



V O L U M E 1 N U M B E R 4

::: AUGUST 2001 :::

FEATURE – Deirdre Dupré

The Perception of Image and Status in the Library Profession

During a conversation between Juanita and the author at our poster session at ALA, Deirdre brought up her research, which centers on the self-defeating ways librarians perpetuate professional anxiety over less than satisfactory status and preoccupy themselves with the image much more than the outside perception of librarians warrants. We invited Deirdre to share her research with you.

INTERVIEW – Joanna Kroll

Joanna Kroll, Career Services Coordinator at the University of Michigan's School of Information, tells us about what she does, provides some real life examples, talks about who is hiring recent grads, and advises on how to seek new challenges and directions for those of us already in the field. If you don't know all that your career center can do for you: read this interview. It may help you find and secure that first job, or perhaps look for another one.

PEOPLE

Richard Heinzkill is a friend, colleague, and mentor to both of us. He shares advice for new librarians gleaned from 30 years as a librarian.

ASK SUSU

Susu, our sometimes irreverent advice columnist, answers your questions about work, school, the job hunt, and librarianship in general. In this issue, Susu advises on ... well, let's just say she advises.

TECH TALK

Moaning, lost profiles, and deviant formats: mama never told me it was gonna rain like this.

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F E A T U R E A R T I C L E

::: AUGUST 2001 :::

The Perception of Image and Status in the Library Profession

DEIRDRE DUPRÉ

Ms. Dupré is a MLIS student at San Jose State University who recently began working part-time at the Sonoma State University Library in California. I met her at the NewBreed Librarian poster session this past June at ALA. The poster session sparked an adrenalizing conversation between us concerning librarians and their self image, specifically how librarians tend to be obsessed with "the stereotype" when everybody else really doesn't care. She brought up her research, which centers on the self-defeating ways librarians perpetuate professional anxiety over less than satisfactory status and preoccupy themselves with the image much more than the outside perception of librarians warrants.

Her research fascinated me, for I had experienced some of the situations she brought up. I remember first starting my job as an academic reference librarian and being told that the faculty in departments across campus don't think of librarians as equals; however, I had never experienced snubbing by any of the departmental faculty I worked with. I decided that my relations with faculty would determine the notions I formed of them and their ideas of me. I never passed on to newer librarians what I soon learned to be a common librarian's myth: we aren't valued.

I also witnessed doormat behavior, where librarians would repeatedly put themselves out to ingratiatingly accomodate a high-hat patron. From this I learned that if you project yourself as unworthy or less than, people will treat you that way. If you respect what you do and regard it as consequential, your time is just as important as the Superstar Faculty Researcher and Big Wig Pollywog. They will appreciate you for your backbone and respect what you can do for them.

Although I don't completely agree - at least not to the same degree - with everything Ms.Dupré writes in this paper, I think it is important that these ideas have a forum where they can be disseminated, evaluated, and discussed. And for the record, Deirdre is happy to report that the librarians she has met at the Sonoma State University Library have a very positive image of themselves as librarians and are quite proud of their profession. -Juanita

When I began my education in Library Science at San Jose State University and started reading the literature of the field, I was greatly dismayed to repeatedly read that librarians believe they are not respected as a professional group. The reading material I was exposed to was designed to educate new library science students on the history of libraries and librarianship, their connection to society, intellectual freedom, and the future of information dissemination. Yet while reading, I noticed a disturbing theme: librarians are very insecure about their profession - so insecure that it has become a pervasive anxiety throughout the field of librarianship. While some insecurity results from the undesirable physical stereotype of librarians perpetuated by the popular media, library literature is the

real offender as it portrays the more serious crisis of professional insecurity, i.e., the feeling of not being valuable or valued by others. To make matters worse, newcomers to the library profession adopt this insecurity through their exposure to the literature of the field, thereby creating a vicious cycle.

The Historical Context

The readings I studied in my courses offered numerous examples of library professionals lamenting their perceived poor status of the library field. Where did this concern with status begin? There had to be some impetus to not feeling valued. I found some fascinating possibilities in Richard E. Rubin's book *Foundations of Library and Information Science*.

One possibility is the founding of the American Library Association (ALA) in 1876. Rubin states that this was an "important guidepost" as the creation of the ALA "substantially increases professional identity" and provides "librarianship with an identity outside the profession" (2000). These statements, while seeming to promote the benefits of the presence of the ALA to the profession, actually illustrate Rubin's point of view (and potentially the point of view of the founders of the ALA): that the profession of librarianship did not currently have *enough* of an identity either inside or outside of the profession. By saying that the ALA was needed to increase professional identity, Rubin implies that the founders thought that the current professional identity was somehow lacking. Librarians of the time, impressed with the idea of being represented by their new professional association, may not have noticed the implied insult to their self-image, but simply internalized the idea that their profession was lacking a suitable identity. Perhaps now that the ALA was there for them, their profession would be more valued. But this kind of thinking reinforces the idea that librarianship was somehow not producing an acceptable self-image and was not already valued prior to the creation of the ALA.

Another possibility as to an initial source of librarians' professional insecurity is Melvil Dewey. Considered a "prime force in the professionalization of librarianship" (Rubin 2000), Dewey contributed hugely to the field of librarianship. Yet he may also have contributed to the lack of a secure self-image when he wrote "The time has come when a librarian may without assumption speak of his occupation as a profession" (Rubin 2000). Although he seemed to be trying to promote librarianship as a profession, his statement implies that for some, unnamed reason, before that "time" had come, librarians could not call their occupation a profession. Had not librarianship previously been a true profession?

The Current Context

A huge amount of professional uncertainty is passed on through library literature. When I read in Harris, Hannah, and Harris' book *Into the Future* that "The librarian of the electronic age could become a valued professional" (Harris et al. 1998), I think that librarians are not currently valued professionals. When suggesting that a librarian can *become* a valued professional, supported evidence is needed to show that the librarian was *not* already a valued professional.

Professional insecurity is also spread throughout the profession by the fact that librarians spend much time and energy in an effort to connect to each other through writing and professional organizations. Professional organizations abound and membership is highly recommended by library science educators. Yet George Bobinski wonders in his article, *Is the Library Profession Over-Organized?* about the "proliferation of library associations" (2000). Bobinski declares that librarians spend "too much time talking and writing to ourselves" in professional library organizations and publications. Since a good number of these written communications focus on the lack of status of the library profession, how to improve librarians' status, image stereotypes of librarians, and similar themes these writings are a supremely effective way for members of the library profession to obsess about their status anxiety.

A prime example of this obsession over status anxiety is seen in the regular column introduced by American Libraries entitled "**Image: How They're Seeing Us.**" This column continued from January 1985 through 1988 and "highlighted representations of librarians and their work from various media" (Engle 1998). The three-year existence of a column - in the main journal for the profession published by the ALA - that focused solely on the image of librarians is a prime example of the obsessive nature with which librarians undertake the issue of their image.

This obsession with image is detrimental to librarians' perception of their professional status. Many articles in library journals record instances and complain about examples (from popular media) of the stereotypical image of the librarian as an old spinster with a bun and sensible shoes. But this obsession with the physical-image stereotype is partly responsible for the professional anxiety that plagues librarianship. As Roma Harris points out "librarians' self-consciousness with their image is counterproductive especially when it leads to self-depreciation of their profession" (Rubin 2000). It seems that physical-image issues are at the root of professional insecurity and need to be eliminated for librarians to improve their perceptions of their professional status. In relating a fellow librarian's experience with image stereotypes, Angelynn King comments that "having internalized [other people's stereotypes] himself he's making [the stereotypes] worse" (1999). Obsession with image and internalization of negative stereotypical images have caused librarians to doubt the worthiness of the profession as a whole. It's not the stereotype that's the problem, it's the *obsession* with the stereotype.

Analysis of the Current Situation

The references for this paper show the large number of current resources centered on the issue of image and librarianship. I contend that these writings are the main method of causing others to adopt the field's professional anxiety. For example, Dan T. Hutchins and Joan Davis mention in their article that "ALA has a serious problem: How do you make a ... job, one that carries with it no social status or power ... attractive? If ever there were a profession badly in need of reinventing itself this is the one!" (Hutchins & Travis 2000). By sharing their poor professional image in writing, Mr. Hutchins and Ms. Davis add to the library field's professional insecurity. The authors focus on what they perceive as lacking in the library profession and inform others that librarians clearly have no social status or power.

Not surprisingly, there is an entire website devoted to "**Image and The Librarian**" (Marinelli & Baker). This website was very informative for my research, but it unfortunately perpetuates librarians' unhealthy self-concept with articles such as, "We Aren't a Stereotype" by Hutchins, "The Image of Librarians: Substance or Shadow?" by Schuman, "Just a Librarian? Who Do They Think We Are?" by Valenza, "Our Image as Images Go" by Manley, and "And We Wonder About Our Image!" by Herring.

When a library science student reads material like this, he might believe that librarians have a bad professional image both inside and outside the profession. That student then graduates library science school and begins working in the field as a librarian bringing his poor professional image with him and sharing it with his colleagues. His colleagues also share their professional anxiety with him, thereby reinforcing everyone's insecurities. The librarian begins to publish articles on the topic of professional insecurity in library science journals, struggling to shed some light on why no one seems to respect librarians. He reads the writings of others in the field who also worry over the poor image of librarians. All of these writings are then read by the next crop of library science students, and the cycle is repeated. Just as Bulimia and Anorexia can be passed from one person to another through intimacy - for example the closeness shared by college roommates (Comer 1996) - librarians pass their professional image anxiety to others in the profession and to those just joining the profession through their working relationships and their published writings.

Then there are the new breed of "image busters" (Brewerton 1999) that are striving to show an alternative view of what it means to be a librarian. Sites like the [Anarchist Librarian](#), the [Belly Dancing Librarian](#), [Librarian Avengers](#), and the [Modified Librarian](#) seem to present a unified front of librarian pride. These alternative librarians offer glimpses into the varied lifestyles of librarians to show their pride in all parts of their lifestyle (including their chosen career as librarians), but are once again trying to combat the stereotype of the bun-wearing librarian. I think that the considerable time and energy these librarians are spending to buck the physical-image stereotype of librarians indicates that they too are obsessed with the image of librarians. As mentioned earlier, Roma Harris concludes that self-consciousness with image damages a librarian's perception of the value of the profession. Publicizing that a librarian can also be a belly dancer or have a tattoo, these librarians are actually defending the worth of professional librarianship. While it is admirable that these librarians are making an effort to uphold their profession as worthy, the underlying message is "we are here to convince you (and ourselves) that we are worthy since society doesn't recognize our merit." However, I am left with the impression that they are not yet convinced of their professional utility. Still, I must admit that the alternative librarians' declaration of professional pride, shared by showing the variety of librarians' personal interests, is at least a positive attempt to improve the image of librarians to those outside the profession.

In studying this issue I fear that my hyper-focus on the perception of image and status has caused my objectivity to disappear and I too have adopted the library field's poor professional image. I realize that while I am criticizing the tendency to be overly concerned with image, I too have fallen into the librarian-image collecting hobby. In doing the research for this paper I was enthralled by each successive article, comic, or web site that portrayed librarians. So my premise about the contagious nature of image consciousness is evidenced by my own experience with becoming overly sensitive about the image of librarians. Even Brewerton admits to being "obsessed with the image of our profession" (1999) as a result of his research on the topic. Librarians are doomed to remain insecure about the profession because we are still so obsessed with our image.

To combat this, we must separate the issue of professional insecurity from the issue of distaste for the physical-image stereotype. For while the physical-image stereotype is annoying, it should not be given such importance as to erode the professional pride librarians *should* have for their profession. Andrew Pace points out in his article, *Marketing Our Strengths*, that "we all make jokes about lawyers, mechanics, politicians, etc., but when it comes down to it we all still rely on their services. Satirizing professional images has become ... a postmodern activity" (2000). By relegating the physical-image stereotype to nothing more than a joke, and not allowing the stereotype to grow into a commentary on the value of the profession, librarians can focus on healing the professional insecurity that is so pervasive in the field.

Implications for Library Management

Professional insecurity is not typically considered a management issue. The literature on librarians and image tends to be op-ed pieces that do not mention management topics. Books, and chapters in books, focus on historical overviews of the library field. Yet it is important to notice that the current problematic perception of both the librarians' image and the profession's status was brought about by the profession's procedures in the management areas of organizational structure, leadership, power and authority, and communication.

By looking at the whole library profession as a single organization we can better understand how one librarian's actions can affect others in the field. The organizational structure of the library profession promotes the sharing of opinions and attitudes through the profession's literature and group gatherings

like conventions. Additionally, new members to the organization (library science students) are indoctrinated into the current prevailing attitudes via their professors' attitudes, exposure to the opinions voiced in the assigned readings, and the highly encouraged (if not mandatory) membership into professional associations, as well as attendance at professional conventions. This organizational structure allows for a communication of perceptions that is similar to how, in a single library, the attitude of the director can trickle down to affect all the employees of that library. Likewise, the attitude of leaders in the library profession can affect all the members of the profession. Organizational structure then, plays a large part in allowing professional insecurity and obsession with image to be perpetually communicated to all members.

Since leaders in librarianship are often also the main authors of the literature in our field, and because prolific authors are granted leadership status in a field that values the written word, the librarians who write for professional journals and publish books have a tremendous amount of influence on the profession. When a librarian is allowed to publish an article in a professional journal it is implied that the views expressed in the article are somehow valid simply by their being published. In a juried publication, the accepted articles carry the stamp of having been accepted by well-respected leaders in the field, giving the articles and the authors even more clout. Since authors of professional literature in library science are almost automatically given leadership status in the field, the question of authority arises. Authority is often mistakenly attributed to those in power simply because power and authority often go together. It seems that both power and authority are granted to authors in the library profession due to the simple fact that they are published, giving them an opportunity to contribute to the continuing professional insecurity through their writings.

Additionally, professional insecurity greatly affects traditional management concerns like employee motivation, recruitment of librarians, retention of quality staff, and salary issues. A librarian suffering from professional insecurity may feel generally lackluster about his job, resulting in an unmotivated work style. It is difficult for a librarian to muster up enthusiasm for his daily work if he feels that his profession is not a worthy one. Likewise, librarians who feel professionally insecure may be tempted to look for another line of work, or may job hop from library to library in an attempt to find the element supposedly lacking in their chosen career. Plus, a librarian who feels insecure about his profession is more likely to desire a large salary to ease his feelings of professional anxiety. All of these situations cause extra work for managers who need to constantly replace employees.

Since the problem of professional insecurity is currently disseminated throughout the entire library field (though admittedly not adopted by every single librarian), and is perpetuated at library conventions and in professional literature, the solution requires a grass roots approach. If the librarians at a single library are able to overcome their professional insecurity, then those librarians can begin to help their colleagues by sharing their new outlook in library journals and at future conventions. If this is repeated at several institutions a new pride in librarianship can begin to spread out across the entire profession. Thus, library managers can help their employees overcome professional insecurity by finding ways to show their own pride. Bob Usherwood proposes in his article, *Rediscover the Public Librarian: Your Value and Worth*, that it is time to "rediscover our confidence in ourselves and our professional skills" (2000). Usherwood's article has many examples of how librarians prove their value by what they provide to society. Thus, the focus of management should not be to combat poor image or professional insecurity directly, but rather to focus on what services, expertise, and efforts to protect intellectual freedom that librarians provide for their patrons and society at large. Andrew Pace suggests "it's time we got over our public image and started concentrating on the portrayal of the services that libraries provide" (2000).

Prospects for the Future

Jennifer Cram, in writing about the self limitations that librarians place on themselves states "the real limitations that rob us of our freedom to make the best of what we have and/or what we are, have to do with the way we see ourselves..." (1991). This then is the key realization that librarians need to arrive at to begin to change their perception that the library profession holds an inferior status. Once librarians let everyone know (including their peers) that librarianship is something to be proud of, that the profession of being a librarian is worthy, then the idea that the library profession's status is in trouble will begin to die out. However, this paradigm-breaking idea that the library profession is valuable must be shared with considerable subtlety. Cram points out that "the more you shout that there is no problem, the more you plant the idea that there is a problem" (1991). This was the paradox of Dewey's pronouncement that the profession was now something to be proud of; it planted the idea that the profession was somehow shoddy previously. This was also the problem that I found with the alternative librarian websites, that they were trying too hard to convince the public of their professional pride and instead seemed unconvinced themselves.

A more successful approach is for librarians to be reserved when sharing the message that the library profession is highly valued by those in the profession. When a person is utterly convinced of the value of his profession he does not need to force others to believe in his professional pride with lots of loud proclamations. Instead his actions, like encouraging others to join the profession, remaining with and succeeding highly at his organization, and exuding confidence that his profession is valued by his peers and society, show that he has no professional insecurity. This way, librarians can convince their peers and the outside world as to the greatness of what they do.

An excellent example of a librarian refusing to add to the spread of professional insecurity and instead sharing an idea for fostering self-love within the profession is GraceAnne DeCandido's 1996 commencement address "[Ten Graces for New Librarians](#)" given to the graduating class of the School of Information Science and Policy at the State University of New York at Albany. She states:

"Develop a strong sense of your own self-worth and the worth of the profession. Honor and respect the women and men you work with... . In the words of the ancient Jewish philosopher Hillel 'If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And if I am only for myself, what am I? If not now, when?'"

If heeded, DeCandido's words would spread enthusiasm for the profession to all those currently in the profession who have unfortunately already adopted the insecurities of the field. An influx into the field of librarianship of new librarians who are proud of their profession can instigate an innovative, healthy professional pride.

In conclusion, the solution to the problem of librarians' poor perception of both their image and the status of the library profession has several steps. First, separate the issue of obsession with physical-image stereotypes from the issue of professional insecurity, so that the physical-image issue can be seen in humorous light and given much less control over librarians' self perception. Second, persuade library managers to encourage their employees' pride in the profession by offering themselves as examples of librarians who are secure about the status of librarianship as a profession. Third, have those librarians who feel proud of their profession, especially librarians new to the field, share their uplifting attitude with colleagues through writings published in the professional literature.

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F E A T U R E I N T E R V I E W

::: AUGUST 2001 :::

Joanna Kroll is the Career Services Coordinator at the University of Michigan's School of Information. She has a master's degree in career counseling, and has been working in career services for 3 years. She came to the School of Information about 8 months ago where she's been learning to appreciate the diversity of the library field. She shares a symbiotic relationship with her students: they are her capital source of information and she is the main aorta that networks with a myriad of opportunities, carrying them out of school and into their first jobs. Joanna continuously asks for and receives input on the kind of programs and workshops work for the students and then tailors the entire year based on student feedback.

In this interview, she tells us about what she does, provides some real life examples, talks about who is hiring recent grads, and advises on how to seek new challenges and directions for those of us already in the field. If you don't know all that your career center can do for you: read this interview. It may help you find and secure that first job, or perhaps look for another one.

NewBreed Librarian: What do you do for students?

Joanna Kroll: In the broadest sense, I help students to be successful on their career path. I provide services and resources that make that journey less confusing, less intimidating and more successful (hopefully!). Some of the services I provide include the following:

1. **Individual Career Counseling/Advising Sessions:** Students come to me to discuss various career-related topics, such as targeting a job search, networking, writing cover letters/resumes, interviewing techniques, negotiating salaries, etc.
2. Throughout the academic year, I coordinate and present **career-related workshops, seminars and panel sessions**. Some of these workshops/seminars include: résumé writing, mock interviews, finding your "ideal" internship, how to negotiate a salary, successful networking ... I try to bring in employers and HR professionals to share their expertise on these panels. This proves to be a great way to connect students with employers.
3. **Coordinating recruiting services:** On-campus interviewing, employer outreach (establishing and maintaining strong relationships with employers), résumé collections, serving as a point of initial contact for employers and advising employers on recruitment strategies and services.
4. **Managing a web-based database** of full-time, part-time and internship positions (<http://www.si.umich.edu/careers/>). Students can search for positions by career fields, location, work type and keyword. It is my job to keep our postings up to date and representative of all career fields related to the specializations offered at the School of Information (Library and

Information Services, Archives and Records Management, Human Computer Interaction, Information Economics, Management and Policy).

NBL: Why should students use a career center?

JK: Students should utilize as many resources as possible on their career development path. Utilizing Career Services can make career decisions and the internship/job search that much easier. We can provide excellent contact resources, from the name of an alum at a certain organization, to key faculty members, to contact information of recruiters in various work settings (public libraries, academic libraries, corporate libraries, special libraries, corporations, non-profit organizations, etc.). It is a Career Service Coordinator's job to be knowledgeable about the employment outlook and employment trends, and to know what employers want to hear in an interview or see on a résumé. Utilizing your career center can only help make your job search a successful one.

NBL: What are some of the services your students might not know about?

JK: Although we publicize our career services to our students quite thoroughly, students may not be aware of the content of some of the services. Students may not be aware of how helpful and informative our workshops/seminars are. For example, attending a résumé writing workshop can show a student the difference between writing a résumé for a professional job and the curriculum vita that they may be used to. Students also may not realize that attending an employer panel is a great way to network and may lead to an internship or job.

Students may not be aware of the services open to them by the centralized career center on campus. Many of the employers who recruit through centralized career centers are employers who hire SI students. Registering with the centralized career center can be just another resource in the student's job search. They offer many more large-scale job fairs and programs that can be relevant to the School of Information students.

NBL: Can you give me some real-life examples of how students have used your services?

JK: Here are a few successful examples of students who used career services.

I coordinated a panel of professionals working for non-profits in Community information/technology. I encouraged students who had an interest in this area to attend and to bring résumés. By the end of the program, 4 students had internship interviews set up. Two of our students were offered great internships for the summer working in the capacity of information architects for non-profit organizations. A similar situation occurred during another employer panel I coordinated. This was a panel of librarians from various settings (public, academic, corporate, digital libraries). These panels have proven to be a great way for students to connect with employers.

A recent grad began her job search 1-2 months before graduating. She was a bit apprehensive about her job search and began frequent visits with me. Initially, we targeted libraries in her geographic preference. She began to contact them and send résumés, but she wasn't getting responses. We talked about the importance of following up after a résumé is sent, and I provided her with more contact information (other than just an HR person). She began following up after her résumés were sent. As a result, she's had numerous interviews, followed by numerous job offers. She never thought she would be in the position of turning down job offers. Next we worked on the art of negotiating salaries. She has

been offered a position in a corporate library, making more money than she ever thought she would as a librarian.

NBL: I noticed on your Who is hiring SI grads? page that more than half of the examples listed are outside the traditional purview of librarianship. How do you help students find these types of jobs? If someone wants an alternative to libraries, where can they begin looking for ideas and workplaces where they can use their MLS?

JK: More and more organizations are realizing their need for the skills of a librarian. These skills are no longer limited to cataloging, reference, and collection development. These skills include highly technical skills in the areas of information architecture, web development, usability design/engineering, interactive media, software development, e-commerce, and knowledge management.

One way I connect with employers in these areas is by collaborating with other career service departments on campus. The Engineering school and Business school have employers who recruit through their schools, but who also hire the School of Information's students. By working together with these career centers on various career programs, more of these employers become aware of the skills and credentials of our students. Thus, creating a recruiting relationship with SI begins.

I also conduct employer site visits to meet with various organizations to talk about the School of Information. This includes our various specializations, curriculum, skills and credentials of our students. Employer outreach at the School of Information has proven to be a well-received task. I provide employers with résumés of our students, or direct them to our résumé web page. This is a great way to establish and maintain strong recruiting relationships with many organizations.

SI Career Services also conducts large mailings to targeted employers for various events, such as the Virtual Career Fair that is put on by the College of Engineering, Business School, School of Information and the Alumni Association. Another mailing goes out to targeted employers for our Bi-annual ExpoSition. The expoSition is like a reverse job fair - our students display their research or academic projects, and employers come throughout the day to view the displays and connect with students. Résumés are also provided by the students. A third mailing goes out yearly to employers inviting them to participate in our on-campus interviewing program. The publicity through these mailings helps the School of Information gain exposure in various work environments, increasing the variety and number of employers recruiting our students.

NBL: One last question - do you have any advice for librarians who are already working in the field and are looking for a new career challenge?

JK: The most general advice I can give is to be **PROACTIVE AND SELF-PROMOTE!**

Educate prospective employers to the fact that librarians have a great deal to offer that can be of value in a variety of settings, including marketing, publishing, consulting, web development, etc. Librarians are experts in organization, research and evaluation, and these are essential skills that can be transferred into various work settings.

Where do I start?

Use the contacts you've made with your library users in your organization and set up informational interviews. This is a great networking activity to connect with prospective employers. Leave your

résumé and take their card. Make sure to follow-up! If you impress them and really sell yourself, I'm sure you'll be contacted when there is an opening.

Tailor a skills-based résumé to each job you apply for. Emphasize how library skills will relate to the activities of that job. Create a section on your résumé that really highlights your technical skills. Librarians' technological skills are improving their employment prospects by leaps and bounds!

With all of these employment options open to Librarians, make sure that you find the right "fit" for you. Do what you do best and research, research, research. Check out the [Occupational Outlook Handbook](#), read many job descriptions/postings, conduct informational interviews. Take advantage of your networking circle (peers, co-workers, faculty, alum). If you are making a career change, make sure it's the right one for you.

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P E O P L E

::: AUGUST 2001 :::



Richard Heinzkill is a friend, colleague, and mentor to both of us. He shares advice for new librarians gleaned from 30 years as a librarian.

Several months ago, I officially became a greybeard - I retired. For some reason your editors thought I might have some pearls of wisdom to pass on to NewBreed librarians. You can be the judge if indeed they are pearls of wisdom; but first a few words of introduction...

I went to library school in the days when computers were huge machines kept in air-conditioned rooms somewhere on campus. They were obviously expensive. They were obviously so complicated they could only be run by experts. I ended my career with a networked computer on my desk. If you had told me at the start I would have a computer on my desk at the end of my career I would have said you were describing pure science fiction and I wanted no part of it.

I reluctantly acknowledged that it looked as if computers were here to stay and were probably going to affect the library world, but I also knew that without programming skills, I would never be able to "work" one and inasmuch as I wanted to be a librarian and not a programmer, why bother getting excited about the impact of computers on librarianship? How wrong I was.

Previous to library school I had taken catalog cards for granted. But now I began to take a closer look at them. Some were handwritten in ink. Many were obviously old. Because we lived in the age of the typewriter, I knew I would not be writing catalog cards by hand. I noticed the typed cards were often in black and red letter. How nifty, I thought. I would get to use my two-color ribbon.

Creating catalog cards looked like fun until I noticed that the spacing from card to card was almost identical and the indentations seemed to follow some sort of logic. Logical or not, their similarity was too confining a concept for this library school student. Couldn't one use some imagination in presenting the information? Little did I know what I was hoping for.

Librarians have let their imagination work in creating catalogs that vary radically from library to library. No more similar looking cards. Thirty years later I have used catalogs that require two and three clicks to get all the bibliographic information a single catalog card presented immediately. (Don't get me wrong. I'm not another Nicholas Baker - I wouldn't trade the computerized catalog for anything.)

In library school I did learn the difference between description and subject analysis (i.e. classification and subject headings), all of which was later to prove quite useful. But still useful for today's librarian? I would like to think so, at least when dealing with the traditional book. However, as librarians gear up to make the off-site library possible (i.e. sitting at home retrieving e-texts) classification does seem to be an arcane, if not archaic, skill really not needed by today's librarian. At this point I could launch into long discourse how classification of documents aids in retrieval, but the truth of the matter is that the public cannot be bothered.

This brings me to my first maxim: **Be prepared to be ignored.**

We have been overwhelmed by what is going on around us. Yahoo!® used to boast of the librarians they employed. Not any more. The ads for ASK JEEVESSM feature the types of questions public library reference people answer every day (although not as much anymore). The cry is: ASK JEEVES, not the librarian!

To borrow some phrases and thoughts from a recent column by Carol Tenopir in *Library Journal* ("Why I Still Teach Dialog," May 1, 2001): **get under the hood!** Translated, this means don't be a consumer only of what vendors are pushing, but learn as much as you can about the whys and wherefores of databases, what makes them tick. Give the vendors intelligent feedback, not just grouching. Be proactive; for instance, pushing for a standard relevance formula for full-text database searching would be a step in the right direction.

Taking this same idea into one's own backyard, be aware of what some of the concerns are of the reference people, if you are a cataloger; if you are a reference person, what the issues facing collection development? The library world is more and more inter-related. **Think broadly.**

My personal maxim has been: **let the early adopters go first.** In case you are not familiar with the "early adopter" phenomenon, these are the people who can hardly wait for the next release of their favorite software. They volunteer to test early versions of software. They want to be the first to use the latest operating system, bugs be damned. Let them! But be aware that sooner or later you will be asked (or forced) to adopt and adapt. One ignores the technology at one's own peril. After the initial hullabaloo has settled, as if it appears to be living up to its promise (read: hype). Is it relevant to what I am doing?

What are librarianship's core values? (I know library schools have spent untold hours wrestling with this question.) But more importantly, **what are my core values as a librarian?** To save the time of the user? I want to make a difference. Look around for ways to do so and you will find yourself growing personally and professionally.

Stay around long enough, and things will come around again in a slightly different guise. What is reference 24/7 but mail and phone reference computerized and extended in time with many of the same issues this kind of reference has always had. Storage facilities for academic libraries were tried with lukewarm success, but easy access to records via a networked computer, improved methods of inventory control, increased building costs for a full service library are giving storage facilities new reasons for being. Society expects librarians to be conservators of the representation of the text. But now faced with the electronic texts, librarians are scrambling to fulfill an old role with a new medium.

My last maxim is: **be aware of organizational change.** I think we tend to concentrate on relating to the people in our organization. However, look beyond the person to the kind of organizational culture that person is trying to instill. Leaders want to put their stamp on the organization. Try to discern what that is. Try to see the overall image that is being presented to the outside world. Once you have done that you will be better able to judge specific proposals as they emanate from the top.

Follow all these (which I pass on to you, having learned some of them the hard way!) and you should have a full and rewarding career as I have had. Good luck!

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A S K S U S U

::: AUGUST 2001 :::

Susu, our sometimes irreverent advice columnist, answers your questions about work, school, the job hunt, and librarianship in general. In this issue, Susu advises on ... well, let's just say she advises.

Dear Susu, I am a new MLS and am interviewing for jobs in public and school libraries, as this is where all of my experience lies. I kind of wish I had gone for classwork which had prepared me for the more lucrative corporate or law librarian positions, but I don't think they are going to be too thrilled with my reader's advisory and youth services credentials, so public and school libraries it is. And herein lies the problem - my interviewers are almost invariably middle-aged women who refuse to believe that I am also in that category. I dress as conservatively as possible, mid-calf skirts, low-heeled shoes, hair up, minimal makeup, and I still get the "oh, how young you look" response which always translates to mean "we're going to hire someone who looks 10 years older" (and usually turns out to be 10 years younger). I mean, I am flattered that I am mistaken for being barely out of my teens when I am actually 37 years old, but if I don't get a job soon I am going to be the youngest-looking bag lady living under the freeway overpass. What can I do when, no matter how hard I try, I just don't seem to have the right "look" for my interviewers? Do I gain 50 pounds? Highlight my wrinkles with eyebrow pencil? Dye my hair grey? What?

Dear Age-Defier, I recommend concentrating on your resume, interviewing skills, and attitude. If, after you've worked on these three and you still don't have a job, have a wild and reckless weekend and schedule an interview for the following Monday morning. You'll look 12 years older and - if that's what they're looking for - you'll get the job.

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Moaning, lost profiles, and deviant formats: mama never told me it was gonna rain like this.

We were sitting in Reference Conference one morning. Reference Conference is a group therapy session that we go to every Wednesday morning to discuss the prior week's problems, what's happening, assignments, patron problems, problem patrons - you know, stuff.

As this particular session progressed, we began thinking about how much of our therapy (i.e., meeting) time was devoted to technology issues, particularly our public workstations. We wondered what someone new to librarianship, sitting in this meeting, would think about how we spent our time. We imagined they would think that reference librarians spend a ton of time dissecting and discussing technological glitches, that we're some kind of pod people inhabited by wanna-be computer geeks (some of us actually *were* computer geeks in a former incarnation, but that's another story). To illustrate the sometimes bizarre turns these meetings often take, we thought we'd share a few examples of what we covered in this particular one.

- **Lost profiles** - Lost profiles? What in the bleepin' bleepity-bleep is a lost profile?! Seems to be some kind of computer amnesia, where every once in a while a computer on the network loses track of its identity (this is too weird) and takes on a new one. Or wait, maybe it remembers its old one. Rebooting will sometimes help, and at other times the computer regains its identity seemingly on its own, switching personalities right in the middle of a search. You can imagine the patron's surprise when the colors change from a restful turquoise to garish neon - or perhaps her delight (and relief) when it's the other way around.
- **Moaning** - Some computers hum, others whine, still others grind away until you're ready to put them out of their misery. But every once in a while we get the unusual loner that prefers to emit a low, persistent moan. If you close your eyes and stand very still, you could almost swear it's channelling a brothel.
- **Deviant formats** - This is our absolute favorite. In fact, if we had thought about it at the time, deviantformats.org would have been an excellent substitute for NewBreed Librarian. This refers to patrons' expectation that you install every plug-in known to man, woman, and beastulax. Of course, technology's always changing, and as hard as we try to be *cutting edge*, we can't possibly keep up unless we hire 5 more Travis' in our Systems department. So don't give us any lip, Mr. Deviant Formats.

Part of the meeting was devoted to a discussion about how technology was going to turn our aging, somewhat decrepit public workstations into speed demons. The magical solution? A terminal server. Normally what we do is create a master image of the hard drive from a public workstation, then copy it

to the hard drive of all the other public workstations. But with a terminal server, we can create a master image on the server (let's call it the mother ship), then each of the public workstations connects with the mother ship to receive instructions and software, just like the Borgs do. Predictably, however, there are always a few glitches to be worked out ... as Bill might have put it, the course of technology never did run smooth.

- **Uniprint popups don't work** - Uniprint is the name of our pay-for-print software (or at least it was at one time - I think it's Pharos now). Our systems folks discovered that the Uniprint software was incompatible with the terminal server in one significant way: it couldn't display the popup boxes that ask patrons to type in a name. So there would be no way for a student to differentiate his print job from everyone else's. He would find some cryptic combination of letters and numbers representing the network name of the computer that sent the job. How in the holy of holies is the student supposed to recognize the assigned job name? It's simple - he's not gonna. This failure to communicate led to...
- **Naming computers with recognizable names** - currently our public computers have memorable names like PT001, PT002, and so on. Apparently our pay-for-print software requires it. But we used to name our computers after trees (until the imaginative names like PTxxx came along). If we used a terminal server, could we go back to naming our computers after trees? They were much nicer. And if we did that, how would our patrons know which of our two print stations to go to? Would we divide the names into two tree groups, like deciduous and evergreen? tropical and boreal? Would we even be limited to trees? What about boys' names that start with D for one print station and girls' names that start with Q for the other (honestly, this conversation really happened). This train of thought led to ...
- **Selling raffle tickets for the privilege of annihilating our pay-for-print system** (not the company, just our own equipment). Wouldn't this be a great fundraiser for the library? When people came up the desk to complain about printing, we could offer them a raffle ticket to pound on one of our print stations. The Reference librarians alone would contribute enough to finance a trip to Vegas...

The therapy session ended with an invitation from the Systems department to stop by and try to crash the terminal server before we made it available to the public. For some reason, our Systems folks have the idea that we possess the singular ability to bring down our computer systems in ways that wouldn't occur to them in a million years. We'll just keep the truth - that it's our patrons who are the talented ones - all to ourselves.

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