

# Academic librarians as advisors

## Working with students to plan their futures

by Paul Studdard

Academic librarians often view classroom faculty with some degree of envy because of their frequent contact with students, particularly those students majoring in their discipline.

While there is a lot of personal satisfaction for librarians in working with students to find information, classroom faculty have the added advantage of getting to watch their students grow and learn throughout the length of a course. This maturation process of their students gives classroom faculty a great sense of accomplishment, as they watch their knowledge increase and their thinking processes mature.

Acting as an academic advisor is a good opportunity for librarians to experience the personal feeling of accomplishment that comes with helping a student choose a direction to take in his or her life and career.

### What is academic advisement?

While academic advisement means different things in different institutions, it generally involves three major activities: 1) being a friend and mentor for the student, and giving him or her someone to talk to; 2) helping the student choose courses to take that will best suit his or her needs, and (3) helping the student explore various majors and career options.

All three of these activities are extremely important and beneficial to college students, especially incoming freshmen, who are taking their first steps into adult life and are away from most of the friends and relatives that they have grown up knowing.

Perhaps the most important roles that an academician can play in a student's life is as a mentor and a friend. College students are often lonely and confused about their futures, and having an adult to discuss career plans with can be a tremendous help. Librarians are skilled in listening to others and determining their information needs; and what a college student often needs the most is someone who will *listen* to what they have to say.

Each college and university has general education requirements that must be met for students to graduate, and determining which classes meet these requirements can be difficult for college students. This can result in their taking courses that do not count toward their graduation requirements, which in turn could lead to frustration and resentment. Signing up for inappropriate courses can result in a student having to attend college for an additional semester or quarter, which can lead to additional expense and potential loss of income.

Librarians can play a vital role in a student's course selection by researching what courses

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satisfy graduation requirements, and, if possible, by checking to see what courses are still available by the time the student registers.

Academic librarians have a number of resources available to them to help students explore careers. Titles such as the *Occupational Outlook Handbook* and the *Encyclopedia of Careers* are standard reference sources that can be useful to students looking for information to help them to determine what they would like to spend a large portion of their lives doing. Librarians can further assist students in their career choices by helping them determine their strengths and weaknesses, their likes and dislikes, and determining what coursework and majors will help them accomplish their career goals.

### **The Undeclared Advisors' Program**

At Millersville University (MU), students are allowed to apply for admission and declare a major right away or enter as an undeclared major. Students who declare a major right away are assigned a faculty advisor in the department in which they are majoring. University faculty are asked to volunteer to serve as advisors for students who enter the university as undeclared majors.

Many of the library faculty at MU have taken an active role in this voluntary program and work with five-to-ten students a year, which allows each librarian to give personal attention to each student.

Arrangements are made for an initial meeting between the advisors and advisees during a new-student orientation week in the summer, and advisors are provided with students' phone numbers and mailing and e-mail addresses.

Meetings are scheduled between advisor and advisee once or twice each semester; most course registration materials are available via campus Internet, so registration can actually be done in the advisor's office. This provides for one-on-one interaction and helps ensure that the student registers for the most useful and beneficial courses available.

### **The benefits of librarians as academic advisors**

Having librarians serve as academic advisors benefits the students they work with, the li-

brarians themselves, and their educational institution.

- Students benefit from having a knowledgeable, well-rounded professional as a role model and as an advisor for their classes and career choices.

Librarians are usually not affiliated with a specific academic department, which tends to make them impartial when helping students decide on a major. Librarians tend to be familiar with almost every department, and as such can provide their advisees with information that can help them choose between disciplines. Librarians also tend to have "contacts" within most departments—faculty whom they talk to about book orders, periodical subscriptions, etc. and faculty whom they can refer their advisees to for further information about their academic departments' disciplines.

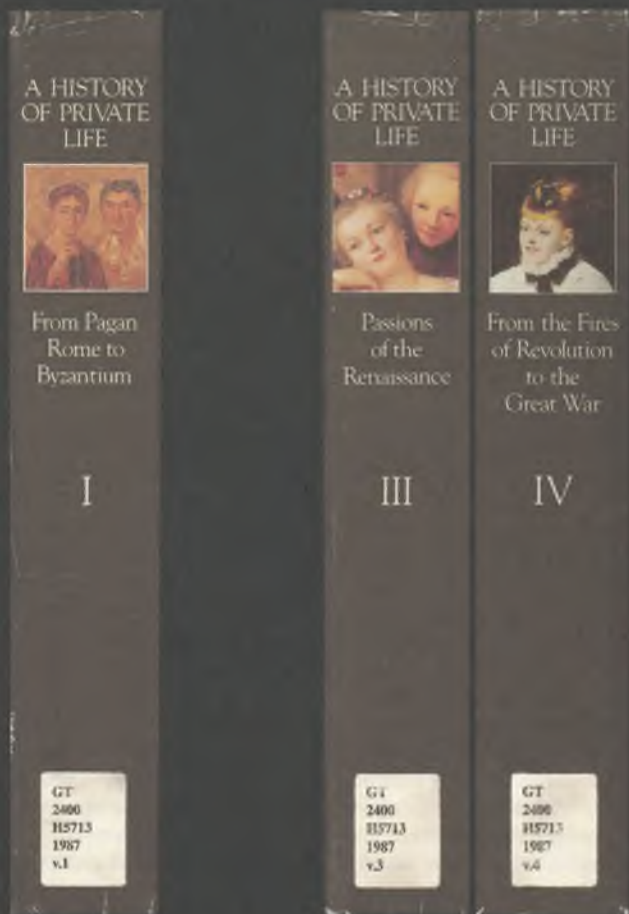
- Librarians benefit from having personal contact with individual students. This helps the librarians feel like an integral part of each advisee's educational process and gives them the personal satisfaction of helping individual students make important life decisions. Working with and referring students to various academic departments also allows the librarians to become involved with the academic community on their campuses outside the confines of providing basic library services. This can lead to increased job satisfaction for the librarians and better communication with their academic colleagues.

- The educational institution benefits from having students who graduate in a timely manner and who are pleased with the personal relationship they have been able to develop with their advisor, one who participates in academic advisement not because they are required to do so, but because they find it a rewarding and enriching experience. The educational institution also benefits from having librarians with increased job satisfaction and who enjoy good relationships with both students and faculty. Such a situation contributes to good library service and better communication between the librarians and the administration.

Librarians have a lot to offer educational institutions besides ordering books and literature searches, although those two activities are certainly important. Librarians are,

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April 2, 1998. 600 years of Medieval History disappears overnight.



May 13, 2000. Recover volume on Alibris and close gap in library's collection.



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**There is no one model that works for every group. Work is underway, however, to establish the elements of existing successful information literacy partnerships and collaborations . . .**

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- Design of virtual/digital environment for community members housed on college and university Web sites, such as small business help and curriculum pages.

- Design of community Web sites through work with instructional design classes and community freenets to offer local and small organization Web presence.

- Expanded internship/mentor roles between junior-high and high-school students and college and university staff in info-tech rich learning and teaching environments.

- Expanded “show and tell” of learning environments between and among K–12 and higher education, including visits of K–12 faculty to colleges and universities and visits to K–12 environments by college and university staff.

- Expanded multitype consortia for e-resources.

- Cooperative design of user education modules for both electronic consortia products and generally used print materials.

- Expanded formal networking of multitype library and information science professionals in communities (general, theme-related, or problem solving).

- Expanded use of existing of uniquely designed standards and guidelines for user education/information literacy in communities.

- Expanded use and standardization of linking education and community Web environments to aid users in easy transitions among and between resources and environments.

There is no one model that works for every group. Work is underway, however, to establish the elements of existing successful information literacy partnerships and collaborations that determine what elements must be present to ensure higher measures of success.

Although upcoming issues of *C&RL News* will feature a number of columns highlighting unique and successful partnerships and

collaborations, interested or active partners and collaborators should read and contribute to Nancy Kranich’s Information Literacy Community Partnerships Initiative at <http://www.ala.org/kranich/literacy.html> or to ALA Special Presidential Committee Information Literacy Community Partnerships Initiative at <http://lrs.austin.cc.tx.us/staff/Inavarro/CommunityPartnerships/Toolkit.html>.

## Notes

1. For additional benefits see Betsy Wilson, “Community and Collaboration: The Year Ahead,” *C&RL News* 61, no. 8 (September 2000): 698–701.

2. These examples were taken from the *Examples of Partnerships Focused on Information Literacy* section on ALA President Nancy Kranich’s Web site (<http://www.ala.org/kranich/examples.html>) and from the ALA Special Presidential Committee *Community Partnerships Toolkit* (<http://lrs.austin.cc.tx.us/staff/Inavarro/CommunityPartnerships/Toolkit.html>).

3. Visit the CHICO site at <http://www.si.umich.edu/CHICO/>.

4. The University of Washington’s initiatives is outlined by the UW President at <http://www.washington.edu/president/articles/K-12speech.html>.

5. For an example visit “Invitational Conference on K–12 Outreach from University Science Departments” held in North Carolina in February 2000 at [http://www.ncsu.edu/science\\_house/InformationFolder/BWconference.html](http://www.ncsu.edu/science_house/InformationFolder/BWconference.html). ■

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first and foremost, *educators* who are skilled in listening, providing information, and working with students to accomplish their academic goals. These skills are extremely useful in advising students about choosing courses and career plans.

Being involved with students’ lives and helping them make important life decisions is a very rewarding experience. Serving as an academic advisor gains the respect and admiration of a group of people who will always remember and appreciate the time taken by that one person who cared about them enough to help them plan for their future. ■