

Against the Grain

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ATG Interviews Kaetrena Davis Kendrick

Associate Librarian, University of South Carolina, Lancaster Medford Library

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ATG: *Kaetrena, Congratulations are in order! You were recently named the 2019 Association of College and Research Libraries' (ACRL) Academic/Research Librarian of the Year. Can you tell us about that? How does someone who works in a small, rural academic library attain such national recognition?*

KDK: Thank you very much! I was ecstatic to learn that I was named to the award, particularly since many previous honorees are colleagues on whom I've modeled aspects of my career. I'm very honored to be recognized by ACRL, and I understand that traditionally, people in formal leadership roles from large academic libraries are linked to the award. That being noted, people working in small and rural academic libraries are doing the same work and leveraging similar networks and practices to implement the good they are doing on their campuses, in their communities, and within the profession. My association with the award also speaks to the power of informal leadership, which underpins and highlights my continuous efforts to successfully and positively transform the library despite changes in formal library leadership on my campus. Since the award is bestowed via collegial nomination and subsequent review and voting from an ACRL Committee, the power of colleagues who want to amplify my work was also at play. The machinations of close colleagues who have consistently encouraged me and supported my professional growth was undoubtedly a central catalyst leading to the award.

ATG: *According to Jennifer L. Fabbi, chair of the ACRL Academic/Research Librarian of the Year Award Committee, you have "your finger on the pulse of some of the most relevant and significant issues in academic librarianship today." What would you say are those issues? How is your work addressing them?*

KDK: Historically, a great deal of LIS scholarship, research, and commentary has been concerned with issues of racial/ethnic diversity in the field, especially where recruitment and retention are concerned. These concerns continue through the expanded frameworks of equity, diversity, and inclusion. My work on those issues is reflected in my research on African-American male librarians, (<https://bit.ly/2SDCx77>) and I've collocated works on diversity (<https://bit.ly/1s33g0d>) since it started being written about in LIS from the 1920s. More recently, we have seen rising concerns about emotional labor and links to the mental and physical health of library employees. My work on low morale (<https://bit.ly/2Jdz7ak>) speaks to these issues, highlighting serious concerns with entrenched library workplace culture and academic organizational culture



writ large. My forthcoming work, (<https://bit.ly/2iOut7Q>) which centers the experiences of racial/ethnic minority academic librarians, exposes links between diversity initiatives, emotional labor, and health impacts on this group.

ATG: *Your forthcoming work sounds fascinating and important. How far along are you? What form will it take? When can we expect to see the results?*

KDK: It's a research article, which I've co-authored with Ione T. Damasco (Dayton University). It's been submitted and is currently undergoing review. I hope it will be published later this year or early 2020, depending on peer review outcomes and publishing cycles.

ATG: *You've noted that working in a small, rural academic library is often done under "augmented constraints." What do you mean by that? How would you advise librarians working under similar constraints? How can these constraints be overcome?*

KDK: Budget cuts, staffing concerns (recruitment, professional development), technology/system efficiencies, and professional development and librarian competencies are perennial issues for large libraries. For small and rural libraries, these issues are amplified immensely. Recruitment is a hard hurdle to negotiate for small and rural libraries since location is so important to many candidates. Many rural areas are not only difficult to get to, but may not have mass transit, a variety of goods and services, or diverse cultural or social outlets. Small and rural libraries generally start with much smaller budgets and are on campuses where most departments may not have adequate human resources, so issues that may be deftly handled on large campuses often take longer or may not be done at all. Despite these shortcomings, librarians on small campuses are still tasked with providing

modern research and instruction services, and these gaps can be stressful. How librarians deal with these parameters is dependent upon several factors — the largest being how much their library leader(s) and campus administrators are willing to advocate for them. A book I co-edited with Deborah Tritt (*The Small and Rural Academic Library* (ACRL, 2016): <https://bit.ly/2Xx3a14>) highlights that outside of supportive leadership, the single most important thing small and rural librarians can do is actively cultivate and maintain relationships with as many other departments on campus or symbiotic town-gown partners as possible. These relationships will ensure library advocacy and growth and may help the library during campus leadership changes or economic downturns.

ATG: *You are known for seeking new and innovative ways to serve your campus community. Can you give us some examples? Are there any ideas that haven't panned out? If so, what did you learn from them?*

KDK: I believe that students on my campus should have exposure and access to modern library services to the extent that I can offer it to them and considering (or despite) the parameters I work within. At my institution, we are not able to participate in the larger system's Institutional Repository, but I really wanted to capture the scholarly output that is created on our campus. That desire was the impetus for Lancer Scholar Square, (<https://usclmedford.omeka.net/>) which houses what I term *ephemeral research* — poster sessions, presentations, and other items that are associated with more formal research but are rarely, if ever, formally collocated, published, or preserved. Since its inception, Lancer Scholar Square has also become a channel that helps library faculty model information preservation, promote intellectual property evaluations, and encourage personal archiving behaviors for undergraduate students in our campus's newly formed and very active Research Club.

USC Lancaster is a commuter campus placed in an area without mass transit. As a result, many of our students come to campus in the morning and stay all day, even if they have large gaps between their classes. I decided to start a Library of Things (<https://bit.ly/2uqrV3C>) so students could check out creative projects, games, and technology support items. Public libraries have been offering similar services for quite some time, but at that time, I didn't know of any academic libraries offering the service. Since the inception of the service, we've grown to include nursing equipment and we plan to offer more classroom tools using student feedback as a guide.

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Many ideas I've created have been successful because they failed early. I try to scale things until I get them right. We live in a "quick-quick" culture, wherein if something doesn't do well right away, we are supposed to abandon it quickly and try different things until something happens to stick. But, this could create a sense of mistrust in our users. I usually give programs or services about two academic years to see what the "real response" is. During that time, I work with my colleague to create tweaks. For instance, when we first started our Study Snacks program — which happened during the last part of the semester (exams), barely any students picked up the treat bags. We had bags of chips and packages of snack cakes in our stock room for months! The library had never offered such a program before, and so the students thought the treat bags were for sale. Since we'd put the items in brown bags, they couldn't see what the food items were, and they didn't want to risk admonishment for looking into the "merchandise." Conventional wisdom would say "our students don't want free food." But I knew that was not the case as I observed that rote free pizza was flying out of boxes elsewhere on campus during that time. So, I made some changes: a full programs/events calendar with welcoming events that culminated with the study snacks, which were offered in clear bags and accompanied by signage that said "FREE!" We still offer this event every semester right before finals. We run out of snacks every time.

ATG: *That's a really impressive list of innovative projects. How do you come up with so many creative ideas? What's your secret?*

KDK: I've always been a questioner, and I try to surround myself with a few people who are highly interesting and interested in various things, and who share those things with me. Regularly talking with folks in this circle often triggers "What if I did/tried..." — types of questions. I brainstorm a lot of my ideas with my working colleague, **Rebecca Freeman** — she really helps me pace my vision where the energy and activity in the library is concerned. Also, I believe that thinking of myself as a creator (seeing projects/ideas as iterative) rather than a doer (focusing on projects as an means-to-an-end) has helped me cultivate an internal sense of psychological safety. That means I can keep trying and improving without judging myself as my ideas are realized.

ATG: *What advice would you give librarians who want to follow in your footsteps and generate creative and innovative ideas to serve their communities and transform their libraries into essential players on campus?*

KDK: I recommend the idea of welcome. Early on, I recognized that historically, the library on my campus had not been perceived as an inviting space. As a result, everything I have set out to do has been to eradicate that view. Show welcome and be welcoming as much as you can. Set the tone and expectation throughout your policies, trainings, collections,

programs, interactions, and network cultivations. We tell our students — directly — that the library is their space and offer them agency to craft the environment they want (within the policies that we enforce and the other resources we can leverage on their behalf). One of the ways we show off our welcome is literally by having a welcome week event in the Fall — we have a con event (<https://bit.ly/2xMhwwC>) that encourages students to become fans of the library. The event, called WonderCon, introduces students to our services and most importantly, to all the ways they can utilize the space. Because of this and our other programs, we are overwhelmingly viewed as the *de facto* student center on campus, even though there is a *de jure* space elsewhere on campus.

I encourage colleagues to see their library as a sphere of action. I have numerous ideas for every area of the library, and I believe this kaleidoscopic thinking helps me maintain a positive locus of control when externally-generated plans for the library space/building come into play. Do not underestimate the power of user data. Gather as much of it as you can, whether statistical or anecdotal — as it is valuable when you need to reframe stereotypes and advocate for the library. Most importantly — whether you're a formal or informal leader — encourage and model humane, ethical, and empathetic leadership and collegiality in your ranks and throughout your hiring, training, feedback, and separation processes.

ATG: *Aside from your own *The Small and Rural Academic Library Leveraging Resources and Overcoming Limitations* (ACRL, 2016), what other books would you recommend for interested librarians? Are there websites or articles that you've found particularly helpful?*

KDK: Brian Real also has written a book (<https://amzn.to/2SVih0L>) centering small and rural libraries, and I often browse the social media outlets of libraries to get ideas for programs and events and figure out how to tweak, scale, or apply them to the parameters of my institution. There is a Facebook group called Library Marketing and Outreach (LMAO) and I consult that group to learn about or mine best practices for graphic design and program implementation. In terms of creativity, leadership, and productivity, I recommend popular books *The Artist's Way* by **Julia Cameron**, *Ego is the Enemy* by **Ryan Holiday**, and *The Power of Habit and Smarter, Faster, Better* — both by **Charles Duhigg**.

ATG: *Your strong commitment to serving and uplifting traditionally underrepresented and underserved groups of all kinds is well known. Do you think we in the library profession are doing enough in that regard? If not, what else should we be doing?*

KDK: As I mentioned earlier, LIS has been — and remains involved — in the work of recruitment and retention of underrepresented groups and service to underserved communities. I think the traditional channels of support — scholarships, and the like — should continue and grow. I'm pleased to see that focus is also expanding to confront and critique the difficult reasons why these

programs aren't as effective as they could be. More and more librarians from all racial and ethnic backgrounds are becoming involved in anti-racism, anti-oppression, and social justice work, seeking to expose and deconstruct the visible and invisible behaviors and systems that slow down the very work that librarians say they are deeply concerned about. I hope this trajectory continues.

At the same time, librarians are often involved in their work so much that they forget about themselves. To that end, we are quickly becoming an underserved population. As we work against so many real (and perceived) market disruptions, mission creep has led many campus and/or library leaders to ask more of their employees while not offering resources to fulfill these tasks effectively. As we continue discussions about library value, we must move away from notions, proclamations, and plans that place fears about relevance and myths of service over the well-being of the people who do the work that bring our noble missions to life.

ATG: *Kaetrena, you just said that librarians are often so involved in their work "that they forget about themselves." Can you clarify what you mean by that? Are there specific examples that you can point to from your research?*

KDK: My low morale study showed that even when abused and neglected academic librarians realized their predicament, they experienced emotional conflict about their work: they felt guilty about considering leaving the profession when they knew the work they were doing was positive and impactful. Additionally, the effects of protracted exposure to workplace abuse and neglect (low morale) has numerous negative impacts. These are just a few: depression, anxiety, sleeping disorders, hypertension, reduced productivity, and increased absenteeism.

There have been several discussions not only about low morale as defined in my study, but how this phenomenon is linked to emotional labor, the concept of vocational awe, and ideas of resilience in libraries. The combined applications of these topics highlight problems that arise from how they impact librarian's sense of identity and engender negative connections to physical and mental health. Emotional labor is a term coined by Hochschild, who defined it as "the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display" (<https://bit.ly/2F156rw>) within the context of the workplace. Librarians are expected to display certain behaviors and emotions during their practice, and some of them are codified (<http://www.ala.org/rusa/resources/guidelines/guidelinesbehavioral>).

Such codifications are amplified by the concept of vocational awe, which Ettarah defines as "the set of ideas, values, and assumptions librarians have about themselves and the profession that result in notions that libraries as institutions are inherently good, sacred notions, and therefore beyond critique." (<http://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2018/vocational-awe/>) Her definition reveals

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how emotional labor and the subversion of librarian stereotypes and library values have been mythologized to the detriment of library workers. Mistaken ideas about the meaning of service and the perception that the library is a place of safety and comfort for all who are there (including workers) are also heightened, and they seem to be driving the current trend of mission creep in libraries. The idea of resilience (<https://bit.ly/2XQluBl>) underscores the impacts of emotional labor and vocational awe, exposing the toxic message that library employees should consider it normal to “do more with less,” while striving to effectively show the value of the library — even as that value is willfully undermined by staffing cuts and fiduciary attrition.

It should be noted that all of these behaviors and systems of thought are noted to have particularly detrimental effects on women and racial/ethnic minorities, which is particularly troubling when we consider the ongoing issues of salary parity and recruitment, advancement, and retention of these groups in LIS.

As library employees consider their exposure to these systems and behaviors, I encourage them to also consider how their organizations are (not) supporting them as they experience the associated negative health outcomes. Through my own research, my aim is to help library workers and organizations

recognize these impacts and create supportive countermeasures.

ATG: *You have justifiably been praised for your research efforts. Can you tell us more about them? Which of your research projects do you think have been most impactful and significant? Why? Are you currently working on anything that our readers should know about?*

KDK: Overall, my research interests focus on issues of professionalism, ethics, and racial/ethnic diversity in LIS. My recent applications of qualitative methodologies led me to deeper insights on the topics I’m interested in, especially where workplace culture and behavior are concerned. In 2017, I published a research study on low morale in academic libraries. The results of that study have been deeply impactful to me and to many who have come across the work. I think that is because the methodology I used — phenomenology — gives a clear voice to a traumatic experience that is more common than people think. I also think the impact comes from the acknowledgement that emotional trauma is occurring in librarianship, a field which both librarians and the public believe is worry-free. Earlier this year I was awarded a grant to continue my studies on low morale, and I am currently focusing on how low morale develops in public libraries and business and nonprofit workplaces. Through my low morale work, I’ve also created an online community, I teach a course, and soon I will be launching a workshop designed to help library employees recover from low morale.

ATG: *How do you stay busy when you’re not working on research projects or helping students and faculty at the library? What do you do in your down time? What fun activities help you re-charge and get ready for the next challenge?*

KDK: Considering my work on low morale and emotional labor, my goal is to not always be in a state of busy. I’ve found that being committed to spaces of non-busy does wonders for keeping me energized and rejuvenated. In my down time, I work on improving my yoga practice and I spend time with my family. I enjoy cooking for my loved ones, and I like to write, so I work on my blogs, which help me casually flesh out ideas and keep me engaged creatively. I’m also very interested in Korean history, culture, language, and music, so I enjoy reading books about, watching television programs, and listening to music from South Korea (I also spend a lot of time planning my next trip there).

ATG: *Kaetrena, again congratulations! You made all of us in the South Carolina library community proud. Thanks so much for taking time to talk to us. It was an honor interviewing you.*

KDK: Thank you so much for this opportunity. It gives me great pleasure to bring the ACRL Academic/Research Librarian of the Year Award to South Carolina, to have a chance to share the great things that are happening in our libraries, and to advocate for the health and dignity of people working in libraries. 🐾

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ATG: *You stay incredibly busy teaching at the School of Information Sciences and presenting papers at professional gatherings like the Charleston Conference. But we all need to take time to re-energize and get ready for the next challenge. What are your favorite ways to relax and recharge? Are there any activities that you particularly enjoy when not teaching or presenting at conferences?*

MB: I take a lot of long walks with my underworked border collie (she, like me, likes to keep an eye on everything and keep things moving along) and, when I can, get my hands in the soil of my garden overlooking the Strait of San Juan de Fuca at my second home in Washington. I enjoy making a big mess in the kitchen and feeding my family well enough that they don’t complain too much about cleaning up, and I get my running shoes on the road enough so that I don’t embarrass my fleet footed 13-year old son who passed up his old mother’s 5k time years ago. Running shoes are more practical to bring to conferences than garden spades and kitchen knives.

ATG: *Prof. Bonn thanks so much for talking to us today. It was a pleasure learning more about you and the important work that you are doing.* 🐾

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<http://www.davidworlock.com/2019/04/scholarly-communications-the-view-from-fiesole>

Hooah and congratulations! Dean Smith, the director of **Cornell University Press**, will be the new director of **Duke University Press**, school officials announced Thursday. **Smith** succeeds **Steve Cohn**, who is retiring at the end of June. **Cohn** has been at **Duke University Press** since 1984, and has served as director since 1993. **Smith will start his new job on July 1.** “I look forward to working with my colleagues at the press and across the university to publish high-quality scholarship and advance the frontiers of knowledge in new and exciting ways,” **Smith** said. During his **30-year publishing career**, **Smith** has helped lead all aspects of the transition from print-based publications to more easily accessible web-based digital editions; this includes a key role in **reimagining Project Muse** to include eBooks and journals together. He has a wealth of experience in book and journal acquisitions, digital platform development, financial management, global business development and strategic planning, and held such roles as journal publisher, director of electronic publishing, vice president of sales and marketing as well as press director. **Smith** is the author of *American Boy*, a book that won the 2000

Washington Writer’s Prize and the Maryland Prize for Literature in 2001. He is also a contributor of poetry to such publications as *Poetry East*, *Open City*, *The Virginia Literary Review*, *Gulf Stream* and the anthology *D.C. Poets Against the War*. Though no relation to the late **legendary UNC basketball coach of the same name**, **Smith** is an avid sports fan who has previously worked as a sportswriter and freelance journalist; in 2013, **Temple University Press** published his book about the NFL’s Baltimore Ravens, *Never Easy, Never Pretty: A Fan, A City, A Championship Season*. Whew! I have a **coach Dean Smith** story to tell. Back when I was a student at **UNC-Chapel Hill**, I went to a **UVA-UNC-CH basketball game** in Charlottesville where both of my brothers were enrolled at **UVA**. Of course **UNC** was the underdog but that didn’t keep me from screaming for the Heels (and much to **UVAs** and my brothers’ annoyance **UNC** won!) I even got coach **Dean Smith’s** autograph! Too bad that the autograph has been misplaced in all my moves. Oh well. **Congratulations to the publisher Dean Smith!**

Speaking of publishers and misplacing, I was intrigued to learn that **Mary Ann Liebert** once upon a time **conducted the first movement of Tchaikovsky’s Fourth Symphony**. She studied for a year with a young conductor and watched all sorts of videos of other conductors! A relative taped the production from

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