

Job ^{of a} Lifetime

Erin Dorney

Rocket scientist librarian, at your service!

"I really didn't have a good understanding of what librarians did when I went down this path, but since becoming one, I can't imagine myself doing anything else."

These are the words of Tina Hertel, help desk/Web support librarian at Lehigh University, a four-year private university in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. After earning her bachelor of science in Aerospace Engineering and serving as a U.S. Air Force officer, Hertel decided to pursue a master's degree in information science.

"I went to Human Resources to do an interest assessment and librarian came back as my number one option, which I laughed at," she says, adding, "... now I can say that it takes a rocket scientist to find information."

Hertel is a member of Lehigh University Library and Technology Services (LTS), a collaboration of information/instructional technologists and university library staff. The entities merged more than 15 years ago, and although some library literature laments this type of restructuring, Hertel describes the inevitable growing pains as a logical choice to make life easier for the end user.



"Sometimes, a library question is really a technical question, or a technical question leads into a library question, so being this closely aligned makes it very easy to manage that and to offer exceptional service," she says. As far as the much-discussed "culture clash" between librarians and IT, Hertel sees it more as a matter of team dynamics, understanding strengths and weaknesses of the organizational players.

It seems that Hertel truly does straddle the line between technologist and librarian, and does so quite successfully. Her job responsibilities include providing reference and technical support, providing Web support to the university (Web design, Drupal, Moodle, LibGuides, free and shareware), serving as the library's "social media maven," and teaching a variety of LTS seminars on topics like Google tools, Facebook, social bookmarking, and Dreamweaver. Her typical work day is varied but normally includes two or three hours at the help desk, at least one meeting, two or three personal consultations, and work on projects, committees,

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and professional development. Whenever she is in her office, she's logged into the LTS live chat service to provide real-time assistance. Administering LibGuides, the Web site, Facebook, Twitter, and the Lehigh Hub (a college-based social media tool) also remain high on her list of responsibilities.¹

And it doesn't end there. Hertel is also a member of the Technology, Research and Communication (TRAC) Writing Mentors teaching team. This fall, she will be co-teaching two classes, a total of six hours per week. The TRAC Writing Fellows Program is a new initiative from Lehigh University that aims to use peer collaboration in order to promote "a campus-wide culture in which writing and communication in its many forms are central to learning."

The course itself is a highly selective, rigorous four-credit seminar where undergraduates are trained to work as peer tutors across the disciplines. Hertel takes her role as an instructor very seriously, serving as the library voice throughout the TRAC program.

"In many places, writing, technology, research, communication, and faculty development are seen as very separate silos. We strongly believe that these are things that should never have been separated and fit naturally together," she says. "I'm continuously blown away by the level of commitment, enthusiasm, and abilities of the students I work with in this program."

Some of her other favorite projects include learning about and sharing online technology tools to improve productivity, information management, and knowledge sharing. "Cool tools" on Hertel's radar at the moment are Diigo for social bookmarking, Jing for quick how-to videos, Remember the Milk for organizing to-do lists, and Evernote for gathering and working with information. She is also a big fan of all things Google, particularly Google Apps.

"Libraries should not be just about searching for and finding information, but we need to be an integral part of how that information

is used, shared, and turned into knowledge," she says, adding that offering services and assistance on creating and managing new information is vital for libraries.

Although Hertel is disappointed that she doesn't seem to have enough time to do everything she wants to do, she appreciates the variety of her job as the help desk/Web support librarian. "That is very rewarding, when an organization has enough faith in you and is open to change." She recommends experimenting, being flexible, and listening for librarians who wish to pursue a job like hers. Adaptability and risk-taking are also important aspects, along with leadership and communication. Some of these skills won't necessarily be taught in traditional LIS programs, so experience and creativity both in and outside of the library are important.

"My military background certainly contributed to my problem solving, conflict resolution, and decision making skills," she says, "I know it sounds cliché, but I really try to make people's day."

Looking towards the future, Hertel is interested in helping with library development, particularly in finding new, creative, and off-beat ways to raise funds and awareness for LTS initiatives. She believes that libraries will continue to become much more than information warehouses, saying, "We have certainly moved away from that and I think libraries (especially academic ones) will continue to grow as centers for knowledge production."

In order for academic libraries to remain sustainable, Hertel recommends listening, observing, and understanding. "Know how the library is being used. Know how and why it isn't being used," she says. Apply that understanding to the bigger picture, and use it to institute positive change.

Note

1. Tina Hertel can be found on Twitter under "serendipitina." 