

## **Personal Reflections from the Inaugural Bachelor of Health Sciences Librarian**

“You don’t need to be an expert on a particular topic: you just have to know where and how to find information on it!” These were among the first words I heard from the director as I entered the Health Sciences Library on August 20, 2007. Turning the key and unlocking my office door symbolized a new era: one that would undoubtedly come with trials and tribulations over the course of a few weeks, yet one that would also reap numerous personal achievements and rewards.

Although I had worked at the University of Calgary’s main campus for over a decade during my school enrolment, the transition from support staff to faculty staff is a big change, no matter how prepared one may feel. Attending numerous meetings with faculty members and fellow colleagues during my first few days in my new position, I had to dig deep to retrieve numerous notes on seeking scholarly material, outline research goals, and differentiate between systematic and literature reviews. As the start of the fall semester was a mere two weeks away, I had to act and act quickly.

News of my appointment spread like wildfire throughout the Bachelor of Health Sciences Program. Within 72 hours of officially assuming my new title, e-mail messages were appearing in my inbox in the blink of an eye and my phone was ringing off the hook. When I entered the library director’s office with a puzzled look one morning, she reassured me that everything would settle down within a few days: I was simply a rare commodity, officially becoming the first Bachelor of Health Sciences Librarian since the program’s creation four years earlier.

Experienced librarians reading my musings may chuckle at the above statement; naturally, the ability to adapt within one’s workplace is a necessity in today’s changing

society. Stephen Covey in his Seven Habits of Highly Intelligent People shares this view. Nevertheless, a rookie with a degree in humanities and social sciences scheduled to begin his library career by teaching genetic mutations to a room of Masters of Biomedical Technology students is somewhat nerve-racking. However, rather than breaking out in a cold sweat and panicking, my mind retraced the first 72 hours of meetings with the director and other librarians. I did my homework, gleaned valuable advice from those who had previous experience instructing these students, and settled down to prepare my presentation notes.

Adhering to the advice and support of my experienced colleagues, my first library instruction session was a success. Although I still can't differentiate between the 16 core nucleotide records in an individual exhibiting traits of the sickle cell anaemia gene, I do know to go to the *GenBank* database to retrieve such information. By learning to adapt and be aware of classes outside the Bachelor of Health Sciences realm, I am developing ties and liaisons with professors within the Faculty of Medicine.

Less than a week after guiding graduate students through the searching process, I ran a library session on database searching for 3<sup>rd</sup> year students embarking on research projects of their own. This led to a trickle-down effect of students parading to my office, seeking advice on their own assignments and research pursuits, including a group who were working on their own independent study projects in the area of global health and society. Being able to help students understand a particular concept, seeing their faces light up as they develop new resolve to continue gathering research on a topic that may have seemed nearly impossible to accomplish a few days before, is the aspect of my position that I enjoy the most.

During my first full month of employment (September 2007), I saw, either in a classroom setting or individually, 244 students enrolled in six different courses within the Bachelor of Health Sciences Program. While it may seem that the primary objective of my position is to provide instruction, it in fact accounts for only 60% of my job profile. I have also been involved, as both a researcher and facilitator, for faculty members in two (biomedicine and health and society) of the three BHSC streams, and am intrigued by the entrepreneurial spirit that the professors within this program exhibit towards their research interests. While skimming through the abstracts of some of the documents that I have either retrieved or been presented with, I feel that I have a better understanding of how collaborative research in the health sciences sector truly is. Further, I feel privileged to be able to work so closely with faculty members, and appreciate being invited to numerous departmental events, including meet-and-greet outings and open house celebrations. One gathering that particularly stands out in my mind is the Journal Club, a required course for all BHSC students entering their final year of study. In speaking individually with the founder of the BHSC program recently, I was made aware of the purpose of this club in greater detail. In every session, a group of students from the class is selected to research and orally present on a pre-selected article that they receive a week before. Such an exercise not only helps one gain confidence in public speaking, it also acts as a means of sharpening one's research skills towards the composition of the undergraduate honours thesis, a required capping exercise for successful completion of the program.

Back on my home turf in the health sciences library, I have gained a wealth of information from my colleagues regarding reference service, and am gradually taking on

more hours at the service desk. In addition, the introduction of instant messaging chat reference at the main University campus is slowly gaining acceptance, and with the medical library serving as a referral point, there will always be new tasks and procedures to learn that keeps me on my toes.

While it is important to main a good working relationship with faculty and colleagues within the health sciences unit, it is just as vital to step beyond these boundaries and associate with the broader library community as a whole. Having recently obtained membership in the Foothills Library Association, I attended a sociable Bubbly Brunch event at McNally Robinson bookstore last month, reacquainting myself with my friends from my days at MacKimmie Library and meeting members from other library facilities throughout the city of Calgary as well. Just a few weeks ago, I was sworn in as the newest member of the University of Calgary's library council, and attended Netspeed, my first library conference, on October 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>. Incorporating technology into a library setting is my niche, and listening to a variety of speakers present their views on this topic during the two-day event certainly gave me plenty to think about.

As I settle down in my new career, I close my memoirs today by listing some of the key goals I plan on bringing to fruition over the next few months: polishing and improve my research and reference skills, continuing my role as a liaison with faculty members of the Bachelor of Health Sciences Program, and developing and maintaining active web pages for this program. Above all though, my primary goal is to stay in this field beyond my one year "trial run", where I can continue to keep on learning.