

Job ^{of a} Lifetime

Ann Wheeler

Building a library for the business of fun

Nestled in the heart of Orlando among some of the world's greatest theme parks, restaurants, and golf courses is the Rosen College of Hospitality Management. Here undergraduate students enroll in unique programs like event or theme park management, in which they learn skills needed to excel in the hospitality industry. The college's Universal Orlando Foundation Library supports these students with a steadily growing collection of nearly 7,000 volumes and 130 periodical subscriptions. Deb Ebster, head of the library, answered my questions about her job of a lifetime.

Being a hospitality management librarian is somewhat unique. What was your path to this job?

DE: I spent most of my career as a community college librarian in northern Illinois, first in circulation, then in reference, and finally as coordinator of library instruction. I got tired of being cold, so I decided to look for a job in a warm place, and found a job at the College of the Bahamas. The major industry of the Bahamas is tourism, so of course the curriculum reflected that, which gave me the experience to apply for this job. The University of Central Florida needed someone to head the library of a brand new campus devoted to the study of hospitality management. I thought, what the heck, I'll toss my hat in the ring. I started in October 2003 and we opened the campus in January 2004.

What makes you passionate about this job?

DE: When I saw this job advertised, I knew it had my name on it. I am the original Food Network and Travel Channel junkie. I love to

travel. I love staying at hotels. I love eating out. I'm just passionate about the subject matter. You know, a friend once told me the secret to job satisfaction is that your work should be your play. Well, this job has so many aspects of play, because basically we're in the business

of fun. Just to give you an idea, when we had a career expo at our campus, Sea World brought their penguins to help recruit students. After I do information literacy sessions for the history of wine class, I'm invited to taste the wines. That's definitely my favorite class to teach!

Not many colleges have a history of wine class. What sorts of library resources support a course like that?

DE: You'd be surprised at the number of wine journals out there! We subscribe to about eight and have acquired hundreds of monographs on wine, because we cover all the major wine-producing countries of the world. Our students use EbscoHost's Hospitality and Tourism Complete, ABI-Inform, and Business Source Elite quite heavily. Our collection is also unique because we are a World Tourism Organization [WTO] depository library. There are only four other WTO depository libraries in the United States. We receive all WTO publications, which include scholarly research in tourism, statistics, demographics, and those sorts of things.

Rosen College is the only college in the United States that offers a bachelor's



Deb Ebster

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degree in event management. Is it a challenge to develop a collection for this degree when there aren't other schools to look to?

DE: Yes, collection development is my biggest challenge. Right now I'm doing collection development for a proposed bachelor degree in golf and club management. Ideally I'd find peer institutions and compare our collections, but in this case there are no peers. It requires a lot of research to do collection development in these emerging fields.

I was surprised to learn that there is a lot of scholarship behind tourism. Can you talk about some of the research your library has helped support?

DE: We have several faculty members who specialize in heritage tourism. There are several others who study the economic impact of tourism. One faculty member, the world's leading authority in his field, traces the history of theme parks all the way back to medieval Europe. Who would have dreamed! But I think the most fun reference question I've had was "how much does it cost to build a roller coaster?"

So how much does it cost to build a roller coaster?

DE: Well, it depends. To put something in your back yard would cost may be \$4,000 to \$5,000. But for a big state-of-the-art roller coaster you see at the theme parks, you're looking at probably \$100 million.

Wow! No wonder tickets are so expensive! It sounds like Rosen College students have to do some challenging research for their classes.

DE: Yes, the classes are very challenging. It's not all just wine tasting. In the history of wine class, students research a particular chateau from a winemaking region in France, and then write a paper on it. This is where information literacy comes in. Students are very comfortable googling the chateau's

Web site, but of course that's promotional and marketing material. I talk about why they should use the databases and scholarly journals, and how to get information outside of search engines. Also I coach them on how to cite their sources in APA style.

What's it like to work with the hospitality management students?

DE: We have to be experts at customer service, because this industry is driven by customer service. Generally we don't have conflicts with our students because that's always in the back of their head. They're a very good group to deal with.

Is it a challenge to get your staff up to speed with customer service?

DE: No, because I've carefully selected staff who have strong customer service skills. Our original staff all had hospitality background as well as library background.

Those are the people I look for. Our motto is "kill them with kindness," even when you're telling them no. That's the basis for good customer service. The other motivation for good customer service is the environment here. The college is built like a beautiful resort, so when you come in, already that sets the tone for good customer service.

You've accomplished a lot since starting the Rosen College library three years ago. What are you most proud of?

DE: I get such a feeling of satisfaction when I see the library full of students researching and writing papers, working together on group projects, chatting with staff at the service desk, checking out materials, and working with our reference librarian. It's a feeling of accomplishment to know that I led our library team in building this collection, and all of these services where there had been nothing before but an empty building. To be given the chance to start a library from scratch is for me the opportunity of a lifetime. ♪

Hospitality management librarian

What: Rosen College of Hospitality Management, University of Central Florida

Where: Orlando, Florida

For more information, visit:
<http://library.ucf.edu/rosen/>