York College Library’s School Media Specialist: A New Library Model for Easing the Transition from High School to College

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Chapter Seven

York College Library’s School Media Specialist

A New Library Model for Easing the Transition from High School to College

Christina Miller and John A. Drobnicki

INTRODUCTION

York College, a senior college in the City University of New York (CUNY) system, has a library faculty position that is unique within CUNY: a full-time school media specialist. This librarian (Christina Miller) is a member of the CUNY faculty union, works the same number of hours per week as the other York librarians, and must meet the same requirements for reappointment, tenure, and promotion; however, she divides her time between providing library services to the York College community and to the staff and students of the Queens High School for the Sciences at York College (QHSS) and the York Early College Academy (YECA), both of which are operated by the New York City Department of Education (DOE). Miller also occasionally provides information literacy sessions for classes from area public schools and students enrolled in York’s College Now program.

Miller is York’s state-certified school media specialist and a literacy specialist. She is a York College-CUNY graduate with a BA in economics and subsequently earned two masters degrees (an M.L.S. and an MS Ed Literacy, grades 5–12) at Queens College-CUNY. Miller has served as York Library’s “High School Librarian” since the inception of QHSS in 2002, first as an adjunct (2002–2008) then as a full-time faculty member (2008–present). QHSS is located on the York College campus and is one of New York City’s specialized high schools requiring top-tier performance on a citywide en-
trance exam. It is a small (400 students), academically competitive school. QHSS does not have its own library; the school shares the York College Library. QHSS students have local borrowing privileges at York Library and full access to the library’s online resources, computers, and study rooms.

By her second semester at York Library, Miller began providing information literacy classes for QHSS students and professional development for teachers, and purchased materials for the library’s collection to support the school’s mission and curriculum. While the library needs of the QHSS community were Miller’s first priority, she also provided reference assistance for York’s college students.

In 2006, YECA was opened a short distance from the college’s campus with 81 students in sixth grade. With a grade added each year, the school reached full capacity, 567 students in grades 6–12, in 2012. YECA is one of CUNY’s twelve early college schools; students attend from grades 6–12 and can earn up to sixty college credits at York College by the time they graduate. From 2006–2010, YECA shared a building (and a library with a school media specialist) with the Catherine & Count Basie Middle School. In 2010 YECA moved to its current location, within walking distance of the college’s campus, to a building it shares with a middle school; however, YECA does not have access to a library at its current site. Like QHSS students, YECA students have local borrowing privileges at York Library and access to the library’s online resources, computers, and study rooms.

With QHSS’s growth from one grade to four, the opening of YECA, and the increasing need to designate a point person in the library to liaise with K–12 populations, Miller was appointed a full-time faculty member in 2008 and began to provide information literacy classes for York College students; serve on library, college, and university committees; and liaise with academic departments. Miller then enrolled in Queens College-CUNY to earn her second masters.

BACKGROUND OF THE SCHOOL LIBRARIAN POSITION AT YORK

In 2001 it was announced that York College would have a high school on its campus commencing in September 2002, as would several other CUNY campuses. It was also made clear from the start that the students of the soon-to-be-established QHSS would not have their own school library or school librarian, but would use the York College Library. The announcement took York’s faculty and staff by surprise, since they had not been asked to provide planning or input. Several issues were immediately raised by York’s librarians, including:
1. The library was already understaffed, with only six full-time faculty members covering two reference desks. Adding additional responsibilities without increased staffing would be burdensome and short-change students and teachers.

2. In CUNY, librarians are members of the faculty and are evaluated for annual reappointment (as well as tenure and promotion) based on the same criteria as the classroom faculty; that is, teaching effectiveness, scholarship, and service. Would it be a violation of the faculty contract to have *college* librarians evaluated based on their teaching of, and reference interactions with, *high school students*? Would this constitute out-of-title work and a change in librarian faculty members’ terms of employment? Would the college place a high school student in, for example, the classroom of a history professor without that professor’s prior consent? If not, why were the library faculty being treated differently?

3. In order to be a librarian in a public high school in New York State, one had to be certified as a school media specialist (library), which required the completion of education courses, a specialized library science curriculum, and a practicum. None of the existing library faculty members at York would qualify for certification as New York State school media specialists, and had no training or expertise in providing library services to high school-age students. By making York College librarians responsible for the high school, was the New York City Department of Education depriving a member of the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) of a job?

4. As part of a four-year undergraduate school, the York College Library concentrated on collecting college-level materials to support the college’s curriculum, as well as supporting the research needs of the faculty, which due to stagnant or reduced budgets over the years it had barely been able to maintain. Would the library be able to support the needs of high school students—albeit academically advanced—without an increase in funding? The library was already trying to cope with new college majors and programs, such as Communications Technology and Physician Assistant, with resultant increasing competition for scarce funds. Additionally, who would be responsible for collection development decisions?

5. Would the high school students have borrowing privileges, and if so, how would fines be enforced? (College students could be blocked from registering, but how would high school students be “forced” to pay fines?) How would the addition of high school students affect the library’s electronic resource subscriptions? Should they be counted as
part of York's FTE? Would the library have to install filters on its computers to protect these minors from pornography and other online dangers?

(See the appendix to this chapter for how these issues were resolved.)

York's librarians brought these issues to the leadership of the Professional Staff Congress (PSC, the union for CUNY faculty and staff), both at the campus level and university-wide. Because of (among other things) the lack of consultation with York's faculty and the strain that the proposed high school would have on campus resources, including the library, the executive committee of York's PSC chapter passed a resolution that "this decision and its timetable be revoked and that the proper planning bodies be constituted to discuss the feasibility and implementation of a new high school on the York College campus." The Library Faculty Committee of the PSC's Delegate Assembly also raised concerns about the new high schools on CUNY campuses with PSC President Barbara Bowen and Vice President Steve London.

Whether the pressure from York's library faculty and the PSC impacted or not, the York administration ultimately agreed to make funds available for the library to hire an adjunct librarian responsible for working with the new high school. Three months after QHSS opened, Miller was hired by York to fill this position, especially because of her educational background and professional interests—she completed the school media course concentration at Queens College (CUNY) Graduate School of Library and Information Studies and was interested in fulfilling the requirements for New York State certification as a school media specialist. During her initial years in the position, Miller earned fifteen graduate education credits; participated in a 150-hour practicum at a local high school library; passed the New York State Teacher Certification exams, Language Arts & Sciences Test (LAST), and Assessment of Teaching Skills-Written (ATS-W); attended New York State-mandated workshops on Child Abuse Recognition & Reporting and School Violence Prevention & Intervention; and underwent a background check (and fingerprinting); and ultimately received provisional certification as a New York State school media specialist (library). After submitting evidence of the equivalent of two years of experience as a school librarian at QHSS, Miller received permanent certification in 2007. As QHSS grew, Miller's hours grew accordingly; this complied nicely with Title 8, Section 91.2, of New York Codes, Rules and Regulations for employment of school librarians: "[I]n a secondary school with enrollment of more than 300 but not more than 500 pupils, a certified school media specialist shall devote at least one half of each school day to school library work" (Education 8 NYCRR, § 91.2; emphasis added).
As an adjunct, Miller was asked to be part of a planning committee for a second DOE school that would be affiliated with York: the York Early College Academy (YECA). When funding became available to add an additional full-time faculty line in the library, the then-chief librarian (Drobnicki) successfully argued for the creation of a line for a full-time, tenure-track school media specialist (the first position of its kind in CUNY), since the library served students from several DOE schools. A search was done, and York’s president appointed the existing adjunct (Miller) as a full-time school librarian in 2008; she remains the only certified school media specialist in the CUNY system, although other CUNY librarians do liaison work with high school and/or middle school students. The Leonard Lief Library at Lehman College (CUNY) subsequently hired an adjunct librarian, who has a background in children’s and young adult school librarianship, to work directly with the students of the high school on its campus (High School of American Studies—Lehman College), and the Brooklyn College Library has a designated librarian who oversees the library’s outreach to high school students, including students enrolled in the STAR (Science Technology and Research) Early College High School program, Brooklyn College Academy, and College Now partnerships.

On September 1, 2005, CUNY and the DOE signed an agreement governing the compensation that CUNY would receive in exchange for letting the DOE operate eleven high schools on its campuses (including QHSS). The fee for providing librarians and books for the high schools would be based on the DOE’s annual School Based Expenditure Report—in 2005, the figure was $60 per student. If a CUNY library did not grant full borrowing privileges to DOE high school students, the fee would be lowered to 83.3 percent of the amount. Since York granted full borrowing privileges to QHSS students, the library began to receive “high school funds” on an annual basis to purchase books and/or other materials, initially based on $60 multiplied by QHSS’s enrollment (the amount has since risen as the amount in the School Based Expenditure Report has risen).

YORK LIBRARY’S SCHOOL MEDIA PROGRAM

Although QHSS first opened with only 100 students in ninth grade (the school reached full capacity in 2005, approximately 425 students), Miller created a mission statement, a vision, and strategic directions for York Library’s School Media Program:

Mission—To facilitate QHSS faculty and students’ access and use of a wide variety of materials to meet their research needs.
Vision—The York College Library is a state-of-the-art facility staffed by a certified school library media specialist. The library serves as the information center for students and faculty of the Queens High School for the Sciences at York College. A dynamic partnership exists between the high school and the college; administrators, the school media specialist and teachers work toward common goals. They collaborate to ensure resources and programs are available to support the curriculum. Students are information literate, regularly visit the library and are comfortable using a wide variety of print and online materials for research and independent reading.

Strategies for growing the school media program will center on:

1. intra-institutional collaboration and cooperation (i.e., meet regularly with teachers and administrators);
2. curriculum planning (i.e., encourage teachers to share curricula, join the QHSS curriculum committee);
3. collection development (i.e., purchase materials to support the QHSS curricula);
4. instruction (provide group and individual instruction);
5. promotion of the library and its resources (i.e., publicize the library and its resources in the library and high school newsletters, on the library website, and through special programming, book displays, and exhibits);
6. networking (i.e., join committees and associations that focus on K–12 information literacy); and
7. evaluation of the program (maintain data for all aspects of the school media program).

Miller has become the point person in the library for QHSS administrators, teachers, and students, and also for York College’s liaison to YECA, and she rarely passes up an opportunity to work with high school students. In order to sustain an active school media program, Miller recognized that she needed to develop good relationships with students, teachers, and administrators, and get involved in K–12 activities whenever the opportunity arose. Over the years Miller has engaged in myriad K–12 activities, including:

- providing information literacy sessions for an area public high school
- giving tours of the library to high school students participating in a regional science competition at York College
- judging high school science competitions
- teaching classes with York College professors during YECA students’ three-week “Summer Immersion Program” during two summers at York
- participating in the New York Academy of Medicine Junior Fellows Program with QHSS students
• accompanying QHSS students and their teacher to author readings at the 92nd Street Y as part of its Literary Outreach Program.

At QHSS Miller was embedded in a journalism class and helped edit the school newspaper, Synapse; she also helped organize the school’s annual three-day science poster exhibition in the library. In many professional development sessions and presentations at staff meetings provided for QHSS teachers, Miller highlighted new library resources or websites and encouraged teachers to integrate standards-based information literacy skills into their curricula. Miller wrote an article about the “American Association of School Librarians (AASL) Standards for the 21st Century Learner Lesson Plan Database” for the journal The Charleston Advisor, and gave two presentations (one to New York City DOE school librarians and one to QHSS teachers) promoting use of the database to integrate AASL Standards and the Common Core State Standards into a school’s curriculum.

To publicize the library’s school media program, Miller writes a column in the library’s newsletter (now called LibWire) that highlights school media activities, including information literacy classes, collection development, class visits to the library, and special programs and projects that she participated in with high school students or that took place in the library over the previous year.

Miller provides approximately thirty classes each year for QHSS students and YECA students taking college courses at York. These consist of typical “one-shot” lessons and multisession units that take place in the library’s computer lab, in a computer lab on campus, or in a QHSS smart classroom. Students also meet with Miller for research consultations, and seek assistance via e-mail. This past year, Miller provided a weekly library session for students taking the high school class “Writing the Research Paper” and was able to view and critique students’ work in the class’s dropbox.com space.

CUNY LIBRARIES’ SERVICES TO K–12

In his book Informed Transitions, Kenneth J. Burnham (2013a) notes the “impressive record of collaboration, engagement, and outreach demonstrated by librarians working to transition students across the educational continuum” (xi). Burnham (2013b) defines the “transition movement” as “libraries and librarians collaborating across the educational continuum to prepare students for academic success” (6). Nowhere is this movement more exemplified than in the partnerships between K–12 schools and colleges. The introduction of high schools on college campuses, dual-enrollment schools, and college prep programs is based on the premise (and promising data) that students at both the college and high school level benefit (higher high school
graduation and college retention rates, smoother transition to college, better prepared college students, etc.) if they are exposed to a college setting, receive college prep, or take college courses while they are in middle or secondary school (Barnett & Stamm, 2010; Berger, Adelman & Cole, 2010; Rosenbaum & Becker, 2011; Columbia University, 2012; Edmunds et al., 2010). As a result of these postsecondary opportunities, more academic librarians are interacting with middle and high school students, their teachers, and librarians (if they have one), giving all the parties an opportunity to articulate and anticipate the information literacy needs of students throughout a broader educational continuum than in the past. These collaborations and partnerships represent a national trend in which traditional boundaries between educational levels, institutions, disciplines, and academic and “everyday” learning are more fluid than in the past. (Miller and a library colleague, Dr. Anamika Megwalu, recently gave a presentation at a library conference about fostering students’ transliteracy skills and helping them to apply their “everyday” learning to academic work.)

One of several factors Rosenbaum and Becker (2011) identified as contributing to the success of early college schools is the creation of “clear curricular pathways aligned with college-level coursework” (16). They quote CUNY early college administrator Cass Conrad who stated that “teachers [in early college programs] plan backwards from college, to make sure [students] know what they need to be successful in college-level classes” (16). Miller finds herself doing this “backward planning” when she designs information literacy sessions for high school students. From her teaching experience, interactions with college students at the reference desk, and work on committees that focused on information literacy, Miller is aware of the information literacy skills college students find difficult to master, and she emphasizes these skills in the instruction and reference assistance provided for high school students.

Miller was part of a CUNY/DOE Libraries working group that explored ways to ease the high school to college transition. The committee analyzed college assignments and syllabi to identify the information skills students would need to successfully complete the work; they explored ways (such as professional development workshops and online tool kits) K–12 teachers could align the skills in their assignments to the Common Core State Standards and college assignments. Although this committee was dissolved, at least two other groups in CUNY, the DOE/CUNY Library Collaborative and Graduate NYC!, are working on easing the high-school-to-college transition by connecting high school and college administrators, teachers, faculty, and librarians, and exploring ways to align curricula with information literacy standards and college expectations and increase incoming college students’ preparedness to do college work.
Through CUNY’s PreEducation/College Collaborative programs, each of CUNY’s eleven senior colleges and six of its seven community colleges have a College Now program, a high school on its campus, or an affiliated early or middle college school. In addition, many CUNY colleges have formal and informal partnerships with K–12 schools or provide outreach to local K–12 schools on an ad hoc basis. Some of CUNY’s affiliated early or middle college schools or high schools that share their campuses have their own libraries or share a library with another K–12 school, while others have neither a library nor are provided services by their affiliated CUNY library. An informal survey of CUNY libraries conducted by the authors in August 2012 showed that a majority of CUNY libraries provide services to K–12 populations. Of the ten (of eleven) CUNY senior college libraries and six (of seven) community college libraries that responded to the survey, nine offer borrowing privileges for K–12 populations; four provide remote access to the library’s databases; ten offer information literacy classes for K–12 populations, and four offer interlibrary loans for K–12 populations. Of those colleges that provide information literacy sessions for K–12 populations, five have a designated high school liaison that provides the sessions.

THE FUTURE

A lot has changed in the twelve years since Miller created her vision for York Library’s School Media Program. The physical library is no longer the “information center” for students and faculty of QHSS. Students now have access to the Internet, e-books, multivolume encyclopedias, and thousands of full-text journal articles, periodicals, and newspapers in their classrooms and from remote sites. The library’s home page and the Internet have become the students’ information center. Miller’s role decries the concept that librarians may become obsolete—she is needed more than ever to help students navigate the information landscape and acquire information literacy skills for all their learning needs, to ensure that information skills are integrated throughout the high school curriculum, and to provide opportunities for students to develop their skills. York Library’s school media position was an essential component of the collaboration between the college and high school, and critical in the development of a successful and expanding school media program at QHSS.

APPENDIX

The Library Faculty at York College were concerned about the following issues when it was announced that there would be a high school on campus:
1. The library was already understaffed, with only six full-time faculty members covering two reference desks. Adding additional responsibilities without increased staffing would be burdensome and shortchange students and teachers.

- Christina Miller was hired as an adjunct to be the liaison to the high school, which helped to alleviate the staffing issue.

2. In CUNY, librarians are members of the faculty and are evaluated for annual reappointment (as well as tenure and promotion) based on the same criteria as the classroom faculty; that is, teaching effectiveness, scholarship, and service. Would it be a violation of the faculty contract to have college librarians evaluated based on their teaching of, and reference interactions with, high school students? Would this constitute out-of-title work and a change in librarian faculty members’ terms of employment? Would the college place a high school student in, for example, the classroom of a history professor without that professor’s prior consent? If not, why were the library faculty being treated differently?

- The library faculty did feel that they were not consulted when it was decided that the York College Library would be the library for the high school—but the hiring of Miller as the “high school librarian” (first as part-time and then as full-time) helped to smooth over that initial reluctance. Although all of the librarians assist anyone who comes to the reference desk, and it is not always apparent whether students are in high school or college, Christina Miller is the only librarian who teaches information literacy sessions and other workshops for QHSS and YECA (sometimes assisted by another librarian). And though every library faculty member is observed by a department colleague teaching an IL class as part of the contractually mandated annual evaluation process, Miller has always been observed teaching a class for York College students rather than high school students to assure she is held to the same standard as other library faculty.

3. In order to be a librarian in a public high school in New York State, one had to be certified as a school media specialist (library), which required completion of education courses, a specialized library science curriculum, and a practicum. None of the existing library faculty members at York qualified for certification as a New York State school media specialist, or had training or expertise in providing library services to high school-age students. By making York College
York College Library’s School Media Specialist

Although state certification as a school media specialist was not required to be a library faculty member at York College, it was one of the preferred qualifications in the advertisement for the full-time job that was secured by Miller. The New York City DOE often does not comply with Section 91.2 of New York Codes, Rules and Regulations for employment of school librarians, and it did in fact request a variance “to provide equivalent library services in alternative ways”; this deflected any potential issues around the question of union solidarity.

4. As part of a four-year undergraduate school, the York College Library concentrated on collecting college-level materials to support the college’s curriculum, as well as the research needs of the faculty, which due to stagnant or reduced budgets over the years it had barely been able to maintain. Would the library be able to support the needs of high school students—albeit academically advanced—without an increase in funding? The library was already trying to cope with new college majors and programs, such as Communications Technology and Physician Assistant, with resultant increasing competition for scarce funds. Additionally, who would be responsible for collection development decisions?

- The library had several years of poor budgets prior to the opening of the high school, but the Office of Academic Affairs made funds available to acquire books suitable for high school students. And, as mentioned above, the university and the Department of Education reached an agreement in 2005 that provided for funding of the libraries that served affiliated high schools. This funding has been very advantageous, since the materials that have been purchased are also utilized by college students.

5. Would the high school students have borrowing privileges, and if so, how would fines be enforced? (College students could be blocked from registering, but how would high school students be “forced” to pay fines?) How would the addition of high school students affect the library’s electronic resource subscriptions? Should they be counted as part of York’s FTE? Would the Library have to install filters on its computers to protect these minors from pornography and other online dangers?
The library has sought the cooperation of the high school principal when there have been instances of unpaid fines or lost books, and it has not been an issue. Because their school is off campus, YECA students who seek borrowing privileges must have their parents or guardians sign a letter stating that they will be responsible for any fines or lost materials. The University IT policy explicitly prohibits the installation of software that filters based on content, so that has also not been an issue. The high school enrollment is so small that it has not affected the cost of any of the library’s electronic subscriptions, since an additional 400–500 FTE would not push the library up into a more expensive category. Something unforeseen was the switch to a network log-in system for York College students that excludes QHSS students because they are not in York’s “Active Directory.” The solution thus far has been to provide QHSS students with an unsecured, generic account that they all share. As the library moves to a reservation system that is linked to York College students’ individual network log-ins, the generic shared account may present problems, and the library is working with York’s IT Department to provide individual accounts for QHSS students.

REFERENCES


Enhancing Teaching and Learning in the 21st-Century Academic Library

Successful Innovations That Make a Difference

Edited by Bradford Lee Eden

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Lanham • Boulder • New York • London