

## Against the Grain

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# Expert Guide, Cheerleader, Coach, Fake News Combatant: The Many Hats of Academic Research Librarians in Supporting Students

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use the library literature to make sure they're working on something original or novel. We support this work through targeted collection development, which comes from the knowledge and expertise of subject liaisons who buy or lease information, and through aggregated search engines designed and populated by librarians with an IT or a cataloging/metadata background.

Many researchers in multiple fields use, reformat, and create data. Anthropologists use GIS data. High-energy physicists collaborate with large, globally available datasets. Biological and medical scientists use genome mapping, while humanists mine old English texts. All researchers who use data have to learn how to harvest, sort, organize and preserve it. Research data management librarians are trained to teach and support this type of work. Best practices include having a research data management plan at the beginning of the process so that no data is lost, disorganized, unusable, or unsharable at the end of the process. Research data management stems directly from the field of library and information sciences, as librarians have long been harvesting information, organizing it, and making it accessible, adapting and creating new systems as the data creation demands. We have hired a data scientist to be **Penn State Libraries'** first research data management librarian, and we plan to hire a social science research data management librarian in the coming year.

Research has changed with the creation of massive digital indexing, abstracting, and sometimes the deep indexing of databases with information beyond just the citation or full text. As scholarly output and the meta-information created to manage has moved to the digital world, researchers have had to spend much less time doing their background work. Many publishers are experimenting with and creating innovative support tools that are hybrids of classic indexing and abstracting databases. Tools like **SAGE Research Methods** and **REAXYS** not only help researchers find materials, but also help them make connections between different types of information in new and time-saving ways. These new products are indeed wonderful for researchers, but their proliferation produces deep challenges for managing flat, decreasing, or very slow growth in library materials budgets. And instruction librarians must keep abreast of regular updates and interface changes.

At **Penn State**, we conduct annual rolling reviews of journal subscriptions and databases, and we are planning to assess our allocation model in the near future and explore the idea of creating an allocation schema. We hope our schema can account for the huge variations across disciplines in the creation, use and dissemination of scholarly output.

Our subject liaisons review their subscriptions individually and in subject-oriented groups, and they consult with faculty to make cancellation or purchasing decisions. Though we haven't recently conducted a large-scale cancellation, we recognize that we may eventually have to move beyond annual reviews to a comprehensive assessment.

## Guidance on Open Access and Copyright

Once researchers are ready to publish, our librarians can work closely with them to help them evaluate the viability of open access journals, or to help them deposit data or papers into open access repositories. Our goal is to make these processes seamless, so that there is very little or no burden on researchers. Librarians, especially those with expertise in copyright or scholarly communications, help researchers with language to use in contracts so that they can retain some of their copyrights — ensuring that they can share their articles in a repository, on their websites, or with their colleagues and students. These specialized librarians also must teach faculty and researchers that they need to retain some or most of their copyright. Our own copyright librarian, who holds the first position of its kind at **Penn State**, has spent the past three years figuring out the university's needs. She has become a valuable resource for individual faculty and researchers in managing the copyrights for their scholarship, their use of materials in the classroom, and the creation of their open education resources. Based on her needs analysis, we will be adding positions to that department: a scholarly communications outreach librarian and copyright analysis support staff.

## Research Assessment

Once research is published, there are many ways to assess its worth. Citation counts are no longer the only methods of assessment. Altmetrics are nontraditional metrics, such as counting the number of times people tweet about someone's research. This and other types of altmetrics can be mined to assess an article's effect on the profession. We have a group of medical and science librarians at **Penn State** who help researchers learn about and use these new ways of measuring scholar impact.

## Open Education Resource (OER) Support

Our librarians, especially those with subject and instruction responsibilities — along with instructional designers at the university — are working closely with faculty to identify, vet, design, and review appropriate open education resources for use in our World Campus courses, and for other courses where faculty are interested in experimenting. Other institutions, or even state university systems, have mandated OER. Librarians are invaluable partners with faculty conducting research into the viability and use of open materials in the classroom, and librarians play a strong role in increasing the adoption of open education resources by advocating for them with students, faculty, administration, and other librarians.

## Conclusion

As academia changes, so do libraries. As you've read, librarians have taken on new roles to support changes, sometimes drastic, in our institutions. Many people in higher education say that the library is the heart of an institution. At **Penn State**, we take this role seriously. As our institution responds to changes in the world of higher education, we respond to the needs of the faculty, students, and researchers with whom we interact with and support. This is because we change along with those who need us. It's an exciting time to be a librarian, no matter what your title is. 🌍

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# Expert, Guide, Cheerleader, Coach, Fake News Combatant: The Many Hats of Academic Research Librarians in Supporting Students

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by **Roz Tedford** (Director for Research and Instruction, Z. Smith Reynolds Library, Wake Forest University) <tedforr@wfu.edu>

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**W**hen you tell people outside of academe that you are an academic librarian you often get responses back like “oh, I'd love to be a librarian, I'd love working with books all day!” or “do students really need libraries anymore? Isn't everything online?” But within the walls of academe, research librarians today are more engaged than

ever in the teaching and research missions of their institutions and while the hats we wear continue to grow, so too does our impact on student success.

Students come to college with varying degrees of research experience behind them. Some come from high schools where there was extensive attention given to the research

process while others have never written a true research paper before. Add to the mix a growing international population of students and you bring issues of cultural differences in writing and attribution expectations and English as a second language issues into the mix. So we never quite know what to expect

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when we start to meet with classes and with individual students about research.

But research librarians at all levels are nothing if not flexible. We should be developing a sense of what level of experience the students have in our classes and what the faculty expect from student research and we adjust our approach accordingly.

To do this, we need tools in our toolkits that we bring out to meet the needs of faculty and their students. From single class meetings to semester-long credit bearing classes, from one-on-one appointments to taking research help directly to students outside of the library building, academic librarians should be eager to meet the students where they are and to become an essential partner for faculty in guiding students through a research paper or project.

### Whole-Class Meetings

Whole-class meetings with students, sometimes referred to as “one-shots” by librarians, can be foundational to the other work we do because we can provide essential information as students are beginning to wrestle with the research project. The content of these sessions are usually negotiated between the faculty and the librarian and range from a quick “here’s who I am and what I can do for you — now come meet with me on your own” to full class-length instruction on searching catalogs, databases, web content.

At **Wake Forest**, we have found several things that can help make these sessions successful:

- Use some of the time at the beginning of class to make sure students know their way around your library’s website (e.g., how to make an appointment, how to find research guides, where your workshops are listed, etc.). Don’t assume they know these things. Making them comfortable with your web presence is as important as making them comfortable with your building.
- Reiterate (multiple times) that you are available for in-person help. Most students are not going to speak up in the class to ask questions about their own topics. But making sure they know that you WANT them to come meet with you (and how they can make those appointments) can ease their minds.
- Don’t try to cover everything. Focus on where the students are in the research timeline and focus on what should be the very NEXT thing they need to be doing. Then encourage them to come see you for help in the rest of the process.
- Don’t let perfect be the enemy of good. You will not always get the backing you might want from the faculty member. You may only get 10 minutes. You may only feel like five students in a class of 30 are actu-

ally paying attention. One-shots are not the ideal instruction environment even in the best of circumstances, but they can be very useful to many students and faculty. Remember that and do what you can.

### In an Era of “Fake News”...

In the past year, librarians have seen an uptick in the number of faculty who want librarians to talk to students about issues surrounding “fake news,” and we should feel uniquely qualified to discuss this topic; whether looking at the peer review process in light of how expertise is developed, or at issues such as the “filter bubble” and echo chambers that lead to distrust of sources that don’t agree with us, librarians should lead students in these kind of discussions. Helping students be selective and critical consumers of information while steering them away from a skepticism toward any information that doesn’t mesh with their personal beliefs is a tricky but important role that academic librarians should embrace.

These conversations are not always easy, but things like **Ted Talks**, provocative news pieces, and discussions of sites like **Snopes** can be wonderful ways to get students to see situations in new ways. The key is to find an “in” that you feel comfortable discussing and going from there. If the session is for a class taught by a faculty in an academic discipline — meet with the faculty to find out what they are interested in the students getting from the session and then use the topic of the class to craft a session. The success of these alternative kinds of sessions depends in large part on the library’s role in the campus community.

### Classes for Credit

Some academic libraries also offer credit-bearing classes — either required or elective — for students to take. Sometimes they serve as a general education requirement to cover issues of information literacy and other times they support discipline-specific research. It is in these classes that we can tackle the larger issues of information creation, copyright and intellectual property and perhaps most importantly today, fake news and junk science. They can be add-on classes for research seminars or geared to graduate students. What they have in common is a more in-depth engagement with the content and a longer relationship between librarian and student.

Getting administration to support for-credit classes can be tricky. Using accreditation standards is one way to get buy-in; if your institution is up for reaccreditation or if you have a Quality Enhancement Plan or other strategic plan or goals for the institution, having a class that helps meet those goals can be attractive. Another way is to start small — perhaps with one department with honors research seminars — and offer a small half- or one-credit class for elective credit in that department as an add-on for the research seminar. Or start with a graduate program where students are struggling with research as programs with large numbers of non-traditional or older students can be good targets. Someone who has not

done research in 20 years might appreciate the opportunity to take an elective class that would guide them through today’s research landscape.

### One-on-Ones

One-on-one meetings between librarian and student where a student asks a specific research question, are perhaps the most important interaction we have but also the most resource-intensive. Whether they need background research to set the stage for their paper or need to find one specific United Nations report on genocide, students get the highest-touch help by meeting with their librarian. Because these interactions are not “one-and-done,” often students return to meet with the same librarian, or will meet with various librarians for various needs.

It is in these meetings that we get to steer students to the kind of resources the faculty expects. We help students vet sources of information, find the needle in the haystack of information (a really, really, really big haystack these days), navigate interlibrary loan for materials outside our collections, and cite that tricky UN report once it has been found.

One of the keys to get students in the door for these sessions is to make it clear that this is your job — you are there to help them do research. Often students feel they are “cheating” or “bothering you” and wherever you interact with them, it is critical that you dispel those myths and make it clear that you are doing your job (hopefully a job you love) by helping students. Asking questions during the session about the assignment, the topic, etc. can help to establish a rapport with the students and help them realize you appreciate the interaction. When students are embarrassed that they need help, it is our job to make them feel welcome and comfortable. Following-up after the sessions can also bring the students back for repeat meetings. If you come across new items that are relevant to the students, just dropping them an email with a link can be critical in keeping communication going.

Librarians often find ourselves in the roles of coach AND cheerleader during these sessions. For a student who has never written a research paper before, their first few attempts can be very stressful. A faculty member may not have a chance for in-depth interactions with all their students. A friendly librarian who can help get a student going down the road to good research can boost confidence and set students on a path for success. While we can count the total number of one-on-one sessions, it is far more difficult to measure this qualitative impact on success.

While the traditional one-on-one sessions are fairly standard at most academic institutions, new ways of finding students who need research help are also being tried. Pop-up or roaming research help, such as setting up a table in residence halls or dining halls during heavy research times, is usually well worth the energy expended. At **Wake Forest**, we set up a table with an outreach librarian in the lobbies of first-year residence halls over the fall semester.

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undergraduate research experiences. Both in terms of finding applicable digital journal articles or physical texts and as a physical location to study into consistently late hours, the library served as an invaluable resource for all aspects of my education. When looking for final graduate school options, the library served both as a resource for considering advisors and also as a component that was considered when making a final decision on which school to attend.

During my first semester as a full-time student, I became involved in undergraduate research that necessitated an early introduction to the resources that the library had to offer. My introductory-level courses also required introductory sessions with reference librarians in order to provide students with the groundwork knowledge that would ultimately be an essential component during future courses. These sessions showed me the physical collections available in the facility but also demonstrated effective tips and tricks for utilizing online assets. Perhaps most important, these sessions also highlighted the appropriate ways to use library information, such as citation management tools and identifying potentially undependable journal articles.

When undertaking a project, the library is always my first stop to finding previous literature and formulate research questions. The first individual undergraduate research project that I undertook showed the importance of an effective library catalog and database. The project consisted of a program evaluation of a language immersion program in the local public school district. The program had developed a well-respected reputation but minimal analysis had been conducted on the efficacy of the program and the outcomes of its students specific to language utilization. I was able to demonstrate tangible benefits for the program in addition to providing a snapshot of the foreign language utilization by graduates. While online resources provided an extensive basis for my literature review and the development of my research protocol, the print resources in the library were perhaps most useful as they provided a greater contextual basis for the articles and gave a more elaborate description of research methodologies. I was surprised by the variety of print resources available locally and by the overall value that those sources provided towards my project.

The value of physical print resources seems to vary slightly based on academic disciplines. During my undergraduate studies, I found that print resources seemed to be more relevant to the social sciences and humanities than to the physical sciences. While I often used print resources for groundwork theories in the social sciences or classic texts in the humanities, my peers and I rarely used physical print resources in the physical sciences because that data and research had often been reworked and utilized for today's groundbreaking discoveries.

The physical library facility itself also serves as an integral facet for students and young researchers, such as small group study rooms for working on group projects or studying for final exams. Similarly, small

rooms for those involved in webinars or online courses may serve as the only suitable opportunity for some students to effectively participate in distance learning. Appropriate and effective management of these spaces, perhaps extending hours during final exams, is crucial for them to be well-utilized.

As future generations of students increasingly continue to focus on digital assets as the primary means of information, libraries will likely face an increasing burden to demonstrate relevance, particularly for the highly-trained personnel that keep the library running smoothly. The immediate effects of budgetary constrictions are likely to be the most deeply felt as well: reduced hours, fewer online resource subscriptions and limited access to reference librarians. Translating these effects to library users is integral to communicate the importance of the institution for current and future students. The role of faculty in the effective use of the library should also be highlighted. As professional academics, some faculty have demonstrated a strong understanding of the resources a library holds but also how best to utilize those assets. Faculty should strive to share that information with students as a hands-on example of effective outcomes. 🌱

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*Iain Miller recently graduated from the University of Alaska Anchorage after completing an extensive undergraduate course of study. During his undergraduate studies, Iain was involved with a variety of undergraduate research projects that covered topics from the social and physical sciences. He will be starting a Master's program at the University of Alberta in the fall with a focus on rural and indigenous healthcare and ultimately plans to attend medical school.*

#### Endnotes

1. Office of Institutional Research. (2016). *Fact Book 2015-2016*. Anchorage, Alaska: Author, University of Alaska Anchorage. Accessed at <https://www.uaa.alaska.edu/academics/institutional-effectiveness/departments/institutional-research/fact-book.cshtml>.
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We give out candy and students stop to talk and often even ask reference questions or book a research appointment. This is a low-stakes way to talk to the students where they are and even if all they come away with is a piece of candy and a reminder that librarians are there to help, it's worth our time. Students begin to see the library as more than just the walls of the building and see librarians as people willing to meet them where they are.

#### Building Faculty Relationships

As with any relationship, building a rapport with faculty takes time. The more chances you have for interaction, the better. Whether that is in planning your session, providing feedback

based on your meetings with students, running into them at a lecture, or simply meeting them for coffee to get their take on how the session went, the more you communicate, the greater the relationship will be.

Communicating back to the faculty as the students come to meet with you will serve several purposes. First, it lets faculty know that their students are taking advantage of the service and makes it more likely they will invite you into their classrooms. Second, it is your chance to provide faculty feedback on assignments. If students are struggling with the assignment, contacting the faculty for clarification can let them know what they need to clarify for everyone and expose some issues they need to fix.

At **Wake Forest**, as we have begun to work with faculty more often, we have seen them bringing us in to help at new phases of

the class. We are often asked for input as they craft assignments and in this era of 'fake news' discussions, to develop content around that. The more flexible you are with what you are willing to do, the greater variety of work you will see yourself doing.

Academic librarians are often the touchstones for students throughout the research process, serving roles that range from counselor to detective — from expert to encourager. Throughout it all, our primary goal is to reduce the time students spend on the hunt for good sources in order to maximize the time they can spend on the reading of the sources and the crafting of their arguments. We meet with students in a variety of different environments and assist in a variety of different ways and our hope is that their research projects are the better for it. 🌱