility belt**. On this utility belt we would attach all the stuff that we need in our day-to-day librarian work -- things like keys (for digging paper out of printers), and paper clips (for digging keys out of printers), and a flashlight (to see to dig keys and paper out of printers). Just add a handheld computer, a coin changer and, presto, each librarian is self sufficient, fully mobile, and action-packed. Of course, we librarians are already self sufficient, fully mobile, and action packed; but who among us has a nifty utility belt? Now, that, I think you will agree, is reason enough to have a library uniform.

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immediately two men entered the room from a side door. One was bearing a large ledger, the other a sheaf of correspondence. One of these gentlemen was presented as head bookkeeper, the other as credit and collection manager. These boys soon destroyed all hopes of

help. The trouble was that I had not explained the purpose of my call when I made the appointment. Business woman that she was Mrs. Meyer had assumed that I was coming to arrange to pay a rather sizable delinquent account. I believe that Mrs. Meyer learned something from me: don't be too optimistic when making appointments. I learned that **George Delacorte** had other places for his money

besides struggling publishers. Didn't he contribute substantially to the creation of statuary, fountains and amphitheaters in Central Park for the enjoyment of children?

... **Shirley Lambert** was secretary to **Edward Maguire**, sales manager of **G.K. Hall** and I was assistant to **Richard Abel** when we met during a Chicago Midwinter ALA ses-

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