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librarians need
love, too!

Show Your Librarian Some Love by Todd Gilman

An excerpt from The Chronicle of Higher Education, October 3, 2006

Just as children raised in a loving environment tend to fare better in life than those from broken homes, so students trained by professors and librarians who cooperate and affirm each other's role fare better than those forced to bear the brunt of troubled relations.

Many professors summarily dismiss librarians' earnest and repeated offers of research instruction or, at the very least, don't take full advantage of those offers. When prodded they may claim they have "too much to cover" in their courses to make time for a library visit. They may even tell the librarians (and themselves) that their students already know (or should know, or could easily find out on their own) enough about research to get by.

I sense that one or more of the following factors might be at work, depending on the faculty member. First, some college instructors have only a vague idea of academic librarians' expertise — despite the fact that many of us hold two master's degrees or a Ph.D. or both — and an even vaguer idea of how librarians might help them help their students. In essence, such instructors do not respect librarians as colleagues.

Second, some professors may be less than enthusiastic about sharing control. They don't want librarians in their classrooms — physically or virtually — because it means they themselves are no longer the sole authorities present.

Third, as I began to suggest above, other professors — particularly at elite institutions — may be unaware of, or unwilling to face, the full extent of their students' ignorance (and — gasp — their own) about negotiating the library's research tools.

Fourth, some professors may feel unfairly burdened by the thought of having to devote class time to a primer on how to use a research library. They may feel that way even when the librarian would cheerfully schedule the session in a state-of-the-art electronic classroom at the library, do most of the talking, and answer any follow-up questions throughout the semester. Their thought process goes something like this: "Why didn't someone else cover that so that I don't have to use up my precious class time on it? Isn't it bad enough my students can't write — forcing me



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to provide high-school-level instruction in English — without throwing the complexities of college-level research into the mix? Besides, research education is only tangential to my course content.”

Finally, some professors may object to the call for “information literacy” — a phrase that has become the mantra of some academic librarians in their efforts to teach research skills. And the term can rankle. It risks sounding elementary, or condescending, or alarmist, or perhaps seems like an affectation by which librarians seek to mystify and aggrandize what they do via jargon.

Ok, point taken. That’s why I prefer the phrase “research education.” But as for the other objections I’ve cited? With all due respect to teaching faculty colleagues, get over it.

Your students need the library and the librarians in it. If your students didn’t get enough exposure to research education before your course (and trust me, they didn’t) you owe it to them to bring them in.

If you think I’m exaggerating, ask your students these simple questions: What is the difference between a catalog, a bibliography, and an index? What is the difference between popular and scholarly literature on a given topic and why does it matter? What does the phrase “peer-reviewed” mean and why is it important? Why isn’t it possible to look up individual journal articles — instead of just journal titles — in a library catalog? (And for extra credit: since it isn’t possible, how *would* you look up individual articles?) What is the difference between searching by subject and searching by key word in the catalog? (If anyone answers that a search by subject seeks a match between the word(s) entered and Library of Congress Subject Headings or other controlled vocabulary, whereas a search by keyword seeks a match between the word(s) entered and all fields of each bibliographic record, you have my permission to disregard everything I’ve said and send me hate mail).

Those and related questions are what so many academic librarians spend most of their days clarifying for readers at the reference desk, via telephone, e-mail, online chat, and in such classroom presentations as professors invite them to offer. But we could do that work much more thoroughly and effectively and reach many more students if we had more buy-in from more professors.

So if you are a teaching faculty member, why not respond to that librarian who e-mails you every fall with an offer to meet you and your students for research-education (or “information literacy”) sessions at the library and take him or her up on it?

Better yet, why not work with that librarian to develop one or more assignments for a grade that will enable your students to apply what they have learned while the library is still fresh in their minds? That way they are sure to take the library seriously, reap the maximum benefit from their interaction with the librarian, and get practice using the library for something more than study space.

Your librarian will feel regarded as a partner. Your students will get a leg up, learn how to approach an information problem, and write better-informed essays — in all likelihood not just for you but for all of their instructors. Through research education, students are learning to help themselves learn, and that can’t help but pay off in our information age.

And who knows, you might learn a thing or two about the library yourself. I can't think of a better outcome for all concerned.

Todd Gilman is the librarian for literature in English at Yale University's Sterling Memorial Library. This article was reprinted as an excerpt from The Chronicle of Higher Education, October 3, 2006. Retrieved October 20, 2006 from, <http://chronicle.com>.

New Subscription Databases

Subscription databases are an alternative to searching for articles on the Internet. Each year the electronic sources librarian reviews many offerings from vendors in order to provide the college community the best authoritative information across disciplines and interests. Within the past year, the following databases have been added to the existing list, available from the library's Web site at www.pgcc.edu/library/online.index.

Computer Database. Provides abstracts and selective full text articles for computer-related product introduction, news and reviews in areas such as hardware, software, electronics, engineering, and technology.

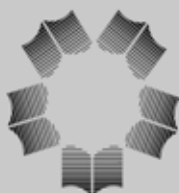
Infotrac OneFile. A multi-disciplinary database that covers topics in business, computers, economics, education, environmental issues, health, humanities, law, literature and arts, politics, science, social sciences, sports, and technology.

LegalTrac®. An index of more than 1400 titles including major law reviews, legal newspapers, bar association journals and international legal journals. Also included are law-related articles from over 1000 business and general interest titles.

Science Resources Center. A one-stop resource for all science-related research needs. Includes information on earth science, history science, life science, science and technology and more.

Helpful guides for using these and other databases are available as Word files, and can be found on the "Databases by Subject Categories" Web page. Check out these new databases and recommend them to your students for their research assignments. The librarians are always available to help you help your students.

The PGCC librarians extend everyone wishes for a wonderful holiday season.



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