

Job^{of a} Lifetime

Ann Wheeler

Rocky Mountain Science: Larry Schmidt and the University of Wyoming

The University of Wyoming sits on the high plains just east of the Rocky Mountains in the town of Laramie. It's the perfect location for Larry Schmidt, associate librarian for reference and instruction services and subject specialist for the sciences.

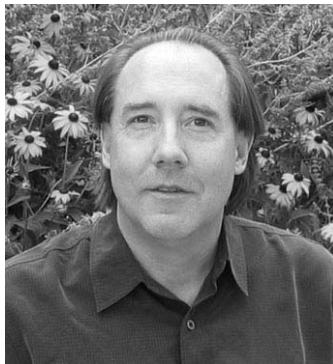
Born into science

Schmidt has a background in the sciences, although he didn't always know he'd become a professional librarian. "I have an undergraduate degree in both chemistry and botany, and a master's in environmental engineering. Also, my dad was a physicist; I think that's why I do so well with the sciences. Before coming to the University of Wyoming, I worked at a public library in circulation and shelving for a while. My supervisor there said I should go to library school, and sort of kicked me into that, and here I am."

Teaching all students

Schmidt's favorite part of the job is the daily interaction with students and faculty. "I like talking to the faculty and learning about the new research that's going on. I enjoy working at the reference desk and helping students find the materials they need and helping them learn to use the library." There's a range of students at

the University of Wyoming, and Schmidt understands the need to reach them all. "We're the only four-year university in Wyoming. We have a lot of students who aren't technologically savvy and some who are. It depends on where they're from. A student from Jackson may have been exposed to a lot more than a student from one of the industrial mining towns. You have to be there for everybody."



Larry Schmidt

One way he's reaching students is by team-teaching a new class for juniors or seniors he helped develop called "Managing and Navigating the World of Information." "We have an information literacy requirement, but students from some of the departments or transfer students can fall through the cracks. This class prepares them for life after the university, and gives them some life-long learning skills in information.

"For example, we'll teach them how to find out the cost of living in a certain town, how much they'll need to get paid if they move there . . . that kind of thing. We're going to bring a librarian to show the class government resources and another to show them consumer health infor-

Ann Wheeler is the librarian at the Maryland Department of Natural Resources. Have a story idea for Job of a Lifetime? E-mail Ann at awheeler@dnr.state.md.us

mation resources that are freely available. We hope the students will have ideas, too, about what they'd like to learn."

Digitizing a herbarium

Schmidt enjoys collaborating with colleagues outside the university, as well. He is working with another reference librarian on a project to digitize a herbarium collection housed in Grand Teton National Park. (He presented their work at the ACRL National Conference in 2007.)

They work closely with botanists at the Rocky Mountain Herbarium (RMH) who have botanical expertise and the desire to see RMH digitized in the near future.

"We're in our third year of the project. We're pretty much done with the digital imaging, but we're still editing content.

In some cases we have to go back and add the information by hand from the digital image of the specimen label. We're planning to use Luna Insight as our online interface."

What type of researcher might use digital herbarium specimens? Schmidt answered that question for me. "A botanist interested in a plant might want to see a type specimen, in other words, an original from a collection. It's a way to check if a plant is what they think it is.

"The digital images we created can display the specimens at about 2.5 times the original size and still be pretty clear, but in order to see some of the features, such as seeds or floral parts, you sometimes need a very powerful microscope. The digital images help a researcher identify which specimens they need to borrow from the herbarium to examine more closely.

"So, for example, say there's a researcher on the East Coast looking at a certain genera of plant. After looking at the digital collection, they may find they only need

to borrow two or three specimens rather than the whole collection."

Future collaborations

Schmidt has lots of ideas for the future. "I'd like to see more collaboration between libraries and data curation. For example, the Rocky Mountain Herbarium has the original notebooks of one of the early collectors. We could digitize those and put the original descriptions of the plants online next to the digital images. And there are all kinds of opportunities, with podcasts and that kind of thing, to get young students interested in science.

For example, I could make a podcast of the entire process of collecting, pressing, drying, and entering a specimen into the herbarium.

"We were just up

at the Grand Teton National Park, meeting with the park personnel to discuss the herbarium project and found out there is another herbarium collection at the Teton Science School, which provides educational programming to grades K–12. We're hoping to write some grants to digitize that collection, as well. Hopefully we can tie it to the K–12 students, maybe even make curriculum kits. I'm hoping this gets students excited about science and botany."

Mountains of support

Schmidt credits the University of Wyoming's supportive environment for allowing him the leeway to pursue projects that interest him. "It's been amazing. That's why I think this is such a good job. I can initiate something and carry it through. The administration is very open in allowing us to do things like this."

Although it adds up to more than a 40-hour work week, he enjoys the work and loves the projects he's involved in. With a backdrop like the Grand Tetons, it's easy to see why this is a job of a lifetime. *~*

Associate librarian for reference and instruction services

What: Science subject specialist

Where: University of Wyoming

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