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ATG Interviews Rosann Bazirjian, Dean of University Libraries, University of North Carolina at Greensboro

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Dean of University Libraries, University of North Carolina at Greensboro

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

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

ATG: *Rosann, collection development has been a major focus of yours throughout your career. What do you make of the current state of library collections? Are they as important as they once were? What do you think the future holds for library collections and their use?*

RB: I think that collections will always be important. They represent content and research and are still very much the backbone of libraries. Collections are still a big part of the “product” that libraries provide to our students, faculty and scholars. I also believe that electronic content is critically important to our students as they work on class assignments and pursue scholarly endeavors. Students are using our electronic collections, and are likely not even aware that they are doing so. As important as collections are, libraries offer so much more than that. For example, collaborative work spaces that provide the latest technologies are a huge reason students come to libraries. They are or they may not be using our content when they are working in these types of spaces. Also, libraries provide spaces to work on digital media projects, or places to practice presentations or create 3D models. I think that collections will always remain the backbone of our product, but students and faculty see us as offering so much more than that now.

ATG: *You have been praised for having a deep commitment to diversity. The library at UNC-Greensboro has been a leader in this area. But we wonder, do you think that libraries are doing enough to promote diversity both on campus and in the library? Is diversity adequately reflected in library services and collections?*

RB: I am so proud of what our Libraries have done regarding diversity and inclusion initiatives. We are recognized on campus for all of the initiatives we have undertaken. Our Diversity Resident Librarian program is stellar, and the four librarians who have been our diversity residents were very active on campus. In addition, our Diversity Librarian has won national honors and sits on many high profile committees on campus. He played a critical role in the creation of a Faculty Senate Diversity Committee. These are just a couple of examples among a large number of diversity initiatives we have in the Libraries. To answer your question, UNC-Greensboro promotes diversity on campus and in the library. I know that there are many other libraries nationwide that have residency programs and who follow strategic guidelines for diversity and inclusion both in their libraries and on campus. I think that more can always be done. Many libraries are working on doing more, and have consulted with us on ways to



accomplish more. I know that we can do a better job at hiring more diverse staff members and faculty. At UNC-Greensboro we try to provide diverse collections and acquire products in different languages but more can always be done.

ATG: *Innovation is also recognized as one of your strong suits. As you look back on your career, which of your many innovations are you most proud?*

RB: That’s a tough question. I think simply providing an environment where the staff and faculty can feel free to take risks and think creatively is a huge achievement. We have had many library faculty members and staff win awards for their innovative work. That can’t happen unless they feel that they can be innovative in their work. For more than six years we have awarded a \$2,500 Innovation and Program Enrichment Grant to a staff member who submits the most creative proposal. I have to acknowledge my colleague Joyce Ogburn who discussed an innovation award she was sponsoring when she keynoted our very first entrepreneurial librarian conference. I loved the idea, and started a similar award at UNC-Greensboro. I have to think that this annual grant award is what has imbued the spirit of creativity and innovation among the library staff.

ATG: *You were the driving force in the creation of the Conference for Entrepreneurial Librarians at UNC-Greensboro. Can you tell us more about that? Why is an entrepreneurial spirit so important to librarianship? We are not often thought of as being entrepreneurial. Are there ways the profession can change that perception — aside from sponsoring relevant conferences?*

RB: I created the conference in 2008 at a time when “entrepreneurism” seemed to be the new buzz word nationally and on campus.

I believed that libraries were entrepreneurial, but we were not being mentioned. I felt we were being overlooked. I met with Lynn Sutton, my colleague at Wake Forest University, to run the idea of an entrepreneurial conference for libraries by her. We discussed the format and the goals for the conference. We co-sponsored what has become a biennial conference hosted alternatively at our two universities. Attendance has been growing over the years. We need to be entrepreneurial and we need to be recognized for that. I think the budget crisis that has touched so many of us makes this even more important. Aside from the conferences, I think that offering a competitive innovation award, as I mentioned above, is another good way to foster the entrepreneurial spirit.

ATG: *You are also a big proponent of professional growth and development and encourage colleagues to publish and serve in professional organizations. What are the key benefits for librarians in this kind of involvement? What positive results in improved library services have you observed resulting from librarian professional growth and development?*

RB: Yes, I strongly believe that we need to contribute to our profession. Publishing articles and books as well as presenting at national conferences and serving on national committees are an important way we can do that. I think it is important that we contribute to the scholarship of librarianship. When I first arrived at UNC-Greensboro, I increased funds to support professional travel. Professional Development is critical — it is important to attend conferences and meetings to grow as an individual and to bring ideas back to your library that you can try and implement. I always go to conferences with the idea of bringing back new ideas that we can try. One result I see is that my library faculty are constantly being asked to speak at conferences because of their expertise and because people see them at conferences, read their publications and have heard them speak on topics such as information literacy, our new liaison model, e-publishing trends, diversity, and assessment to name just some. This sharing of knowledge is so important.

ATG: *At the risk of sounding self-serving, we have to ask: how did being a major contributor to the Charleston Conference and Against the Grain influence your own professional growth and development?*

RB: Being a major contributor to the Charleston Conference and *Against the Grain* changed my professional life in ways that likely cannot be described. Katina changed my life! Without her knowing it,

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she served as a mentor to me. I went to my first **Charleston Conference** in 1987 when I was the Head of Acquisitions at the **University of West Florida**. After meeting **Katina** and shortly thereafter letting her know that I wanted to get more involved, she invited me to edit two columns in *ATG* — **Group Therapy** and **Bet You Missed It**. Eventually I became an editor of *ATG*, and then led the conference planning committee. Without the involvement at the **Charleston Conference**, I feel as if my professional life would have been different. I met so many people and learned about so many new and innovative things that my fellow librarians we doing. People started to know my name (**Bazirjian** is not a difficult name to forget) and I had a network of people I could learn from and grow with. I was even awarded the **ALCTS Leadership in Library Acquisitions Award** based on my involvement with the conference. It all started with **Katina**.

ATG: *Speaking of librarianship as a profession, what would you tell someone thinking about it as a career? Would you recommend they sign up for library school and take the plunge?*

RB: I am retiring and still tell people how much I love my profession and will miss it. There have been so many changes to this profession since 1980 when I began my career at the **Syracuse University Libraries**. It is likely those changes that have sustained my interest in the profession. It is constantly changing and constantly exciting. I have no

against the grain people profile

Rosann Bazirjian

BORN AND LIVED: The Bronx, New York.

EARLY LIFE: Wonderful memories growing up in the Bronx with my two sisters and many Armenian relatives!

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: I started out in Acquisitions as a paraprofessional at **Columbia University**. My first professional position was at **Syracuse University** as the Acquisitions Librarian (1980). I went to work at the **University of West Florida** as the Head of the Acquisitions Department in 1985, and then as Head of the Acquisitions Department at **Syracuse University** in 1990. That position became the Head of Bibliographic Services when cataloging and acquisitions functions were merged. From there I went to **Florida State University** as the Assistant Director for Technical Services. In 1999, I went to **Penn State** as their Assistant Dean for Access and Technical Services. Finally, in 2004 I became the Dean of University Libraries at **UNC-Greensboro**.

FAMILY: A husband, son and beautiful daughter-in-law. Two wonderful sisters, a niece, nephew and his beautiful wife.

IN MY SPARE TIME: What spare time? I love to travel and look forward to annual trips to Europe every November, and the Dominican Republic in March.

FAVORITE BOOKS: *Sandcastle Girls*, by **Chris Bohjalian** and *Angle of Repose* by **Wallace Stegner**.

PET PEEVES: Things out of place, sloppiness.

PHILOSOPHY: I don't have a philosophy that I live by.

MOST MEMORABLE CAREER ACHIEVEMENT: Being the President of **ALCTS** and winning the **Leadership in Library Acquisitions Award**.

GOAL I HOPE TO ACHIEVE FIVE YEARS FROM NOW: I hope to be enjoying my retirement — living a happy and healthy life. 🌻

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against the grain library profile

University of North Carolina at Greensboro

Started as "Woman's College" • Greensboro, NC 27402
Phone: (336) 334-5880 • <library.uncg.edu>

STAFF: 32 library faculty, 53 staff, 25 students.

BUDGET: \$9,375,000

ARE YOU BUYING EBOOKS? Yes, lots of electronic books and journals. Focused on OER this year.

WHAT DO YOU THINK YOUR LIBRARY WILL BE LIKE IN FIVE YEARS? I like to envision the library as the information hub of the campus. We know we will be storing more titles in the years to come as we make way for even more collaborative spaces for our students and providing additional services.

DEPARTMENTAL INFORMATION:

HOW MANY DIVISIONS ARE THERE IN YOUR DEPARTMENT? We have seven departments plus the **Schiffman Music Library**.

HOW MANY PEOPLE WORK IN YOUR DEPARTMENT? There are ten people in the Administrative Suite.

WHAT IS YOUR MATERIALS BUDGET? \$3,606,000. 🌻

regrets telling prospective LIS students to take the plunge. This profession will continue to grow and change and meet the needs of our students and faculty in new and exciting ways. That is part of the charm and challenge of this profession. We need to keep changing to remain a relevant part of their lives.

ATG: *Rosann, we understand congratulations are in order! After an accomplished career as a librarian and library administrator you are retiring in April 2016. What led you to the decision to open this new chapter in your life?*

RB: The answer to this question is really simple. I want to travel, I want to take long walks on the beach, and I want to wake up without an alarm. I have given 36 years to my profession and now I want to live life without any constraints to my time.

ATG: *We hear that you are moving to Myrtle Beach. There are lots of fun things to do there. Are you looking forward to anything in particular? Are there any exciting titles on your reading list? Will you be doing anything library related after you leave UNC-Greensboro? Can we expect to see you in Charleston?*

RB: I love the beach, and plan to do a lot of walking on the beach. There are wonderful

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branding the product to gain acceptance as a global company from India. We also needed bigger investments to add new features and functionalities to become globally competitive. There was lot of resistance too from some of the Ivy-league publishers in supporting us, by misreading us as a potential competitor. Hence, it took too long a time to be where we are! We are happy today that people recognize us to partner with us. This change will be a leap forward for Informatics.

ATG: *J-Gate, and its subset Open J-Gate, seem to be your key offerings. Can you talk more about them?*

NVS: I will be happy to. We conceived J-Gate in 1999, just when the Web-based e-journal revolution had started. We started working on J-Gate with a vision to develop the single largest e-journal database and portal. Very early on, we realized that our market in India couldn't support a product, indexing thousands of e-journals, for two reasons. One, e-journals were still far from the reach of Indian libraries due to Internet infrastructure limitation which was too slow to happen; two, the number of e-journals subscribed by libraries then was too small, in the range of 100-500. We changed the direction and focused on a customized database, limiting to the journals that libraries subscribed to, which works as a product within the local area network of the institutional campus. In effect, we created a local discovery solution for the libraries and their journal literature holdings. We quickly expanded this concept to a group of libraries and library consortium as a shared discovery and resource-sharing solution. This caught up the imagination of Indian library consortia. The consortia modeled J-Gate solution, popularly called in India as JCCC (J-Gate Custom Content for Consortia), would facilitate online access to e-journals by their

defined right-of-access to resources subscribed by libraries, either individually or collectively. By virtue of indexing articles from their print journal holding also, JCCC facilitated inter-library loan when a user found an article in a journal, which might not be subscribed by his library. JCCC was adapted in 2003 by one of the earliest and largest Indian Library Consortium. It is another matter that big publishers didn't like JCCC for this reason. But, they couldn't stop us, as the libraries wanted it. However there is one instance where surprisingly a leading not-for-profit publisher signed with a consortium to make available his content to the consortium for inter-library loan among its members under CONTU guidelines, but threatened them and us, several years after our service was in use, with copyright violation for facilitating ILL. Fortunately, he was the only one, an odd one indeed!

J-Gate as a customized solution could have been an ideal product for the big global libraries and the consortia to adapt as an effective discovery and resource-sharing platform in the early days of e-journal evolution itself. We marketed global e-journals in India extensively, but we failed to get our unique e-journal discovery solution into the global market. I may say, it is for journalists like you to analyze the reasons for our failure to brand a great Indian product in the global market.

ATG: *It's probably not a big revenue opportunity for you, but you are the world-wide distributor for S.R. Ranganathan's journal, SRELS Journal of Information Management. Does that journal have an international following?*

NVS: Very little. We took over this 52-year-old journal only two years ago. **Ranganathan** is a great universal brand in the librarianship, like **Melville Dewey**. But

the journal started by him is not widely known outside India which is typical of any Indian scholarly journal. Marketing and branding a single journal is an expensive job. Hence, we have created a platform called i-Scholar (www.i-scholar.in) to host and market Indian

journals with a good e-commerce model. Currently i-Scholar hosts around 200 Indian journals, with archives dating back to first volume. We have started adding

global journals also to our i-Scholar platform. We hope to do better with this strategy. Now that we have made SRELS Journal online through our i-Scholar platform, libraries around the world can subscribe to it easily online.

ATG: *What about the future? What new products can we expect from Informatics?*

NVS: Our future plan is in two distinct directions: (1) to strengthen our library-centric products and services to maintain leadership in this market and go global; (2) expand our market into many non-library domains of the global information market place. Our strategy is to be a "Technology + Content" Company. We realize that in the digital world, information products cannot be conceived or pursued as a quickly scalable market without the internal strength of technology. Pursuing this strategy, three years ago we created a new subsidiary company called Informatics Publishing Ltd., which is now focusing on our established library market. We are working towards building technology strength within our parent company. We plan to expand into the new horizons of information market place with this strength. You will see a few new products in the coming years, which may even be spun-off into new subsidiary companies. We are, in some way, back to start-up mode. 🌱

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restaurants in Myrtle Beach, so I am looking forward to checking them out. I am also looking forward to getting involved with community events. Now that I am a South Carolinian, I am determined to finish the **Anne Rivers Siddons** novels that I have yet to read. I love getting to know local authors, so I will go to author events and buy their books. I don't know if I will be doing anything library related after I leave **UNC-Greensboro**. Everyone says that when you retire, you shouldn't make any commitments for at least six months. It is important to feel the rhythm of retirement and then make any decisions regarding committees, volunteering opportunities, etc. I will definitely be in Charleston now that I do not live too far away but solely as a tourist! 🌱

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have guessed! From the time **George** was **four months old**, **Sam** (his dad) has been reading **George** a real **print book** at bedtime and **George** actually listens! **Bruce** and I were reading to him in his dad's absence and **George** paid attention! Impressive!

Speaking of which, I read **Mark Sandler's** essay (this issue, p.26) with great interest. Yes, students prefer not reading books. And Websites may have more visitors than books, but the print book is not going anywhere. Generations have always liked to take the easy way out. But I believe that as a profession we are focusing too much on the fact that there are now more competitors than we have ever had. But we still need to preserve print books. Whew! Got that off my chest!

Speaking of which, have you encountered this book? **The Bad-Ass Librarians of Tim-**

buktu by **Joshua Hammer**. Just out. The story of a librarian in Mali who arranged to save hundreds of manuscripts from destruction.

Did you see the **Phil Davis** April 1 post about **Sci-Hub**? **Lolly** talks about **Sci-Hub** in her questions and answers column. And I had an intriguing conversation about **Sci-Hub** with **Georgios Papadopoulos**, Founder and CEO of **Atypon**. Wonder if we can get him to Charleston in November? <https://www.crunchbase.com/person/georgios-papadopoulos#/entity>

Oh! This just out from **Jim O'Donnell**, University Librarian, **ASU** — Like WOW — Dear colleagues, I'm delighted to announce additions to the senior leadership team, additions that will energize us for the challenges ahead. Joining us later this summer from **Purdue University** will be **Tomalee Doan**, arriving in the role of Associate University Librarian for Public Services. She will initially be responsible for public and access services in all library locations, for student success

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