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Adventures in Librarianship -- Performance Appraisal

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You Gotta Go to School for That? — Love and Roses in the Library

by **Jared A. Seay** (Reference librarian and Head, Media Services, College of Charleston) <seayj@cofc.edu>

As I found out one night serving my public late on Valentine's Day evening, the stately aisles in the library can be the perfect place to express love to that special someone — even if they are not particularly the library type. Seems a young student (okay, so ALL of them are young) was all a-twitter because she could not for the life of her find a book on the shelf. Seems she had never looked for a book in the library before and ... well ... all them numbers did not make sense to her. After I explained to her the LC system (in easy to understand vernacular) the wee lass came back ten minutes later quite distressed and unable, still, to locate the book in question. It was all the more important because her boyfriend had said that she must find this book, as it contained some information vital to their relationship. I accompanied the nervous young miss to the third floor and found the book (*Poems* by **Lord Byron**). Lying upon the book was a yellow rose. A message was stuck



in the pages of the book. Imagine the surprise of both of us when the note told us (among other mushy things to which I was not privy) to locate yet another book on another floor, which also (you guessed it) had a yellow rose and another love note with instructions at the end to find yet another book.

This same thing went on for about six more books — with us running up and down floors and the increasingly embarrassed lass collecting an increasing handful of yellow roses. The girl seemed truly embarrassed and thanked me for helping her inasmuch — as she admitted — “I don't know much about the library, and I could never find these things. You see my boyfriend loves books and he does not know that I don't.” Methinks the lad was the intellectual, romantic one of the pair.

Well, the boyfriend certainly had varied tastes in books as we wandered across classic poetry, art books, philosophy, history, and for

some reason ended up in the technology books with the last yellow rose on top of the book and a long, fancy note attached. She read the note (perhaps a bit too quickly considering the effort that had gone into the whole endeavor) and thanked me profusely for assisting her.

“Don't guess you ever helped someone find roses in books in the library before, huh?” she said. I admitted that I had not, expressed surprise that the roses were actually still there, and pined that such things need happen much more often around here. She kept thanking me as we descended the stairs and she hurried out the front door (presumably to fulfill the request on the final secret message).

I returned to my reference duties, well exercised, and contemplating how the library had been so intricately involved in this particularly energetic Valentine effort. Glad to know I was part of making someone's Valentine evening a grand success. Times like these make one really appreciate being a librarian for more than just the intellectual stimulus and high salary.

Just trying to figure out how to record the ref stats on this one — one per rose? 🌹

Little Red Herrings from page 75

much closer to monitoring the actual information seeking behaviour of their users.”

If you can diagram either of those sentences, please send them to me. I don't know about you but if we have promiscuous, volatile users in our building, I'm calling security. Sure, I understand the idea, I'm just not sure I buy into fully. Yes, such users probably are the wave of the future, but it's a wave I'd rather not surf just yet.

On balance this is a report every librarian should read. Its unquestioned acceptance that libraries as we all know them are not only a thing of the past or dying dinosaurs at best, but by golly it's about time and are we ever glad! It will rattle but maybe it's what we need to hear to wake us from our reverie. Not the prognosis I wanted to read from a putative library-friendly entity, mind you, but what we may need to hear regularly. And in any event, what exactly is anyone — i.e., you and me — doing about it? I mean, really.

ALA rushes to embrace any new technology and almost — almost mind you — dismisses anything that reeks of real reading (unless of course you count those inane READ posters featuring **Brittney Spears** reading an upside-down book). I wish we could mount some truly engaging campaign about libraries, one that distinguishes mere information, data, from what we all want it to grow up to be.

Knowledge, and yes, in some cases, even wisdom. 🌹

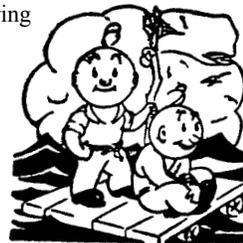
Adventures in Librarianship — Performance Appraisal

by **Ned Kraft** (Ralph J. Bunche Library, U.S. Department of State)
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Considering the implementation of the new Capricious library system, the failure of the University's accounting system (MUDL), and the basement flood in December, it has been a trying year for all Acquisitions staff. However, **Floyd Doormat** rose to the challenge and met each hurdle with flying colors and soaring confidence.

SYSTEM IMPLEMENTATION: **Mr. Doormat** learned how to log into the new Capricious library system and find “Order Create.” We are confident that in the upcoming year he will become proficient at entering titles and authors into acquisitions bib templates. With any luck, actual order entry won't be far behind!

TEAMWORK: **Mr. Doormat** spends almost every moment networking with fellow staff. When the university issues an early holiday or snow dismissal, he is the first to know and he generously shares that information with all his coworkers. Those without windows depend on him for meteorological updates.



MAIL SORTING: After more than twenty years of experience, **Mr. Doormat** can still be counted on to ask his supervisor where the weekly *Economist* should go. His insight allows him to not only dispose of unwanted catalogs, but to dispose of all catalogs, regardless of importance with little or no supervision.

TRAINING: It is safe to say that **Floyd Doormat** has more training than any other employee! His supervisor knows that having **Mr. Doormat** out of the office for long stretches is certainly a benefit to the whole team in the long run.

This is his 14th year in the **Microsoft Word** class, his 5th year in the Accounting Basics class. Several instructors have commented on the rate of his improvement and the depth of his understanding.

SERIAL CHECK-IN: Although he was adept at listing incoming serials on official University stationary, because of **Mr. Doormat's** strenuous mail sorting duties, the

continued on page 77

Media Minder — Outsourcing Your Non-Print Media Requirement

by Philip Hallman (Ambassador Books and Media) <philip@absbook.com>



Thirteen years ago, **Ambassador Book Service** became the first jobber to actively assist college and university libraries in acquiring non-print materials. Since then, many other traditional book jobbers have also begun providing non-print materials. Unlike the book supplier market, which is a relatively straight forward path (emphasis on relatively), media acquisition is filled with lots of hair-pin turns and potholes. So much so, that many larger institutions have found it necessary to employ a full-time media librarian to navigate the terrain. But not all places have the luxury of hiring a permanent media-savvy employee. Even those library directors who do have a media librarian on staff may often ask that person to manage other areas, thus relegating the acquisition duties to an assistant who may not have much training. So what's an acquisition department head to do?! Many turned to their friendly book jobbers and screamed "help." Most jobbers threw their hands up or supplied a small fraction of the materials requested.

We, on the other hand, saw it as a challenge and a great way to increase business by working with libraries that had not needed help in the past. We hired a full-time media librarian to orchestrate the activities, hired staff to assist, promoted the service, developed videographies, created a database of available titles, and, in the end, produced consistent results. We also changed our name — **Ambassador Book Service** became **Ambassador Books and Media** and we have been pleased with the results.

As our first Media Director, I must admit that I have a bias. I must also admit that I was

not immediately convinced that this would work. I'm not a psychologist, psychiatrist, or a doctor, nor do I play one on TV, but I am a media librarian and I understand the mindset of my breed. To stereotype in the broadest terms, media librarians have to function in a dualistic world straight out of a sci-fi novel and must adapt a kind of **Dr. Jekyll** and **Mr. Hyde** personality in order to succeed.

On the one hand, we media librarians are the **Rodney Dangerfields** of the information world; we rarely get the respect the other divisions of the library receive. Even as we enter the 21st century, where the general population is completely enthralled with anything electronic, and is practically hooked-up to the Internet 24/7, media librarians must often work with a woefully low budget and are challenged to collect accordingly. Many colleagues still do not feel that developing a moving image collection is necessary nor do they see the intellectual merit of such a collection. In many minds, a media collection is still a frivolous, entertainment-driven waste of time. And what about training? If you check the class schedule of any school of information/library science, I think you would be hard-pressed to find a single course devoted to training people to work in the field.

Yet, in spite of the continuous downgrading of our services, media librarians still do a pretty good job. And that is due in large part to the other side of the media librarian's personality which kicks into gear and saves the day. You see, we also see ourselves as the **John Waynes** of the information world. Particularly **John Wayne** as **Ethan Edwards**, the role he played in **John Ford's** classic film "**The Searchers**." Like **Ethan**, we are the lone wolves of the library who must go it alone in our quest to find that hard-to-find video that is no longer in print. We find great satisfaction as we ride atop our white horse and hand a DVD copy to the professor who requested an impossibly difficult-to-find film from Chile. As we shut the professor's jaw that's dropped open because no one could possibly find it, we ride away into the sunset deeply satisfied with what we have achieved. (This is all done with appropriate humming and guitar strumming music in the background.)

So how do jobbers compete with a lone wolf? They don't. And it took me a long time to realize that. Media librarians don't want help nor do they ask for it either (except from other media librarians). Why not? Because if administrators and colleagues are questioning your very existence, the last thing you want to do is show any kind of vulnerability. And asking someone else to secure your materials is akin to asking your girlfriend to wash your underwear. You don't do it. At least until you get married.

But there are lots of library departments who do need and want the assistance of a jobber. Take **Sharon Propas** of **Stanford University**, for instance. She wrote the following:

*"Perhaps the greatest advantage to using a media approval plan is having a place for one-stop shopping. **Ambassador** sends us a list of new releases once a month, and the coverage of this list is amazing. ... For acquisitions, research time has greatly lessened. We receive the order with all of the information we need, and we know the source from which we can order the title. ... Truly impressive for these often difficult orders."*

So, for those who want and need the help, thanks for the business. What else do you need? For the **John Waynes**, I'm not sure I can ever convince you, but, have you considered using a jobber for a portion of these media services? Consider that since the 1980's, library administrators have borrowed from the business world the notion of "just in case vs. just-in-time" collection strategies. The "just-in-case" selector purchases materials of merit hoping that someone in the future can make use of them, while, the "just-in-time" selector takes the opposite approach, buying materials only after they have been requested by a faculty member or patron and praying that it will be received "just-in-time" for the patron's use.

Most media collections, particularly small academic collections, are developed using a "just-in-time" approach. Since budgets are tight, selectors want to be sure that the vast majority of the collection is used. A great many academic media users tend to wait until the last possible minute to check and see if an item is in their library's collection, which forces the selector to go into speed mode in order to secure its arrival on time. No vendor can help there and shouldn't promise to do so. That's what makes **Amazon** so amazing. But there are plenty of other titles that you know that you do want to receive so why not let someone else help out? Especially since you probably already have many other responsibilities including, committee assignments, letters of recommendation for colleagues, budget reports, new hires that need to be trained, job candidate and promotion dossiers to read, booking systems that are down, students that are late for work.

For those who have the luxury of using the "just-in-case" method, the jobber can assist mightily in this regard. Why not take advantage of lists and subject guides that have already been established? If you need to develop a collection of films from India because a new faculty hire is asking for them, a jobber can help. Remember, in addition to the "just-

continued on page 78

Adventures in Librarianship from page 76

Library has decided not to continue overburdening him with automated serial check-in.

CUSTOMER SERVICE: For customer outreach, **Mr. Doormat** has no peer. Whether the customers are in study carrels, browsing the stacks, or working at the copier, **Mr. Doormat** will find them and make sure they are up to date on such topics as play-offs, retirement qualifications, local elections, and mass transit problems.

SUMMARY: For his verbal skills, **Mr. Doormat** is known throughout the library as "The Great Communicator." He has an immense effect on the library's reputation, staff morale, and productivity. Hardly a day passes that his supervisor does not receive some comments on **Mr. Doormat's** abilities. A highly valued employee. 🐼