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On the Road -- Alma Mater

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was a scarce commodity that required librarian intervention both for purchase and access. With the arrival of the Internet and digital resources, scarcity has become abundance so that the library is no longer the only information resource for faculty and students. The function for library liaisons needed to change.

To speak of collection development first, the focus on digital resources and decreasing purchasing power have greatly reduced the need for librarians to consult with the faculty about collection decisions. Digital resources are taking a much higher percentage of acquisitions budgets. These resources require macro-decisions about a relatively small number of major purchases rather than multiple micro-decisions for individual orders. With the global nature of these purchases, the individual faculty member will have less input on purchase decisions than would be the case for discrete orders. Purchasing digital resources in packages, including serials, has made much less funding for individual orders plus the purchasing power of almost all libraries has declined in recent years and will most likely decline even more over the next few years on account of the current economic uncertainties. Gone are the days when faculty liaisons in the largest research libraries had difficulty in spending their yearly allocations and had to ask the faculty for additional suggestions. I have so little money left to purchase materials for the Romance Languages that I do little collection development beyond buying what the faculty requests.

I also suspect that faculty are finding more of what they need without consulting the library. For many faculty, the main reason for the library's existence may be to pay for access to electronic resources. They can now find monographic publications beyond those sitting on library shelves. I suspect that the ease of online ordering and the ready availability of materials in primary and secondary markets such as **Amazon.com**, **Half.com**, **Alibris**, and **Abebooks** are tempting faculty to build their personal collections rather than sending their requests to the library. The perverse result may be that academic libraries are no longer purchasing some of the common books that would be heavily used while getting faculty requests for esoteric items that faculty consider too expensive to buy with personal funds.

Now that a glut of easy-to-find information has replaced the former scarcity, faculty and students also have less need to come to libraries for help. The Internet has killed ready reference and has undermined the need for reference help even for difficult questions. What remains are often technical questions on database use rather than questions relating to the underlying information or search terms. While librarians claim that their users often don't find the best information or may take too long to do so are most likely true, many potential library patrons are quite content with what they do find. In fact, I find it paradoxical that librarians now claim the need to meet with students in class to teach them to use relatively friendly online resources when they didn't try nearly so hard in the past when navigating the library required a broad range of esoteric and difficult-to-learn skills. An obvious answer is that librarians can now bring the library to the classroom or computer lab and that discussions of online search strategies may have enough

relevance that students have less inclination to develop the glazed look of total indifference that accompanied instruction on using the card catalog and print indexes.

To avoid the fate of catalogers, public services librarians are staking out new territory that fundamentally moves the liaison function away from building collections and answering reference questions. Now that faculty and students have less need to come to the library, librarians are reaching out to involve themselves more directly in faculty teaching and research. As indicated by the topics in the first paragraph, these **Web 2.0** liaisons can help faculty better understand how the new library technologies can improve their course design, supplement their teaching, and allow students to access more easily a broader range of resources. Librarians can also explain why the database they used successfully last week suddenly has a new set of features. The embedded librarian is only a click away on course software such as **Blackboard**. The librarian can also advise the faculty on new structures of scholarly communication such as institutional repositories though doing so is another step away from dependence on the library. Librarians may also help with technology and e-science but only if they have made the substantive effort to keep up with these developments. The final topic on the list, interdisciplinary research, is one area where I believe public services librarians have always excelled. As a faculty member myself, I seldom need help in the disciplinary areas where I am an expert but seek out reference support when I stray into other disciplines for my teaching or research.

Before giving my conclusions, I'll add that I'm consciously avoiding any extended discussion of trendy **Web 2.0** areas such as **Facebook**, **Twitter**, **Second Life**, and similar popular Web destinations. Reaching out to faculty is the key factor in liaison activities. With exceptions, faculty have been shown to be more conservative in the use of technologies than the students they teach. I suspect that some of the new sites will be replaced relatively quickly by even newer ones. If I have any suggestions for librarians, it would be to use their expertise to make a more reliable resource.

Will these efforts to reach out in new areas keep public services librarians from having their gooses cooked? Perhaps. The key will be to show that such efforts benefit the faculty in the same way that faculty who responded to liaison efforts for collection development were more likely to find what they needed in the library collection. The faculty who invite librarians to participate in their teaching must see tangible benefits such as happier students who learn more and do so more easily so that the faculty member gains a sense of accomplishment and receives better teaching evaluations from students and superiors. If faculty follow library recommendations on scholarly communication, they should expect to see their research have greater impact. They should also be rewarded during evaluations for tenure, promotion, and salary increases.

I'll conclude by pointing out two dangers. First, the new liaison model must be designed so that most, if not all, public services librarians can be successful. I have no doubt that the proponents of the new model can make it work. Average librarians must be able to do the same. Libraries must develop effective training modules and include this skill in their requirements for hiring. In addition, policies must be in place to take into account that liaison librarians take vacations, become sick, or leave for new positions. While a brief absence was normally possible for collection development, the same might not be true for an untended button in **Blackboard** whose clicks are not answered. Second, academic libraries should worry more about success than failure. Taking on these additional responsibilities doesn't guarantee new funding. What if the new model succeeds beyond the library's wildest expectations? How much "success" could the library support before the self-limiting factor of lack of resources kicked in? Could the librarians deal with demand from more than a small percentage of the current full-time and adjunct faculty?

Creating a new model for liaison work with faculty is better than guaranteeing obsolescence by doing nothing. Will the new model keep public services librarians relevant? I don't know. I intend to live long enough to find out whether the gander will continue to thrive on the library farm. 🐔

On the Road — Alma Mater

Column Editor: **Celia Wagner** <celia7@gmail.com>

My dad graduated from **Yale** in 1942. He didn't want to. He had wanted to leave school in December, 1941, after **Pearl Harbor**, to join the Marines, but somehow his mother talked him into graduating first.

The standard image of a Yalie of Dad's vintage is an entitled, blue-blooded young scion, but my father was a scholarship kid, son of an immigrant Jew from France. When my dad went to **Yale**, they had a quota on Jewish students — no more than ten per cent of the class. His friends from **Yale**, the ones he stayed in touch with later, were almost all Jewish quota kids, except for a set of four Irish Catholic brothers, also scholarship students, who went on to do good works all over the East coast.

My dad ended up teaching at the **University of Washington**, and for his twenty-fifth college reunion, our whole family flew out to New Haven. I was twelve, and had not been East of Spokane. We walked onto the **Yale** campus, and I was immediately and permanently in love. I said to Dad, "I'm going to go here for college."

He said, "You can't."

My professor father had never said, "You can't" to me in my life. I was thunderstruck.

"What do you mean I can't?" I said.

He made a look-around-you gesture.

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“There are no women here.”

It was true. It was an all male school. Who had ever heard of such a thing? I was mightily annoyed by that concept.

And then when I was fourteen, **Yale** began admitting women. And when I was eighteen, I started my freshman year. The ratio of men to women in 1973 was eight to one.

I wasn't worried about being in a minority of female students. Already the iconic **Whiffenpoof** song had changed from “Mother of Men” to “Bright College Years.” I was worried about homesickness. Beautiful as the campus was, New Haven that first autumn was far too hot and sunny for a Seattleite. The winter was too cold and snowy, summer was too humid, and there were no mountains off in the distance. In contrast to my wealthy, woody home suburb, there were few evergreen trees, and multiple street people.

But I loved being there. I especially loved the cathedral entrance to **Sterling Library**, and the smell of the stacks, and the dim little study carrels on floor 6B, with the tiny, leaded-glass panes in the windows. I loved the funny, clanking elevator in the stacks, and the joys of just browsing the aisles. Also, it turned out that alongside the walkway to my college dorm room, I passed one of the few big Douglas firs on campus. In fact, if I pushed flat against one wall of the room, I could see that tree from my window. So I could get a little Pacific Northwest hit from time to time.

The tree was the highlight of the walkway. The edgy part of the walkway was the bench occupied by **Mr. Jones**, our resident panhandler.

Mr. Jones was amiable and laid back, given more to lolling than to hassling anyone, but he made suburban little me slightly jumpy. Mostly, he greeted the male undergrads. In fact, the hippest and most ironic of the white boys, the guys from Cleveland and Los Angeles, would exchange high fives with him, or lock thumbs in a power handshake. They didn't call him **Mr. Jones**. They called him “**Brother John**.” I didn't call him anything. We pretty much topped out at the wordless-nod-of-acknowledgement stage.

In the fullness of time, I graduated, moved to Portland, went to work for **Blackwell**, and lo, after a dozen years, **Yale** needed an approval profiling session, and the sales rep actually invited me to come along. I was ecstatic. I imagined three days of meetings in one of those wonderful rooms up in the stacks of **Sterling**, immersed in that smell, surrounded by those little diamond-shaped window panes. I would look up favorite professors who were still there. I would find the classroom with the big stained glass mural of the Arts and Sciences. I would get a lobster grinder from **Broadway Pizza**, and eat it in my college courtyard!

Alas, our profiling visit was scheduled during spring break, so all the professors were on vacation, and the place felt deserted. Some buildings were locked, and the campus had sprouted a number of security gates since my time, so poking around was limited. Worse yet, our three days of meetings weren't up in

those **Sterling** stacks, but in an underground, fluorescent-lit room in **Cross Campus**, the undergraduate library. During a break, I did run up to **Sterling** and throw myself on the mercy of the guy checking that people going up to the stacks had **Yale** IDs. “I'm an alum,” I said, “and I just need to go up there for five minutes and smell the stacks....”

He waved me in. I suspect I wasn't the first alum to beg for entrance.

It was a blissful five minutes. The elevator clanked as always. The stacks smelled exactly like *Essence of Book*. The little, slightly-purple pane of glass in my favorite carrel was still cracked. I was happy.

After the profiling session ended, I headed out for the lobster grinder and the imagined visit to my college courtyard. I knew the colleges were all locked, but I was hoping some kid had stayed on campus for spring break, and would just happen by and let me in. I was planning to use my pathetic, “I'm an alum,” act that had worked on the library security guy.

It was late in the day, and there was almost no one in sight. I rounded the corner of the walkway, and there was the bench. And there was **Mr. Jones**, enjoying the sunset. I was thirty-something, and wearing my visit-a-customer duds, but he knew me instantly. I have never been greeted more warmly by anyone. He sat up and beamed, and said, “Well, HI! How have YOU been?”

And I sat down on his bench, and we caught up on the intervening years. Somebody remembered me. It was a wonderful visit. 🐿

Booklover — Admiring the Translator

Column Editor: **Donna Jacobs** (Research Specialist, Transgenic Mouse Core Facility, MUSC, Charleston, SC 29425) <jacobsdf@musc.edu>

The lights in the **IMAX Theater** go dim to total dark. But even before eyes can adjust to the man-made night, the gargantuan screen explodes with the sun reflecting off the panorama of snow-capped mountains. The proud climber faces the camera. Mount Everest has been conquered once again. Does anyone ever wonder who exactly hauled the cumbersome approximately 35 pound **IMAX** camera up into the death zone of Mount Everest to document someone else's triumph? I do. All the glory to the smile and the invisible photographer is a footnote.

This booklover, living in the oxygen-rich sulfur-spiced zone at sea level, has a similar enigma: “Who are these translators that haul beautiful English words to the paper so that I can write for you about my random discoveries of novels by **Nobel Laureates** in literature who do not write in the English language?” Each time I savor a sentence, a story line, the subject matter, a scenario or a scene I find myself remarking: “And I am reading this in translation.” Since I am not reading the words that earned the author the highest of

literary prizes, I wistfully muse what magic might come to the particular piece of literature if read in the native language.

I have yet to present the works of my favorite **Nobel** author to you — **Gabriel Garcia-Marquez**, and I promise I will, but today I want to introduce **Edith Grossman**, the translator of many of his novels. As I read each of **Garcia-Marquez's** works I completely lost myself in the exotic surreal imagination of the scenes that danced from every page. Then one day as if a bird had lit gently on my head, pecked a small hole and delivered a seed of an idea to flower I realized that my affection was not only for **Garcia-Marquez** but also for **Grossman**. She was the one presenting this phenomenal gift to me.

Once upon a time I could read Spanish but time and disuse has eroded this skill. I marvel in **Edith Grossman's** ability. I gladly accept her invitation into this wonderful arena of literature. I am mesmerized, mystified, and magically transported by the English words that a translator gives to represent the story from author to reader. Their command of

two languages must exceed most people's command of one. I am grateful for their skill and effort. The relationship between author and the translator must be one of trust and respect. The author trusts the translator to give his words a voice in the world audience while being faithful to the language and yet allow the story to be enjoyed.

A little Internet sleuthing on **Edith Grossman** provided me with her photograph and a glimpse of her journey into translation. She began translating the poems of **Juan Ramón Jiménez** as an undergraduate. A **Fulbright scholarship** gave her a year in Spain after which she completed her doctorate in Latin America literature at **NYU** and began her career as a university professor. In the late 1980's she was asked to submit a sample translation for **Garcia-Marquez's** new novel “Love in the Time of Cholera.” This set the stage for her transition to a full time translator. We, the lucky readers, rejoice in

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