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Professor Sheidlower's New Book

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Professor Sheidlower's New Book

[These remarks were delivered in a slightly edited format at the Provost's reception for faculty authors, held on Dec. 13, 2011.]

If Prof. Sheidlower wanted to borrow from Ken Bain, he might have titled this book *What the Best College Librarians Do,* for essentially Scott’s book is about being a good teacher. As you may or may not know, Library Faculty teach Information Literacy sessions for students, often at the request of classroom faculty members – Information Literacy teaches students how to find, use, interpret, and evaluate information, whether in print or online. And unlike the classroom faculty, librarians usually only have one shot – about an hour – to reach the students.

Students are not always enthusiastic about their “Library class” – sometimes they have preconceived negative stereotypes about both libraries and librarians. Since it’s almost always a one-shot class, the instruction librarian does not have the same trust or rapport that the classroom faculty member has built up with his or her students over the course of weeks or months. And the information itself – “How to use the online catalog!” “How to search an EBSCO database!!” – is not always the most interesting, exciting, or memorable.

Scott adamantly believes that librarians who teach Information Literacy classes are performers, and that integrating humor into the subject matter makes the session more enjoyable for students, helps to build rapport, and also encourages students to visit the library in the future to seek out that librarian for assistance.

Scott Sheidlower has been interested in the connection between humor and teaching for several years, and was part of a panel at the prestigious ACRL National Conference in 2007 with the title, “Edutainment with a Bun: Librarian as Stand-up Comic.” Wanting to expand his research, he met Joshua Vossler, at that time an academic librarian in Texas, who was a like-minded librarian/comedian, and they decided to work together on what became this book. As the authors point out, their literature review only turned up 15 articles published about Information Literacy and humor between 1998 and 2008, so they are really on the forefront of this subject. Aside from the literature reviews they conducted, which also included “humor and education” and “humor and psychology,” the authors provide a helpful chapter filled with suggestions, such as avoiding the use of either stories or props. (I guess that’s why Carrot Top wouldn’t make a good librarian...)

They also sent out questionnaires to librarians around the country through listserves about using humor in teaching Information Literacy, and the second half of the book contains 50 techniques and/or strategies suggested by professional librarians, all of whom are credited by name in the book.

Humor, of course, is very subjective – what’s funny to a middle-aged librarian is not always funny to a 20-year-old student, a 30-year-old English professor, or to the Library faculty colleague who is doing your teaching observation. But the outcome is what’s important.

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...continued from page 4

If throwing a small amount of silliness into one’s teaching helps to liven up what would otherwise be a dry lesson about how to use the Library – and if that helps to draw those students back to visit the Library in the future – then the technique is successful. And since many students come to the Library and ask for Scott by name, he must be doing something right.

Prof. John Drobnicki
Acting Head of Technical Services

School Media Corner

The Library welcomes the new principal of the Queens High School for the Sciences at York College (QHSS), Dr. David Marmor, who was previously an Assistant Principal at Francis Lewis High School in Bayside. Dr. Marmor readily agreed to allow QHSS students to participate in York librarian Prof. Anamika Dasgupta’s book drive for the African Library Project (http://www.africanlibraryproject.org). Not only did QHSS students donate hundreds of new and gently-used books to be shipped to Malawi, they also tucked personal notes into some of the books describing what they liked (or loved) about them — and what wonderful books they were! The charitable literature lovers of QHSS donated Caldecott, Newbery, Coretta Scott King and Printz award-winning books along with children’s and adult classics, YA favorites and best-sellers.

In addition to providing information literacy sessions for QHSS classes and individual assistance to several QHSS students, a highlight of my year was working with teacher Ms. Joanne Graziani and her Global Studies students. In the fall and spring, classes used the library’s databases to research ancient civilizations and the middle ages, respectively; students wrote reports, cited sources and created artifacts relating to the two periods. A gallery walk was created in the library, where students used rubrics to peer-evaluate projects; students then created a library exhibit that included their reports and artifacts [See photo above].

In May students from QHSS participated in York’s 9th Annual Math and Science Expo. Librarians Anamika Dasgupta, Christina Miller, and Robert Machalow gave library tours to five groups of students participating in the Expo. This past year, I provided information literacy sessions for York’s College Now students and York Early Academy students taking Cultural Diversity and Speech courses at York College.

Another exciting development at QHSS this year was the addition of a new study hall, which I supervised for several hours each week. Manning the study hall provided a great opportunity to meet students, answer library-related questions, and collaborate with teachers. After another productive year of affiliation with QHSS, I look forward to continuing my work with Dr. Marmor and teachers to provide library services and integrate standards-based skills across the 9-12 curriculum.

Ms. Christina Miller
School Media Specialist