The benefits of library catalogs and – digital libraires

INTERVIEW WITH CARYL ROBERTS NEMAJOVSKY,

Systems/Reference Librarian at the Darton State College Library

(Albany, Georgia)

Caryl Roberts Nemajovsky serves as Systems/Reference Librarian at the Darton State College Library (Albany, Georgia) (August 1995-present; Full-time starting 1999).

In time, she became an expert in: scheduling and instructing orientation sessions for Information Literacy and scheduling research sessions in the library, maintaining library webpages, and serving as Library Webpage Content Contact to review current best practices and liaise with IT (Information Technology) web staff. She also administrates library system client modules (Circulation, Cataloging, System Administration …) including installations/updating and customization of files on staff computers, troubleshoots library technology issues, liaises with technology services in alerting them to software/hardware issues.

Caryl Roberts Nemajovsky oversees potential library technology purchases, manages virtual library projects on the client end and provides technical documentation and training for library staff. Part of her work includes gathering and evaluating library data and preparing reports on periodic and requested basis. She has some experience with the virtual and face-to-face (F2F) hybrid learning. She attends virtual (and face-to-face) professional development including webinars and she is involved in the learning management system (D2L) in an online class as a librarian for information literacy/reference. Finally, she supports various virtual reference services including guides and an email/text service.

Library Homepage: http://www.darton.edu/~dclib/
http://www.darton.edu/~dclib/Research/LibraryOrientation.php

LibGuides: http://libguides.darton.edu/home

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Liliana Moldovan (L.M.): - You work at the Darton State College Library as Systems/Reference Librarian. What are the main tasks of this job?
Caryl Roberts Nemajovsky (C.R.N.) : -Although my official title is Assistant Professor, more specifically: Assistant Librarian for Systems, I often function as an ambassador of technology and library services. I attend to client-side technology issues and liaise with technology specialists within my college and externally throughout my state's university system. I maintain, update, and customize virtual support services such as our library web pages, LibGuides, and virtual reference service. I promote virtual and traditional services through our support services, committee work, embedding as a virtual librarian, and volunteering in the local community.

L.M.: -How many, effective and virtual, users has the Darton State College Library and what kind of innovative virtual services provides this library to the students' community?

C.R.N. : -The Fall 2013 student count for Darton State College was over 6,000 students both on-campus and online. We also have over 300 full time faculty and staff in addition to numerous part-time staff and adjunct faculty. Our on-campus users include community patrons from our area, students, faculty, and staff. We provide virtual support not only for online education but also in support of traditional programs. Virtual support is based from the library website, http://www.darton.edu/~dclib/, and includes linked resources for our library GIL-Find catalog, our GALILEO database system, and finding aids ranging from linked how-to videos to our dynamic LibGuides research tool to text and email capable Ask A Librarian.

L.M.: -How old is the Darton State College and when was the library founded?

C.R.N. : -Darton State College was originally established as Albany Junior College in April 1963. The first buildings including the Administration building housing the library were finished in 1966 when the first classes were held. In the fall of 1971, the Library moved to its own building, known as the Harold B. Wetherbee Library.

L.M.: -The introduction of online library catalogs was driven by a desire to raise the quality of the reference librarian's work. What makes an OPAC system efficient in order to reflect the collections of the library and to aid the electronic books circulation?

C.R.N. : -The evolution of the online catalog together with advancements in cataloging procedures has greatly enhanced the ability for users to not only find items they were seeking but to even discover useful items without intention. For example, our online catalog has filters for limiting items ranging from format to date, subject authorities, suggested similar items, links to further resources outside of our own library, and even offers basic works cited for each item in MLA and APA style. The programmers from our state university system put bling and usability similar to Amazon's book ordering system into an academic book and digital catalog, much to the delight of our students.

L.M.: -What practical strategies has the Darton State College Library applied to support the developing of the e-learning?

C.R.N. : -For many years before online classes became a possibility, Darton State College had been televising class instruction for specific distance learning classes. Because we have historically supported classes for students at a distance, the library staff was able to strategize for e-learning from the start.   I worked on committees for the initial online classes and provided web support and library orientations via class video. We found it vital to collaborate with the information and instructional technology department and with the online instructors from the inception of online classes. As the College online programs grew, we also upgraded policies and procedures in keeping with accreditation guidelines. With the enormous and ever-increasing role of online learning and support, we are constantly working to balance the needs required and resources we supply both traditionally and online. Currently, the balance for journals has shifted increasingly to online, digital resources including the GALILEO databases shared throughout our state colleges and universities and supplemented by our own choices. The basic technology for our library catalog Gil-Find is also shared, and together with GALILEO will be upgraded to a more cloud centric system within the next few years. Our users can request help in person, by phone, through email and through text. Our new Information Literacy Librarian is updating and creating new videos and other support for online classes to reflect the vision for our students to graduate with the information literacy skills to not only perform research for papers but also to engage with information via digital initiatives.

L.M.: -Regarding the digital library services, what rating tools can be used to measure the quality of a digital library?

C.R.N. : -In my view, the quality of a digital library goes well beyond the content. Comparisons should be made with suggested content for traditional academic libraries (as long as similar types of

libraries are compared) but must go further. Not only should surveys of users and staff be included but also usability ranging from statistics for usage of the materials to ease of use of the interface. Ratings should also include data on support services including resources on how to use the library system and follow-through for improvement.

L.M.: -How about the libraries' WebPages, can they contribute to a better perception of the library in the users' community?

C.R.N. : -Library Web Pages are the face of the library to many in the community - some who never enter its doors. As such, users should be able to navigate with ease to both resources and support services. Although flashy sites may bring in users initially, most will not stay long if unable to find significant information quickly with minimal work and without abandoned links. For current students brought up in the information age, resources and support need to be interactive and engaging enough to hold their attention. Generally, the web-page template is somewhat determined or at least guided by the overall design policies of an institution - with limited design choices for individual libraries or sub-departments. Web design and content must usually be made within the confines of institutional policy but with an eye to both usability and user engagement.

L.M.: -How does the Darton State College Library's webpage respond to this demand? What makes it attractive to the young people?

C.R.N. : -As an academic library, we strive for a balance between content and ease of use. The Darton State College Library web pages do not necessarily scream for attention but allow our patrons to interact with our content in a direct way with a limited amount of effort on their part. Our library catalog offers many of the benefits one might find with a site like Amazon with special tweaks for research use. Our support links are offered in multiple areas; giving users a network of backup with the simplicity of a click. With LibGuides our users also get a high level of interactive, engaging content via linked resources and embedded video. The attraction for our Library Web Pages is three way. First, the incentive to use our site to help with research for class projects, second the comfort our users feel with our level of support - whether it is self-directed through LibGuides or requesting help through Ask A Librarian, and third the usability built into our design.

L.M.: -In conclusion, could you please tell the readers (of this interview), in what direction do you think that the management of virtual reference services is going to evolve?

C.R.N. : -I think the management of virtual reference services will develop through a shared platform. With the high costs for content, personnel, and library systems, more institutions will seek value in partnering for purchase and maintenance of library systems - including the technology behind virtual reference, in virtually grouping specialists ranging from cataloging to reference, and in collaborating on the purchasing and maintenance of content based on group defined algorithms and policies. Hopefully, as with our own university system's consideration of a future library platform, experienced librarians and library technologists from all types of institutions will have the chance to evaluate, choose and initiate the platform.

Thank you for the interview!

Liliana Moldovan