

Cynthia A. Romanowski

# First-time faculty librarian

## Fourth through sixth portfolio years' experiences

I ntended my previous *The Way I See It* essays entitled “First-time faculty librarian” to be a series to share my tenure track experiences at Governors State University (GSU). However, life happened. External forces presented many challenges and opportunities for me professionally and personally.

### Teaching and primary duties

Illinois had no state budget during my third portfolio year, and this continued into my fourth. Significant reductions in budget allocations meant less money for the different university areas. The library continued sustaining electronic resources instead of purchasing new materials; therefore, the primary function of Technical Services remained database maintenance and special projects.

The continued crisis created workplace anxiety with staff fearing potential layoffs. Part-time reference librarians' and a visiting librarian's contracts were not renewed, and staff left or retired. It also sparked a hiring freeze so vacated positions remained unfilled, and existing staff had their public services desk times increased.

In my fourth portfolio year, my print Acquisitions person moved to Circulation full-time. With the hiring freeze, one of my team members incorporated these duties into his job. Training him proved difficult with no print budget until a grant gave him a chance to order materials. As a department head, I maintained productivity by improving staff skills through special projects, like enhancing these records and continued collaboration with other library departments to withdraw materials. These projects kept my team productive and provided

job security. I kept up their morale through appreciation by providing food or praise.

A state budget improved things during my fifth and sixth portfolio years. With a small new materials budget, database maintenance remained our priority to prepare for a new library system. Two catalogers retired so I created one higher level cataloging position to better fulfill departmental needs. Even with the budget crisis over, filling it proved difficult. After two failed searches, I worked with Human Resources to update the salary with the state, and this helped fill the position.

During these portfolio years, I had additional duties with extra desk shifts and collection development due to sabbaticals and losing our visiting librarian. My previous work experience had me temporarily taking over OCLC Interlibrary Loan (ILL) when the person died unexpectedly. However, the outdated salary also impacted hiring for this position, and these temporary responsibilities lasted over a year.

Primary duties included creating workshops. We received requests to offer Microsoft Access workshops, so I designed ones that taught Access basics. Their success caused me to create more advanced workshops to offer during my fifth and sixth years.

Many external conditions outside of my control took some forward thinking and great leadership to combat their effects on my team.

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## Research/creative activity

It was difficult to focus on research as my primary duties took priority over my research time. Publishing still intimidated me, but now my work mandated peer review to meet this requirement for portfolios four through six. I published reports and wrote my first book review. I had a paper accepted for the International Federation of Libraries Association Conference and presented it at the conference. I turned the budget crisis into presentations on productivity assessment for two different conferences.

I focused on what I needed for this area, turning negatives into positives. The constant change made it difficult to write because things became a little overwhelming at times, but I succeeded in meeting the requirements.

## Service

Throughout portfolios four through six, I served on various committees and had to show increased responsibility. As secretary of the University Curriculum Committee (UCC), I became one of the administrators of the GSU curriculum proposal system, Curriculog. I created Curriculog workshops to show faculty how to submit proposals. As the UCC liaison for the General Education Committee, I provided guidance for general education proposals.

These committees helped nonlibrary faculty know me because my portfolios now went to the University Personal Committee. Chairing consortium and national committees allowed more involvement in my profession. I volunteered to serve on library boards and association positions to be more impactful. I was unsuccessful in these attempts but I will keep trying to be more involved in those types of activities.

This area also included search committees. With the hiring freeze lifted, we successfully filled two faculty librarian positions. In the middle of my sixth year, our library dean retired, and we had two failed dean searches. Additionally, I served on search committees for Purchasing Office and Information Technology.

With the challenges from external forces, I am grateful for the opportunity to serve. I

value the networking opportunities and hope for future collaboration with former committee colleagues.

Perhaps the greatest challenge faced was a personal one. Even though I overcame the obstacles presented, I felt burnt out.

During winter break of 2018, I planned to organize my fifth-year portfolio. I was told that this portfolio was when my contract would not get renewed if GSU did not want to keep me, creating added pressure, but plans changed.

While on break, my life felt the impact of a death by suicide of which its effect continued throughout my remaining portfolio years. My portfolio was the last thing on my mind, so I received an extension. On what would have been this person's birthday, I used my speaking persona that I reserve for my presentations, to give the eulogy. This persona allowed me to push on no matter how I felt because presentations must go on.

When I returned to work, few co-workers knew what I had been through as I hid my grief to keep up appearances. Putting my grief on hold, I powered through the remainder of the academic year and finished my sixth year. My workload had no room for grieving, and I knew I had to keep going to receive tenure. While awaiting my fifth year continuance letter, another death by suicide occurred. At times, everything seemed overwhelming. I submitted my sixth-year portfolio and successfully achieved tenure, but delayed grief and another near tragedy caused me to finally take advantage of the Employee Assistance Program, and this helped.

As I embark on my journey to full professor, I recognize that the last three years took a tremendous amount of inner strength to overcome the effects that these forces had on me. I never thought life would throw so many curve balls at once, but wonderful people and cats were with me every step of the way, and I am grateful. I share this personal experience to help others who find themselves struggling at times, especially during a global pandemic.

Do not wait to get help. Know that you are not alone, and help is always available. You can do this. *ZZ*