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ATG Interviews: Audrey Powers, Associate Librarian, University of Florida

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ATG Interviews Audrey Powers

Associate Librarian, University of South Florida

by **Tom Gilson** (Associate Editor, *Against the Grain*) <gilson@cofc.edu>

and **Katina Strauch** (Editor, *Against the Grain*) <kstrauch@comcast.net>

ATG: Audrey you will be editing the April issue of *Against the Grain* that will be entitled “Disappearing [print] Stacks.” What led you to take on this challenge?

AP: I am intrigued by the controversy that surrounds the issue of repurposing library spaces and reducing the footprint of books. It is a contentious issue that generates passionate dialogue among the stakeholders involved.

ATG: What major issues/concerns do you plan to cover?

AP: I am leaving this up to the authors. They represent large and small academic libraries. Included in this issue will be eclectic, thought-provoking articles, opinion pieces, and case studies. I anticipate many issues, concerns, and opinions will emerge from both practical points of view as well as passionate perspectives.

ATG: From what you’ve learned so far what are the key arguments for re-purposing the space currently being used for books stacks?



AP: A key argument for repurposing library space used for books is that many libraries are collecting more and more electronic resources; thus, freeing up floor space. In reality, the key reason to repurpose library

space is to address *the changing needs of the community the library serves.*

ATG: What strategies are libraries using to implement such changes?

AP: My hope is that libraries are taking into consideration all aspects of the issue including being cognizant of the use of library resources, trends in publishing, topics in collection development and management, and most importantly, the needs of the community being served.

ATG: Has there been any resistance to this trend from librarians, faculty, or students?

AP: There is resistance when the community affected determines their needs are not being addressed. If they decide their needs are being neglected, protests will follow, as was the case at **Colby College**.

There is an historical belief that the academic library is the “center” of learning, the central place on campus, the center of the academy, and a contemplative place. When that perception is disrupted, there is dissension in the academy.

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ATG: If so, what are their counter arguments?

AP: Counter arguments include the perception that there is a preference for eBooks, although I am not convinced this is accurate. It may be an economic issue for some academic libraries. Of course, it depends on what kind of academic library, the mission of the library, funding, staffing issues, leadership values, etc. It goes back to the argument in favor of Patron-Driven Acquisitions: *just in time* instead of *just in case*.

ATG: In her article "Save Our Stacks" which appeared in *Slate*, Rebecca Schuman argues that book stacks are "the creators and the preservers of the contemplative space that every university needs." From what you are seeing from your contributors is this a legitimate observation?

AP: Interesting question. I will leave that up to you, the reader, to determine if this is reasonable concern.

ATG: Recent numbers from Nielsen Books & Consumer show that eBooks were outsold by both hardcovers and paperbacks in the first half of 2014. From your observation, do such figures call into question the trend toward disappearing book stacks? Or are they merely a blip on the radar screen?

AP: This is difficult question to answer. In the academic environment, my observation is that your discipline dictates your format preference based on which format best suits your research needs.

Leisure reading is quite different.

At the 2014 Charleston Conference keynote speaker Anthea Stratigos cited a survey of undergraduate students in which 86% of the students preferred print textbooks over eTextbooks.

This is one of many surveys and studies being conducted about reading and learning using electronic resources and devices versus traditional methodologies.

In reality, it is too early to tell; however, again, we need to remember that the library should always be assessing and adjusting its mission to *the changing needs of the community*.

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Audrey Powers

BORN & LIVED: Born in New York, but in my adult life I have lived in Pennsylvania, Maine, Ohio, South Carolina, Alabama, and Florida.

FAMILY: Married with two grown sons; Judson and Austin Powers (He was born 12 years before the movie!).

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: Currently the librarian for the College of the Arts. I LOVE it!

FAVORITE BOOKS: There are too many to name, but some of my favorites include *The Great Gatsby*, *Leaves of Grass*, *Stranger in a Strange Land*, *Fahrenheit 451*, *Snows of Kilimanjaro*, *Narcissus and Goldmund*, etc., etc., etc. I recently read and loved *Wild and Untamed*. My dream is that when I retire I will read and garden all day.

PET PEEVES/WHAT MAKES ME MAD: Dishonesty.

PHILOSOPHY: Live life to its fullest and have fun!

MOST MEANINGFUL CAREER ACHIEVEMENT: Working with five Nobel Laureates at Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory including Drs. James Watson and Barbara McClintock.

GOAL I HOPE TO ACHIEVE FIVE YEARS FROM NOW: Publish a monograph.

HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS: I would have never been able to predict what we are doing now. How could I possibly predict the future? 🌱

ATG: Undergraduate libraries have different needs than say a medical library. Will this issue of ATG reflect those differences? How?

AP: Yes. It may be presented as a case study of "how we did it," but it will be evident that strategic planning is the underpinning of change.

ATG: Is your library at the University of South Florida re-appropriating book stacks for other purposes? If so, what are they? If not, why not?

AP: Yes. I plan to write about that, so I can't give it away ahead of time. Stay tuned for more.

ATG: Which of your current print collections are the most viable?

AP: We weeded print periodicals long ago as we transitioned to e-journal subscriptions.

Recently, we moved collections, installed compact shelving, and weeded monograph and serial collections. These activities have served us well and afforded the subject librarians the opportunity to be proactive in collection management, which in my judgment, is good.

ATG: Do you have any predictions about the future of print collections?

AP: Let me look into my crystal ball....

My only hope is that we don't get rid of the old to make room for the new without careful thought and planning.

ATG: What about the future of libraries and library collections in general?

Libraries are more popular than ever. Our library is busy all hours of the day and night.

The question reminded me of the time when online searching first became popular and librarians feared librarianship would become a defunct profession. Didn't happen.

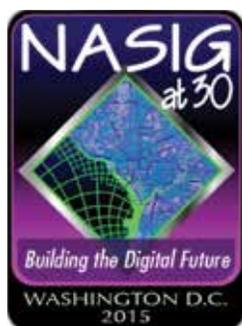
ATG: Busy librarians need some down time. Besides being one of the directors of the Charleston Conference, what do you do for fun? Do you have any hobbies or interests that let you kick back and relax?

AP: Yes, of course. I love to relax with my husband and our chocolate lab. I enjoy gardening, entertaining, traveling, renovating our house, attending arts events, reading, and ... there are not enough hours in the day to do everything we enjoy. Not a bad problem to have.

ATG: Audrey we know that you want to get back to editing the April issue of ATG so we'll let you go. Thanks for taking time to talk to us.

AP: Thank you for this opportunity. 🌱

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