April 2012

Crossing the Bridge Connecting the Corporate and Academic Worlds

Valerie Tucci
The College of New Jersey, vtucci@tcnj.edu

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

Part of the Library and Information Science Commons

Recommended Citation
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.6126

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.
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 presentations 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...
against the grain
people profile

Physical Science and Engineering Librarian
The College of New Jersey
2000 Pennington Road Ewing, NJ 08628
Phone: 609 771-0216 • Fax: 609 637-5177
Email: vtucci@tcnj.edu

Valerie Tucci

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 3½ 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.

The shared governance model in contrast to the hierarchi-
cal structure usually found in the corporate world. The shared governance model results in a flatter organization structure, requiring the sort of thoughtful and deliberate discus-
sions 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.

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.

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, and 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 in 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.

Crossing the Bridge...
from page 20