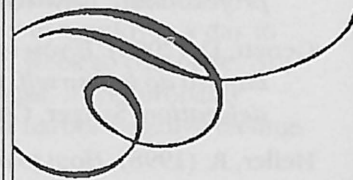# A LOOK AT TODAY'S LIBRARY STUDENTS AND FACULTY

by Ryan O. Weir

Jean Preer is professor at the Indiana University School of Library and Information Science-Indianapolis (IU-SLIS Indianapolis). A graduate of Swarthmore College, she earned her MLS degree at the University of California-Berkeley. Dr. Preer completed a law degree and a Ph.D. in American Civilization at George Washington University in Washington, D. C. Before joining the Indiana University faculty in 2002, she taught at the library school at The Catholic University of America where she also served as Associate Dean. At IU SLIS-Indianapolis she teaches *Perspectives on Librarianship; Collection Development and Management;* and *Library Philanthropy and Fundraising.* In 2005, Dr. Preer received the Indiana University Trustees Teaching Award, and in 2006 she was presented the Association for Library and Information Science Education Award for Excellence in LIS Teaching. In 2007, her essay, "Promoting Citizenship: Librarians Help Get Out the Vote in the 1952 Presidential Election," won the Justin Winsor Prize for Excellence in Library History. In fall 2007, Dr. Preer served on the Indiana State Library Task Forces on Diversity and Unserved Areas.

How have things changed in library schools over the past 20 years?

The curriculum has changed to incorporate the new technologies, but it has stayed the same in maintaining the values of service and commitment to access to information that librarians have traditionally espoused. When thinking of how our traditional values fit with the new information technology, it is very exciting. I think library schools are more interdisciplinary than they were twenty years ago. We are gaining insights from many fields. We represent many different disciplines within our faculties. We have really broadened the way we look at information issues.

How have library students changed over the past 20 years?

Overall, I would say students who attend library school have the same intellectual curiosity that they have always had, and a tremendous commitment to service. One difference is, of course, that library students are bringing a lot of expertise with them. They arrive with a lot of skills. Because our program has so many adult students and people who are changing careers, our students also bring a lot of experience with them. Not just experience working in libraries but in other fields. We have many students with graduate degrees in other professional areas, and all of those skills can be used in libraries in some way. In this way, we have a very interesting student body.

How have library teaching faculty changed over the past 20 years?

I think because there is more of an emphasis on interdisciplinary approaches we have many faculty members who have doctoral degrees in other fields. I am one of those people. I think it is important that when we look for new faculty at SLIS-Indy we say in our job postings that we prefer candidates with a master's degree in library science, but we are interested in people with doctoral degrees in many different areas. So, I think that is one way in which the faculty has changed.

In your experience, are there differences between public and private academic libraries?

Well, I have to say that I have really enjoyed using the library at IUPUI and the IU library system of which it is part. It is a tremendous resource for faculty and students. For my research it has just been wonderful. ILL services are spectacular. I think I arrived here at a time when the technology had really advanced so we are reaping the benefits of that in the way that scholars can do their work. I do not think it is a question of public or private, but the depth of the libraries' resources and how adequately they are funded.

In your opinion, what are some of the most pressing issues facing the library community?

I would say the financial pressures. We keep seeing that for public libraries all over, and in Indiana in particular, there are a lot of questions about property taxes and library resources. Where are funds going to come from, and will they be sufficient to provide the outstanding service we know libraries can offer?

What role does fund raising play in the modern academic library environment?

I think in all libraries, not just academic libraries, fundraising is absolutely essential to the role of the director of the library. A large portion of the library director's time is now devoted to building relationships with potential donors and raising funds. That is one of the reasons why IU SLIS in Indy has introduced a course in library philanthropy and fundraising, because fundraising is a skill that is increasingly important for library directors. That course is a wonderful step and is an example of our connections with other disciplines. IU, because of the IU Center on Philanthropy, has wonderful resources for the study of philanthropy. In fact, we have a dual degree program with philanthropic studies. Fundraising from all sources is absolutely essential to what librarians are doing now.

Has this change over time?

Oh absolutely, this did not use to be an expectation of library directors, but now it is an important component to what library directors do.

What advice would you give to current library students or students considering attaining an MLS degree?

I think seeing what goes on in libraries is one of the best ways to think about whether it is the right career choice. Whenever I travel, wherever we go, we visit libraries. We do this in this country and other countries. They are such a good window into what is going on in a community. I still find it very exciting to go into a library that I have never visited before. Those thinking about a career in librarianship should talk to librarians who are doing different things. They should talk to people who have gone to library school who are using their training in careers not in the library. Some of our students come to library school after being a library volunteer or working in a library as an undergraduate or in a non-professional position. I think libraries are the best advertisement for themselves. Becoming acquainted with libraries and the people who love and work in them is the best way to decide whether that is a good career choice.

Is there anything else you would like to share with us?

I have been trying to think whether librarians are seen any differently by the public than they were twenty years ago. A couple of things came to mind. One was the way in which librarians have become much more public advocates on different issues: the way in which librarians challenged the USA PATRIOT Act, for example. I think it surprised a lot of people who did not know that librarians have a long tradition as advocates for intellectual freedom and access to information. So I think that public advocacy and litigation have changed the perceptions of librarians. The new documentary film, *Hollywood Librarian*, which is going to be shown in public libraries all around Indiana, is going to help people see librarians in a different way. I think that this opportunity to see what librarians are really doing is exciting as well.

Anastasia Guimaraes:

Anastasia is a recent graduate from IU-SLIS Indianapolis. She is currently employed at Hesburg Library at the University of Notre Dame as the supervisor of catalog and database maintenance.

Why did you decide to work at Notre Dame's library?

It was totally unplanned. I had no previous library experience and just moved to the U.S. from Germany where my family lived for two years. I was introduced to a young woman who grew up in my home town in Russia. At that time she was employed by the University Libraries of Notre Dame, but was planning to move to a different state with her family. She mentioned that she could talk to her supervisor about me and would help arrange an interview. I was looking for a job and that is how I ended up in an academic library.

Why did you decide to go to library school?

After working for three years at Hesburgh Library, I realized that without an MLS my professional growth would be stagnated. In addition, a number of my co-workers either were enrolled in library schools or were freshly graduated. Finally, I tend to thrive on challenges and like to learn, so going to graduate school while continuing to work seemed to be a natural way to incorporate both.

Tell me about your experiences while attending SLIS.

I should start with going back in time to my application process. Because my undergraduate degree

was not earned in the U.S., I had to jump through many hoops to be even admitted to the program. Most applicants to the SLIS program are required to submit only GRE scores. In my case, in addition to GRE, I had to take TOEFL (Test of English as Foreign Language) and the IUPUI English language proficiency test. In my opinion, it was completely unnecessary because I received almost the highest number of points on the TOEFL and could not understand why I still needed to show up for the university-administered test. After I was finally given the green light, I started with one of the required classes - *Collection Development*. It was not very easy because I had no experience with college-level classes in the U.S. In Russia the teaching-learning process in a higher education institution is structured very differently, so I had to quickly adjust. Some of the concepts that an average American student would take for granted, like style guides, citations, bibliographies, abstracts, etc., were completely new to me. The one thing that helped me tremendously was my library experience. I could participate in discussions and contribute to each class. The rest I had to learn quickly which I did without any problems.

Thank goodness for online and VIC (Virtual Indiana Classroom) classes. Those were life savers for distance ed. students! I feel that IUPUI SLIS was responding to the needs of many adult students.

Over the years that I was enrolled in the program, I saw an increase in courses that could be conveniently taken by folks like me. I was grateful I did not have to drive to Indy for every class. I really enjoyed almost every class I took. Because I live three hours away from IUPUI, my choices of classes were limited, yet I still was able to make selections that fit my schedule and interests. I had great professors, good professors, and okay professors, but never had I had a professor who failed to teach me something new. I fanatically did all my homework assignments and did not take shortcuts. It took me almost four years to complete all the requirements towards an MLS. I chose to take one class per semester and occasionally skipped semesters when stress and exhaustion crept up.

By the time I was on my last semester I felt like I was ready to graduate. I was ready to take on challenges. I was ready to help people with their information needs. I was ready to join in forces with other information professionals and build libraries 2.0. Library school taught me so much, and although I complained about some of the difficulties along the way, I realize that all of it just helped me to become stronger and shaped me into a person that I am. I also met some very cool people along the way. I made friends and great role models. I know what "professional" means in the highest sense of the word. I saw how the power of information and knowledge can empower.

It was one of the most rewarding experiences for me.

How did working and having a family influence your library school experience?

It was not easy to juggle family, full-time job, and schoolwork. Luckily, my husband and daughter were very supportive of my goal and put up with my drastically changed lifestyle. There were times when I was incredibly exhausted; there were more times than I care to remember when I had to sacrifice my family time in favor of homework. There were times when my family saw me only briefly in the morning and at night because I spent most of my time at work and doing homework.

Luckily, the library I work at was supportive of my decision and provided some relief along the way. For example, I was able to work out a flexible schedule with my supervisor; textbook fees were reimbursed; I was able to attend ALA annual conferences. Finally, there were other people in the program who were in the same boat with me. I knew that the journey would end soon and that end results would most certainly outweigh every moment of misery that I experienced.

Oddly enough, through this experience, I continued to volunteer in my community and actually found it to be an excellent outlet for venting out frustration and exhaustion. I strongly recommend doing it to let one's brain cells switch to different types of activity.

What are your future plans? Where do you see yourself in 5 years/10 years?

I am keeping my options open. Currently, I am not looking to leave my current employer. I would like to secure a professional position at Notre Dame in the near future. Eventually, I plan to be flexible with the place and type of library. Although I have been a part of technical services for eight years, I found out after taking one class that I really enjoyed information literacy instruction and even taught several classes at Notre Dame. With my undergraduate teaching degree background, I might look into doing reference and library instruction. I can also rely on cataloging skills and perhaps work with metadata or cataloging. In general, I learn fast and enjoy change. That means that I might surprise myself and take on a job that I am not considering currently.

Is there anything else you would like to share with us?

I would definitely recommend going to library school to all folks who end up working in paraprofessional positions in libraries and who enjoy challenges.

Graduate school expands horizons; it allows one to see outside the box; it prepares one for a variety of positions in the information science field.

Those who already work in libraries are definitely at an advantage because they just build on to what they already know. Why not do it?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ryan Weir works in the electronic resources unit of Cunningham Memorial Library at Indiana State University. He is currently a graduate student at IUPUI and will graduate with his Masters in Library Science in May 2008.