

2018

ATG Interviews Gary Marchionini, Dean, School of Information and Library Science, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

Katina Strauch

Against the Grain, kstrauch@comcast.net

Tom Gilson

College of Charleston, gilsont@cofc.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg>



Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Strauch, Katina and Gilson, Tom (2018) "ATG Interviews Gary Marchionini, Dean, School of Information and Library Science, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 30: Iss. 2, Article 18. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.8044>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

ATG Interviews Gary Marchionini

Dean, School of Information and Library Science, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

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

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

ATG: Gary, you've had a very successful career in library education. What would you say have been the top three highlights of your career so far? What future accomplishments would you like to add to that list?

GM: Working with doctoral student colleagues and master's students who have gone on to become leaders in the information field. Being recognized by my peers with the **ASIST Award of Merit**. Being recognized by students and colleagues with the **UNC Graduate Mentoring Award** and the **SILS Teaching Award**.

I suppose a future accomplishment I aspire to is to lead **SILS** as a top information school to expand its impact in the first half of the 21st century.

ATG: Back tracking a bit, why did you choose library education as a career?

GM: It was a circuitous and somewhat serendipitous route. I began professional life as a math teacher and got involved in computer-based education in the 1970s. When I finished my dissertation in 1983 I began looking to move my young family to the east coast and a job at **University of Maryland College of Library and Information Services** (now named **College of Information Studies**) caught my attention. I was math and English double major and the interdisciplinary nature of LIS made it an easy transition from educating teachers to educating service-oriented students who wanted to leverage technology to make information more accessible. It was also a smooth research transition from IT applied to learning to investigation of information seeking (search) as a learning activity. This led to more than 30 years of work at the intersection of information retrieval and human-computer interaction.

ATG: You have witnessed a number of changes in library education. From your perspective, which changes have been the most significant?

GM: The first great change was the first retrospective conversion — getting the catalog online and barcoding items that linked those items to the online catalog. This caused IT to become more crucial to LIS education (this is why I was hired at **UMD**). LIS programs began offering many kinds of IT courses ranging from database management and networking to online searching and computer-assisted indexing.

The second great change was the Internet, which has driven a second retrospective conversion in which full items (full text, videos, music, photos) are put online and available through public and private services. This has democratized collections and caused libraries



to define services that exceed what is freely available on the web. It has also challenged the nature of expertise in general and forced librarians to articulate and demonstrate advanced information skills and perspectives.

An important side effect of the Internet has been the development of digital libraries that incorporate much more diverse kinds of “born digital” or digitized content. Many of these digital libraries are new entities but all libraries have been actively developing digital collections to expand or augment existing collections. These digital libraries have typically been done as “add ons” without new resources and libraries are forced to manage digital and analog collections with mainly static budgets and with older personnel who were educated pre Internet days.

Another major change in LIS education over the past 40 years has been strong attention to the psychological and sociological characteristics of library patrons and the public at large. Although work in collection building and management remain very strong, human factors have become much more important for building and delivering library and other information services. Thus, courses in user needs assessment, community engagement, human-information interaction (or human information behavior) have become central to LIS curricula.

A number of other changes have strongly influenced LIS education. There has been strong growth of archive education courses and programs to augment or supplement LIS with more attention to preservation. The IT emphasis in libraries has led to schools hiring faculty from allied disciplines such as com-

puter science, which in turn changes course offerings and styles of research and teaching. Core courses have evolved in several ways: Collection development now includes database licensing strategies, research data repository policies, and a variety of scholarly publishing changes; Reference has moved from source focused (e.g., disciplinary literatures) to patron education and needs assessment; and Cataloging has shifted from AACR2 rules for original cataloging to incorporate metadata assigned by crowds or non-experts, and interoperation across different vocabularies and indexing systems.

In sum, these changes challenge us to be more expansive in our curricula, give more attention to social and economic trends, and help students develop problem solving perspectives for managing change with static or shrinking resources. It is more important than ever that LIS students are educated as prepared professionals who are adaptable, and use creativity and skill to serve the information needs of diverse and growing user communities.

ATG: Some people think that the **MLS** focuses too much on library processes and on the library as place and not enough on the services librarians need to provide. Your response?

GM: I agree. We are information schools and attend to broad visions of information work, which continue to evolve rapidly. The skills, perspectives, and ethics we teach apply to information services in homes, schools, corporations, and governments, as well as in libraries. Consider the variety in libraries alone — classic distinctions between public, academic, school, and the host of “special” libraries have long existed and they are augmented today by the need for information professionals (aka librarians) who manage information ranging from gene arrays to cloud transactions in enterprises that range from corporate and government entities to new infrastructures such as the **Internet Archive** or **Wikipedia**. The best services are driven by community needs and cultures and much of these specifics will need to be learned on the job. LIS graduates will bring the skills of building bridges between people and systems and creating community-based services. There is no template for library work.

ATG: Others contend that the **MLS** is no longer essential to perform the tasks required of the 21st century librarian. Do they have a point? Does the **MLS** curriculum provide the necessary skill set to be a successful librarian in today's digital environment? Has it kept up with current needs?

continued on page 36

Interview — Gary Marchionini
from page 35

GM: Libraries have important societal functions and are under resource constraints. Responsible leaders must recruit, hire, and integrate top people to do this important work. Libraries should be committed to their patrons and communities rather than to a trade association. That said, I am unwavering in my belief that the best people to work in intensive professional information fields are educated in top quality information schools. Our challenge is that there is too much focus on the credential and not the experiential learning that prepares those highly trained professionals.

Consider professional education in other fields: Medicine requires internships + residency, likewise pharmacy, dentistry and nursing demand workplace training. Social work schools require hundreds of hours (multiple semesters) of field study. Teachers must do student teaching, and lawyers clerk before joining firms. Major MBA programs require five years of experience before admission. We do ourselves a disservice by offering professional degrees that are limited to classroom learning.

ATG: Other than at UNC, are library/information schools generally aware of the need for workplace training? Are internships and residencies becoming an accepted part of an MLS education?

GM: Yes, many schools try to provide some kind of field experience option. Some programs have a lot of students who are already working in libraries so the workplace training is less critical for those students, however, it is essential that students have experiences either in information-intensive workplaces or at least (or in addition to) arrays of simulations that prepare them for creative problem solving and diverse service populations.

ATG: A number of European libraries, and some in the U.S., are looking beyond the MLS when recruiting new professional staff. Do you see this trend as a threat to the MLS?

GM: No, this is not a threat to rigorous programs that adapt to changes in the profession. Libraries need the best people to do the wide array of work needed in today's libraries. Libraries have a responsibility to their stakeholders to provide the most effective and efficient services and if that means hiring librarians with deep training in law or engineering, so be it. What some LIS schools are doing is pushing students through credentialing steps rather than professional problem solving steps. Other schools are offering engaged learning opportunities that include internships and the course work to information enterprises. Our schools should be able to compete with any other professional program or discipline when it comes to information work. If we cannot, we should and we will become increasingly irrelevant to companies as well as to libraries.

ATG: To remain competitive, should MLS programs be partnering with other related programs like those focused on digital archiving and preservation, artificial intelligence, data analytics, and the like?

GM: That is exactly what many schools are doing. Certainly at UNC we are deeply collaborative with programs across the campus. We partner with the UNC Libraries on the Carolina Library Associates Program that immerses a dozen MSLS students in paid library internships over the two years of their program. Our health informatics program involves the Schools of Medicine, Public Health, Nursing, Pharmacy, and Dentistry, and the computer science department; our environmental informatics program partners with the program in ecology and environmental science; we have dual Master's degree programs with Law, Public Health, History, and Art History. We collaborate with computer science, applied mathematics, and other units on a data science Master's degree and research programs. SILS faculty have shared appointments with medicine, bioinformatics, the Carolina Digital Humanities Initiative, the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, the

Health Sciences Library, and the National Consortium for Data Science.

ATG: If you were assigning a letter grade to the effectiveness of library education what would it be? And why?

GM: Just as there are "A" students and not such good ones it is unfair to not recognize that many outstanding librarians are educated each year. Overall, however, for the field, I would say we get a "C-" at best.

ATG: That's not very encouraging. What steps can library education take to improve your assessment? What will it take to get an "A" from Professor Marchionini?

GM: I think that better internship and/or residency programs would help. I think that more experiential learning activities will help (e.g., simulations, community-based projects). I think more group projects will help as well. It would be useful to create certifications or licensing at the state or national level for different kinds of library careers. I think that having in-service and continuing education requirements post graduation would help as well. All these educational activities will require some kind of accreditation beyond the current COA focus on planning processes and self-defined criteria for success.

ATG: Being the Dean of one of the top library programs in the country must take a tremendous amount of energy. What do you do to recharge your batteries? What fun activities help you keep your edge?

GM: I try to keep my research network somewhat active (go to conferences, review papers, etc.) and do a lot of editorial work (a book series with more than 60 titles and several journal boards). For fun, I spend time with my grandchildren. I also enjoy cycling, gardening, walks, and watching basketball.

ATG: Gary, thanks so much for taking the time to speak to us. We've learned a lot about some key issues. 🐾

Rumors
from page 34

and first lady **Brigitte** to the **Library of Congress**. **Librarian of Congress Carla Hayden** and **Laurence Engel**, president of the **Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF)**, announced a collaboration between the **Library of Congress** and the **BnF** to provide digital content for a new online space for collections relating to shared **French-American history**. The initiative will also be supported by other U.S. organizations, including the **National Archives**. Through direct digital access to complete books, maps, prints and other documents from the collections of the partner libraries, the new bilingual website will focus on the cultural and historical connections between France and Northern America and, more specifically, the United States during the 16th through

the 19th centuries. "The **National Archives** is honored to be celebrating the important historical ties between our countries by sharing our unique French-American documents in this exciting international venture," said Archivist of the United States **David S. Ferriero**. As a key part of this collaboration, **Bibliothèque nationale de France** will create and host the website, which is part of its collection "**Shared Heritage**," while the **Library of Congress** will select and make available high-quality digital scans of relevant materials from its collections.

copyright.gov
gallica.bnf.fr
www.archives.gov



Speaking of which, just saw this article in **FCW** which "provides **federal technology executives** with the information, ideas, and strategies necessary to successfully navigate the complex world of federal business." See "**Library of Congress to collect every e-book**," by **Chase Gunter**. "In a notice of proposed rulemaking to be published April 16, the

Library of Congress will begin including published e-books under its mandatory deposit rule, but only on a by-request basis."

<https://fcw.com/articles/2018/04/13/loc-digital-ebooks.aspx?m=>

Moving right along, **Oxford Brookes University**, one of the UK's leading universi-

continued on page 43