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# Crossing the Bridge Conencting the Corporate and Academic Worlds

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operated. This is something that I wrote about in my article "Invisible Fences."<sup>1</sup>

As I moved from the vendor to academic libraries, I carried this focus with me of getting where the customer is. With my positions at Toledo and Michigan, I have tried to focus my attentions on meeting the needs and the expectations of the customers in the very best way that we could. While we can never get 100% of what our patrons want or need at these positions (even with a far greater financial situation at Michigan than at Toledo), the key thought was to do what we can for our customers and try to meet their needs regardless of where they are and what they are asking for. And certainly not every vendor works like this, but the good ones definitely move in those directions.

### Where are My Glasses? A New View of the World

In many ways, every experience that we have in the workplace adds to our philosophy of work. If we only work in one type of library, year in and year out, we run the risk of not being able to think creatively about our workplace and possible solutions to our problems. This, in turn, makes it harder to envision true change in our libraries. And while working for different types of libraries can be eye-opening in regards to our ability to approach both services and problems creatively, I would argue that working in business (for vendors or otherwise) also has the same value.

While it is very easy today to be skeptical about the commercial landscape and its commitment to service (especially in light of increased fees we are paying for activities that were once considered "bundled" — like baggage fees), the reality is that companies have to perform well to survive. While we might have transactions that fail to meet our desired outcomes with companies, they need to have an overall positive relationship with the customer. Should companies continually disappoint, their customers will "fly away" and leave business with nothing. As an employee of a company working in the information management market, I saw an entirely different part of the library world. Having this exposure has provided me with a different vantage point and perspective that I have carried forth in my positions at the **University of Toledo** and the **University of Michigan**. It is from this perspective that I have come to realize that we must not operate as a virtual monopoly on our campus or our community, but act with the best interests of our patrons and customers in mind. And if we can operate on our campuses and communities as if the "customer is always right," then maybe our future can look brighter than it has been these last few years. 🐾

#### Endnotes

1. Seeman, Corey. 2002. "Invisible Fences: a Shocking Theory for Re-Examining Work Flow." *Computers In Libraries* 22, no. 7: 24.

# Crossing the Bridge Connecting the Corporate and Academic Library Worlds

by **Valerie Tucci** (Physical Sciences/Engineering Librarian, The College of New Jersey, Ewing, NJ) <vtucci@tcnj.edu>

After almost 40 years as a corporate librarian, I was ready for new challenges, not retirement. When **The College of New Jersey (TCNJ)** offered a position as Assistant Professor, Physical Science and Engineering Librarian I gladly accepted, motivated by twin desires: to share decades of knowledge gained as a special librarian and manager, and to keep learning as an active member of the library world. I have been asked repeatedly to contrast these two environments; this is my attempt to explain what I see as the key differences. These are opinions only, and are meant to guide, not judge.

The most compelling difference between these two library worlds is the emphasis academia places on "publish or perish." From the first interview it was clear that publishing in peer-reviewed journals, within a very narrow and defined time frame, would be a major requirement of the tenure-track position. Until that point, I hadn't fully comprehended the magnitude of this requirement; I hadn't even listed my few publications on my resume! As a corporate librarian, publishing seemed secondary, and, indeed, sometimes company confidentiality discouraged or even prohibited publication. So worried, but determined to give it a try, I accepted the position.

My first agenda item upon arriving at **TCNJ** was to meet the faculty of the many departments I would serve, and determine their information needs and the needs of their students. Fortune smiled on me, and another faculty member who was a trained facilitator offered to conduct a series of focus groups with faculty members so I could gather feedback on their information expectations. I began with the computer science and engineering faculty, since I viewed their information requirements as similar and I had a great deal of industrial experience working with professionals in these fields. The findings were surprising, and before I had time to worry too much I massaged this information into my first article. Yes, there were many steps along the way, including presenting the information at an **ALA/ACRL** Research Forum and receiving very helpful mentoring advice on my research. And, of course, there was the peer-review process with subsequent editing and revisions. The bottom line, however, was that just doing my job, trying to understand what information patrons need and how they obtain it — as I had done in the corporate world — was fundamental scholarly research. A second paper materialized from my collaboration

with the chemistry faculty when I integrated information literacy instruction along with three assessments into the chemistry seminar program.

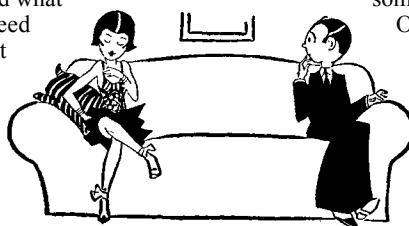
So my advice to others considering the move to academia is that the publication process is not as onerous as it sounds. Certainly some luck such as being at the right place when an editor is looking for a paper on a specific topic, having contacts in professional organizations, and being flexible and willing to meet deadlines all help. Research is something I have always done, and now I publish to record and organize my findings, get peer review and feedback, and share my thoughts and experiences while striving to achieve tenure!

Another significant difference between the corporate world and academia, at least in the environment in which I am working, is the loss of direct vendor contact. I am bound to academic library protocol dictating that vendor questions must be filtered through the acquisition, serials, inter-library loan, and electronic services librarians. These librarians are the key contacts for vendors and provide efficiency by serving all subject librarians via the same process. The negative side of these middle-man procedures is that subject librarians, who know the players in their fields and their publications and who could offer very insightful comments, have limited access to vendors except at outside meetings. This "separation of powers" limits librarian-vendor collaboration which, I found in the corporate world, often produced new products or product enhancements. Also, in this digital age, the tendency to treat all disciplines equally limits the impact of subject experts in areas such as science and technology, who are often early adopters of new approaches to fulfilling an information need. For example, scientists would prefer pay-per-view document delivery with full-color rendering via a PDF file from the publisher, rather than a traditional academic inter-library loan providing a gray, scanned copy of an article from a printed publication. The one-size-fits-all approach to all the disciplines with a limited gateway to vendors produces some efficiency but limits risk-taking and innovation. Since I have significant management experience and I am used to working with all the processes in a library, the lack of vendor contact may be something that only bothers me.

Other subject librarians, who have never managed a large library operation, could be content or even prefer the limited contact.

Academic institutions tend to favor a shared

*continued on page 22*



governance model in contrast to the hierarchical structure usually found in the corporate world. The shared governance model results in a flatter organization structure, requiring the sort of thoughtful and deliberate discussions one associates with academic pursuits. All constituents of the academic community are represented including faculty, staff, and students. A plethora of viewpoints and opinions results, and when a consensus is reached most of these viewpoints have been given an opportunity to be expressed and debated. While slow and time-consuming, this process is well thought-out. I found that coming from a corporate environment, where the hierarchical structure identifies those in a position to make a quick decision, the shared governance model can be hard to adjust to or even stifling. Again, my decades of corporate management experience may cloud my view and influence my desire to see shorter response time. Other subject librarians appear very comfortable with the shared governance model.

In both academia and the corporate world, the art of reference requires that you help locate information that answers a question. In the corporate world, however, the emphasis is on accuracy and speed. In the academy, librarians are expected to teach methodology, so students and staff become more self-sufficient — whether they want to or not. Student requests, especially, cover all points in a spectrum of information needs, and it is a challenge to determine how interested they are in learning how to find information. Some students understand and are very eager to hone their search skills. Other students go so far as to request that I just tell them if the library has the book they want and where it is. If my library offered paging for books, I am sure some students would request I obtain the book from the stacks and deliver it or put it on hold for them. In the corporate world, with its emphasis on service, it was not unusual to deliver requested materials, but offering that assistance to more than 6,000 students is counter-productive, if not impossible.

Another challenge with meeting student information needs is trying to understand the students' backgrounds and knowledge bases. When I first started in this position and I was taking students on a tour of the library, I pointed out the large microfilm and microfiche collection. After several tours and more than a few blank stares, I realized no one knew what microfiche was and that their chances of ever using it were near zero. I have made similar discoveries when I mentioned the **Library of Congress** classification and assumed anyone with a high school education was familiar with books arranged according to that scheme.

My subject expertise also influences how I handle reference questions. There is no doubt that I am most comfortable with students' questions in the areas for which I have subject responsibility: mathematics and statistics, physics, chemistry, computer science, and engineering. I find it a challenge to handle reference questions regarding women and

## against the grain people profile

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**BORN & LIVED:** Born in Pittsburgh, PA and lived in NJ almost 40 years.

**FAMILY:** Husband and five cats.

**EDUCATION:** Carlow University – BA Chemistry. University of Pittsburgh, MLS, ABD.

**FIRST JOB:** Drug store clerk.

**PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES:** Over 40 years in the corporate library world and 3 ½ years in academia.

**IN MY SPARE TIME I LIKE TO:** Read, gardening.

**FAVORITE BOOKS:** *Black Beauty*.

**PET PEEVES/WHAT MAKES ME MAD:** Animals being abused.

**PHILOSOPHY:** Promoting peace.

**MOST MEANINGFUL CAREER ACHIEVEMENT:** Manager, **Information Services and Research Quality Air Products and Chemicals, Inc.**

**GOAL I HOPE TO ACHIEVE FIVE YEARS FROM NOW:** Tenure.

**HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS:** Very changed. 🌱

gender studies, world religions, music, and K-12 education.

The move to academia came with another entirely new responsibility: developing lesson plans and conducting information literacy classes. At **TCNJ**, librarians are faculty and thus share the teaching mandate of the faculty. I was expected to build on the required information literacy class and introduce subject-specific information sources to students. This was a new challenge for me, rewarding on many levels, but one in which I stumbled and blindly felt my way, continually re-evaluating and revising presentations. With no formal background in pedagogy and none provided on the job, I relied on my analytical training and quickly began to question providing instruction without assessing outcomes. So I selected one discipline, chemistry, and collaborated with faculty to design a three-year information literacy program along with three individual assessments to measure outcomes from the courses. I also learned how to design LibGuides that outline information sources for a specific discipline and assist students and faculty in retrieving subject-specific information. I view these LibGuides as a way to clarify and simplify using library resources for the undergraduate, but wonder if students become too dependent on them, especially as their creation proliferates among other subject librarians.

What do I miss most in academia? I wish there were more in-house staff development opportunities. In the corporate world, everything from simple team meetings, where we shared the results of **Myers Briggs** personality tests, to spending a week off-site participating in an **American Management Association** self-awareness course, afforded a stimulating en-

vironment to build experience and knowledge in areas such as organization development, team building, management, and supervision. Similar activities have not been offered during my three years in academia, and anecdotally it appears most academic librarians have only limited exposure to learning these skills in graduate school with little reinforcement with in-house job training seminars. Instead, librarians are required to learn management and supervisory skills on their own just as I was expected to learn pedagogy skills on my own. While I could avail myself of courses offered at **TCNJ**, the other participants would not be the colleagues with whom I work and with whom I wish to develop trust and build a stronger team. This lack of team-building activities, along with the tenure process, produces a type of isolation known as the “silo-effect” in academia in which faculty work in their own silo, resulting in limited interaction with other faculty. The “solo-effect” restricts communication and efforts to produce a united community. I may be the only subject librarian who had this negative perspective of the “silo-effect,” and other subject librarians may favor this independent and stand-alone structure.

Corporate librarians who cross the bridge to academia bring tremendous subject expertise and real-world know-how that can be of enormous value to students and especially faculty. Helping students prepare for lifelong learning and assisting faculty in teaching and research is a great learning experience with many professional and personal rewards. I hope this essay encourages other corporate or special librarians to appreciate the differences between the two library worlds and embrace and accept the challenges of an academic position. 🌱