

THE ADJUNCT LIFE

The best of both
worlds—working
and teaching
future librarians

LIFE

By Stephanie Willen Brown

I consider myself a library evangelist. I came to librarianship as a second career, but once I discovered it, I knew it was a perfect fit. My idea of heaven is knowing the answers to all the questions I've ever had, and my librarian's tool kit helps me find a slice of heaven on earth.

I have helped countless patrons over the past ten years, including newspaper reporters, a Guggenheim Fellow, and college students of all stripes, and, of course, friends and relatives. I started a blog (Libraries for My Friends) with tips for nonlibrarians on how to search the vast resources available via their public library. I've written tips on evaluating medical information, searching WorldCat.org, and using our local public library to find music cassettes for a friend who doesn't have a CD player. I even offered to help my eye doctor do research for a case study.

But this does not entirely satisfy my evangelist nature. I wanted to expose more people to the treasures available through academic, public, school, and special libraries, so I turned to teaching in library school as a third career.

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My "real" job is electronic resource librarian at the University of Connecticut (UConn), Storrs. I teach for the Graduate School of Library and Information Science (GSLIS) at Simmons College on Saturdays, alternating between the introductory reference class and an advanced reference class called Digital Information Services and Providers.

Preparing to teach

I had taken reference, of course, and had worked as a reference librarian for several years, so I had some ideas about what to teach. Still, I was fortunate that Simmons provided me with a full set of materials, including a syllabus, PowerPoint slides, assignments, and a final exam; I was very relieved when all the assignments included the answers! My students spend 20–30 hours on my class each week; in my first semester, I easily spent the same amount of time setting up for class. After three years of teaching, I don't feel quite so frantic about preparation and grading. I now spend between five and 20 hours per week getting ready, depending on whether I am prepping for a class with content I know well or grading a major assignment.

My fellow adjuncts and I share enthusiasm for the profession and have similar stories about our adjunct experience. Most of us put in many hours. Phil Edwards, who is in his fourth year of doctoral work toward a Ph.D. in information science at the

University of Washington and teaches in its MLIS program, says, "When I [set up] a class for the first time, it typically takes 40–60 hours prior to the start of the quarter in order to plan the course, select readings, and create supplementary materials, such as the course web site." To stay sane, he often reserves one weekend day as "a day away from teaching and writing."

Adjuncts who have taught distance education courses in addition to traditional face-to-face classes agree that online classes are even more time-consuming in their organization, presentation, and grading.

Many adjuncts I spoke with told me that their partners accommodate their crazy schedules, though I suspect all of them gripe occasionally. Mine doesn't mind the day-to-day grind but wouldn't object if I had an occasional free weekend.

Back on the real job

Given the amount of time I spend on my class, it's natural to wonder how my full-time colleagues react. I am very fortunate at UConn that both my boss and her boss are very supportive of my second job. They often suggest articles for me to share with my students. Beyond that, many adjuncts find that teaching gives them greater credibility with their faculty colleagues and clients. An added benefit of teaching is that we know some of the best new librarians and are able to hire them either as interns, or, if we are lucky, into permanent positions. One of my former UConn students helped with our electronic resource management implementation and did incredible work on the usability testing we ran last summer.

On the other hand, we adjuncts acknowledge that it is difficult balancing two jobs: each has time-dependent requirements, and it can be challenging to satisfy the demands of both. Many of us also agree, quietly, that working as an adjunct is a labor of love. We don't do it for the money. I reckon I made just over the minimum wage in my first semester. While my hourly rate has improved as I've gotten more efficient, teaching remains labor-intensive.

Why we do it

Despite the long hours and low pay, teaching is something my colleagues and I do because of our passion for the field. Cindy Mediavilla, part-time lecturer for the UCLA Department of Information Studies and part-time library programs consultant for the California State Library, says that teaching is "the single most [worthwhile] thing I've ever done. There is absolutely nothing as rewarding as helping create new librarians with fresh ideas and an enthusiastic service attitude." Barbara Nichols Randall, director of the Guilderland Public Library, NY, who teaches cataloging part-time at the SUNY-Albany Department of Information Studies, uses real-life stories to share her love of cataloging and to persuade some of her students about the value of cataloging as a profession. Rick Block, head of special collections and metadata cataloging at Columbia University, teaches cataloging as an adjunct at both the Pratt Institute School of Information and Library Science and Palmer School of Library and Information Science at Long Island University. He admits that teaching gives him "a new perspective on some of our standards." Responding

to students' questions about the profession can be a wonderful intellectual challenge.

Another benefit is that teaching helps practitioners stay current. The professional literature for me is not just light reading. I subscribe to many library journals and often read them with pen in hand. I pull articles to send to my current students and mark those that illustrate a particular point for a future class. As I begin to ready myself for each new semester, I "browse" through LIS databases and occasionally find articles that are useful for class and for projects underway at UConn. I also demo some new e-resources at Simmons, which enables me to provide recommendations (or not!) for my UConn colleagues.

Ann Cullen, who teaches Business Information Sources and Services at Simmons and works full-time as a curriculum services librarian at Harvard Business School, stresses in an article in Harvard's *Library Notes* that with "the constant changes taking place on the Internet, it is important to accept that you can't know it all, and that's why teamwork and networking with your colleagues are so important." We teach not only technology itself but also how to use it, evaluate it, and work with others to improve its value.

Theory vs. practice

Several of my students and colleagues have said that adjuncts were their favorite professors in library school. They enjoy our practical approach to teaching and our anecdotes from the real world. Alphonse Vinh, who teaches two courses for the Catholic University of America School of Library and Information Science in Washington, DC, and also works as a reference librarian part-time at Georgetown University, emphasizes hands-on library experience in his reference courses.

I often share examples of my reference interactions at UConn to supplement a segment on question negotiation. I tell students my successes (finding the original 1923–24 article "Essai sur le Don" in *l'Année Sociologique*) as well as my failures

“THERE IS ABSOLUTELY NOTHING AS REWARDING AS HELPING CREATE NEW LIBRARIANS WITH FRESH IDEAS AND AN ENTHUSIASTIC SERVICE ATTITUDE.”

—CINDY MEDIAVILLA, CALIFORNIA STATE LIBRARY

(not finding political cartoons on immigration published in Spring 2006). I use both types of encounters to reinforce the value of conducting a good reference interview and being well versed in all the sources available in the library.

However, we can't only tell our students tales of what we did yesterday. We also have to explain why we work the way we do, so that when the world changes, "our" librarians will be able to cope and apply LIS theories to their new environment. Fortunately, the value of the reference interview doesn't change even as methods used to interact with patrons do. We must ask certain kinds of questions whether we are face-to-face with a patron, IMing a grandmother, or text-messaging a teen.

What else could LIS education do?

Library and information science education is fortunate to have a mix of newly minted undergraduates and second-career students in the classroom. Between us, the adjuncts I spoke with and I have taught attorneys, teachers and college professors, clergy, musicians, artists, child-care providers, civil servants, hospital staff, and business leaders. Our students range in age from their early 20s to their mid-60s. One of my colleagues commented that LIS schools could take better advantage of the diversity of our students' experiences; perhaps an approach that better integrates previous work experience into the classroom and libraries would benefit the profession. For instance, one student worked in a corporation for many years prior to library school, and that was very helpful when she worked with business students in a community college. Although she was new to librarianship, she was familiar with the business world and was able to relate that to students in a dynamic way.

Linda Fox, who taught as an adjunct for SUNY-Albany for several years and is now school library system director for the Capital Region Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES), believes she prepared her students well to be school librarians, but she thinks the LIS community is "not doing a great job preparing principals and school leaders to work with these new librarians." Many of her students were disappointed to work where "the principal felt threatened by their capabilities and expected them to stamp books and shush students." She would like to see library schools work with other leadership training programs so that school teachers and administrators have a better idea of what a school librarian can do. Then,

the school can take advantage of the librarian's expertise with technology and other library resources.

Bruce Rosenstein, reference librarian for *USA Today*, teaches a course on special libraries and information centers at Catholic University. He believes library education should offer more practical experience for students in the form of internships or consulting opportunities similar to those provided by MBA programs. At Simmons, archives students and those in the School Library Teacher Program gain real-world contact as part of their curriculum. Field work should be expanded to include reference; one of my students' favorite assignments is to observe actual reference interactions and then write about them.

Our former students

My ex-students are working in libraries around New England and on the West Coast in public, school, and academic libraries. I enjoy keeping in touch with them, especially hearing about their challenging reference issues. As Rosenstein says, "I am hopeful for the future of the profession, based on the quality and commitment of the students."

In the end, teaching part-time and working full-time is quite demanding, but the rewards offset the obstacles for me and many of my colleagues. Teaching serves as an outlet for my library evangelism in many ways. I have access to a variety of new library and technology resources, I read professional literature on different types of libraries that takes me beyond the walls of the academy, I am energized by students' questions, and, finally, I pass on my fervor to future librarians, who will pass it on to their patrons. ■

The *LJ* Teaching Award

**NOMINATION
DEADLINE
OCTOBER 1, 2007**

The *LJ* Teaching Award, sponsored by ProQuest, recognizes excellence in educating the next generation of librarians. This annual award, now in its first year, honors the winning LIS teacher with an article in *LJ* in the November 15 issue, a \$5000 prize, and a reception at the 2008 ALA Midwinter Meeting in Philadelphia.

NOMINEES WILL BE JUDGED ON THE FOLLOWING CRITERIA

- Illustrates student-centered thinking in all aspects of teaching
- Has track record as career builder: is a mentor and recognizes relationship to students can be career-long
- Communicates the core principles of librarianship, such as intellectual freedom, privacy, and a belief in the value of library service
- Effectively integrates theory, practice, and research, infusing teaching with real-life librarianship
- Is forward thinking: keeps up with cutting-edge issues in the profession and in teaching, including those dealing with technology and its uses in the library field

ELIGIBILITY Anyone who has taught a course at an ALA-accredited master's program since September 1, 2006, as full-time faculty or as an adjunct, is eligible.

WHO CAN NOMINATE Current students or recent graduates and faculty members are encouraged to nominate candidates. Students must have taken a class from the nominee within the past two years.

WHAT TO SUBMIT Candidates will be evaluated primarily on the basis of the nominating letter (no more than two pages in length or email equivalent), but nominators are welcome to submit also letters of support and supplementary material (examples of coursework, etc.) for the judges to consider.

NOMINATION POSTMARK DATE OCTOBER 1, 2007

Please send nominations to:

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