

## Guest editorial

### Image Counts

Over the past year I have spoken to academic librarians around the country about the need to recruit talented people to our profession, especially those from diverse backgrounds and those who have strong training in the sciences. Helping funnel bright individuals into library school programs is only part of the task, however. Recruiting also requires a more universal effort, persuading others of the variety in our field and of the unique services we provide. I am concerned that we are often so busy just doing our jobs that we don't make a clear impression on those around us.

Ask yourself these questions: Do people with whom you interact as a professional ever encounter you in other contexts and roles? And conversely, do people whom you meet in civic, religious, or social settings realize what you know and what you really do as a professional?

I am afraid that most of us would answer no to both questions, and that worries me. Librarianship has a chronically low profile among the information and education professions because people do not understand the depth and breadth of our expertise or the extent of our responsibilities. Fortunately, each of us is in a position to help correct this problem with a little planning and a bit of moxie. For instance, we can schedule a lunch date every few weeks with someone we know on campus or in the community who is not in our normal library circles. We can volunteer to speak to local groups about the role of information in society (which will really focus on the capabilities of academic librarians and, hence, of academic libraries). We can take part in high school and college career fairs as panelists and advisers. We can build

relationships with reporters who cover campus events and offer to help with feature stories about what goes on behind the scenes in an academic or research library. We can even join electronic bulletin boards on topics that interest us but are not library-related. Then, when we contribute to online discussions, we can mention that our professional training helped us locate such and such information in a particular place.

I have found that pointing out the common interest in information is often the best way to communicate with any audience, whether the group includes other highly trained professionals or citizens from diverse backgrounds. Because everyone today needs information to function well in society, I have discovered that highlighting our specialty as information connectors captures people's attention. It does not always seem obvious to others that librarians are often the best source for information of all kinds.

I know that many librarians hesitate to call attention to themselves, but that is not what I am suggesting. I am urging that we consciously and frequently call attention to our profession—especially when dealing with people who think that every library employee is a librarian and that no graduate work is required to enter the field. Keep in mind that we must be able to describe what we do in plain language without using jargon and acronyms.

Ultimately the best way to market ourselves is to be ourselves. We do offer a variety of unique services that are useful to the rest of society.

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