
Volume 13
Number 1

New Voices/New Views: The Next Wave of Librarians (Spring 2007)

July 2014

What's a Second-Grader Doing in Special Collections?: Academic Libraries Reach Out to K-12 Schools

Sue Kunda
Oregon State University

Recommended Citation

Kunda, S. (2014). What's a Second-Grader Doing in Special Collections?: Academic Libraries Reach Out to K-12 Schools. *OLA Quarterly*, 13(1), 22-25. <http://dx.doi.org/10.7710/1093-7374.1148>

© 2014 by the author(s).

OLA Quarterly is an official publication of the Oregon Library Association | ISSN 1093-7374

What's a Second Grader Doing in Special Collections?

Academic Libraries Reach Out to K–12 Schools

by Sue Kunda

Digital Production Unit,
OSU Libraries

MLS Candidate (expected
graduation date 2008), School
of Library and Information
Management, Emporia State
University

Allison carefully puts the white cotton gloves on her hands and gingerly sorts through the photographs on the table in front of her, looking for local historical buildings and landmarks. Her classmates are spread out around the room conducting searches of their own, using materials provided by library staff.

Before tackling a research project, Tyler's class meets with reference librarians in the library's electronic classroom. After a period of guided practice and independent searching, Tyler feels confident he can find the information he needs to complete his paper. One of the librarians hands him her business card, encouraging him to call, e-mail, or IM her with any questions he has.

Jena spent the last year consulting with scientists, physicians, and nutritionists for a research project on celiac disease. After defending her thesis, Jena's paper is deposited into the university library's institutional repository where it can be accessed by other interested scholars.

Scenes like this occur daily in academic libraries but what makes these stories different are the students. Would it surprise you to discover Allison is ten years old and in the fourth grade? What about Tyler? He is a seventh grader at the local middle school. And Jena? Now that she has finished the required senior year research project she's on course to graduate next month—from high school.

With today's decreasing budgets and increasing workloads why would academic libraries stretch their already limited resources to develop partnerships with K–12 schools? Oregon's public schools and higher education institutes traditionally compete for the same spending dollars. What, then, compels academic librarians to share their "piece of the pie" with the competition?

It's the kids. Imagine the excitement of an eight-year old touching a cuneiform tablet dating from 3350 BC. Or the infectious enthusiasm of a group of sixth graders verbally sparring over a passage from *The Giver*. Even high school students are visibly

impressed with the scholarly environment of an academic library. In spite of budget woes, time constraints, and heavy workloads, educators at all levels are searching for ways to provide the best possible education for every student, not just those with whom they have direct contact.

Information Literacy and School Success

Academic librarians realize that today's high schoolers are tomorrow's college students, many of whom arrive on campus completely unprepared for the rigors of academic work. While more than three-quarters of graduating seniors in the U.S. enroll in either a four-year or community college within two years of graduation, more than half of them fail to earn any type of degree, in part due to their inability to read and understand complex material. Additionally, more than half of college instructors feel freshmen lack adequate information literacy skills—skills essential for higher education's academic environment (Peter D. Hart Research Associates/Public Opinion Strategies, 2005).

What are information literacy skills? The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) sees an information literate student as one who can:

- Determine the extent of information needed
- Access the needed information effectively and efficiently
- Evaluate information and its sources critically
- Incorporate selected information into one's knowledge base
- Use information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose



- Understand the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information, and access and use information ethically and legally

Why are these skills so important? Again, the ACRL sees information literacy skills as the very basis for lifelong learning; they allow students to:

- access materials in a productive and timely fashion;
- navigate the complex technological information landscape;
- combat information overload;
- improve self-directed learning;
- simulate skills necessary in the workforce;
- set a foundation for lifelong learning; and
- enjoy a rich personal life.

Information literacy does not start at the high school door. Librarians at all levels recognize the important role these skills play in ensuring student success. In 1998 the ACRL joined forces with the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) to encourage partnerships between the two entities. The resulting Blueprint for Collaboration (<http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrl-pubs/whitepapers/acrlaaslblueprint.htm>) outlines ways these two organizations can initiate and foster collaborations to meet the information literacy needs of all students.

Statewide Collaborations

The two projects described below are examples of partnerships involving extensive discussion and planning, as well as funding



The truth is that, ideally, literacy is a life-long process that begins with learning to read and continues with becoming steadily more literate as the years go by. Literacy, seen as the spectrum of ability that it is, is clearly the concern of all libraries ... from research institutions to elementary schools (Gorman, 1995).

from statewide organizations, before they were established.

Calisphere: A World of Primary Sources

(<http://www.calisphere.universityofcalifornia.edu/>)

Calisphere is a teacher's dream-come-true. This University of California, California Digital Library (CDL) project focused solely on transforming CDL research-based digital resources into appealing and accessible collections for K–12 teachers. In 2006, after countless hours of teacher interviews, Web site modifications, and usability testing by CDL and UC Berkeley's Interactive University, Calisphere was launched.

The Web site houses more than 150,000 digitized primary sources—photographs, newspaper clippings, correspondence, documents, diaries, and works of art. The themed collections, organized by historical era, include sets of appropriate images, brief overviews of historical issues, and classroom discussion questions, all aligned with California's State Board of Education Content



Standards. Teachers and students alike now have easy access to printable, high-quality, credible images to supplement lesson plans, course materials, and class projects

UDLib/Search

(<http://udlibsearch.lib.udel.edu/>)

Delaware is committed to bridging the digital divide—the gap between those having access to the Internet and those who don’t—and students, parents, educators, and state officials are thrilled. The University of Delaware Library, with funding from the Department of Education, provides online access to more than a dozen periodical and encyclopedia databases to all computers in Delaware’s K–12 public schools. Along with negotiating subscription and licensing agreements for the databases, the University of Delaware Library also provides related training and support to all K–12 school librarians, teachers, and administrators.

Local Collaborations

Collaborations don’t have to be complicated or expensive, however, to be effective. Wanting to promote literacy, reading for pleasure, and family reading habits, University of

Florida academic librarians partnered with a local middle school to form a parent-child 6th grade reading group. Administrators enthusiastically endorsed the project and classroom teachers loved the idea of highly-educated personnel donating their time and talents to provide educational opportunities for the students (Malanchuk, 2006).

University of Colorado Special Collections Librarian, Michelle Visser, regularly partners with local elementary, middle, and high school librarians to provide students with programs on a wide range of subjects. WWII springs to life for high school students seeing a book once held and signed by Adolf Hitler. A middle school writing club poring over Emily Dickinson’s original work is mesmerized by the poet’s handwriting. Illustrated medieval manuscripts spark a group of fourth grade boys’ imaginations. A trip to the University of Colorado Library never fails to inspire discussion and, at times, can even ignite a student’s passion (Visser, 2005).

Possibilities for Oregon

There are few academic library/K–12 school collaborations in Oregon. These numbers






Recently, staffs from the Oregon State University Library, Corvallis School District, and Corvallis-Benton County Public Library met to discuss possible future collaborations. At their first meeting, librarians and classroom teachers shared their concerns, hopes, and expectations with one another.

will certainly rise in the years to come for those reasons described above as well as those listed below:

- There is a growing acceptance of a seamless K–16 educational system, compelling educators who rarely dealt with one another in the past to work together now and in the future.
- Information resources are, increasingly, priced too high for individual institutions. Cooperative efforts are necessary to develop and maintain access to electronic resources and databases. On example is the State Library's work with Oregon Department of Education to ensure access to the Ebsco databases in Oregon's public schools.
- The lack of school librarians in Oregon leaves the teaching of information literacy skills to overburdened teachers who are often untrained themselves. Academic libraries can partner with local school districts to provide instruction and support to classroom teachers.

- Success begets success. As school and library staffs see the value of working together and discover rewards unique to these shared experiences, collaborative endeavors will increase.

Academic libraries, with their extensive collections and well-trained staffs, have much to offer the K–12 community. What can the K–12 community offer in return? It's the kids. The enthusiasm of younger students is a welcome relief from the oftentimes blasé attitude of college students. There's nothing quite like seeing a roomful of students' eyes light up with excitement or being on the receiving end of an appreciative six year-old's hug. And who knows? The young students you inspire today might very well be your academic library users of tomorrow. 

References

- ACRL (2000). Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education. Retrieved January 13, 2007 from <http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlstandards/informationliteracycompetency.htm>
- Gorman, M. (1995). The domino effect, or why literacy depends on all libraries. *School Library Journal*, 41:27–29.
- Malanchuk, I.R. (2006). Academic librarians organize a sixth-grade reading club. *Young Adult Library Services*. 4:13–17.
- Peter D. Hart Research Associates/Public Opinion Strategies (2005). Rising to the challenge: Are high school graduates prepared for college and work? A study of recent high school graduates, college instructors, and employers. Retrieved January 1, 2007, from http://www.achieve.org/files/pollreport_0.pdf
- Visser, M. (2005). The real McCoy. *School Library Journal*. 12:33.

