The Quarterly Interview: Andrea Falcone

Auraria Library, University of Colorado Denver
-Edited Transcript-

LOEX: *Where do you work? What is your job title and main responsibilities? How long have you been in this position?*

Falcone: Over the last three years, I've been a library faculty member at the University of Colorado Denver. I was drawn to the Auraria Library because it serves three distinct institutions: Community College of Denver, Metropolitan State University of Denver, and the University of Colorado Denver. I stepped into a newly designed role—Department Head for Education and Outreach Services—with the aim of evolving an ad-hoc instruction program into a strategic and sustainable one serving over 40,000 students with a broad spectrum of curricular needs ranging from guaranteed transfer courses to doctoral programs. As the department head, I established program-level student learning outcomes, embraced shared information literacy curricula and assessments, rebalanced faculty workloads, solidified newly remodeled teaching spaces, formalized a peer teaching observation program, and developed two new positions (Pedagogy and Assessment Librarian and a Graduate Teaching and Learning Librarian). I also formalized our partnerships with campus support offices, which led to a consistent library presence at campus events and trainings. Our talented team made these accomplishments possible; I'm fortunate to work with colleagues that strive for continuous improvement.

In August 2017, I was appointed Associate Director for Education and Public Services whereby I have the pleasure and challenge of envisioning and managing information services more broadly. This includes engendering academic success in and beyond the classroom and the strategic development of library learning spaces and integrated service points. This work is often about responding strategically to user needs and bringing library departments together to achieve similar aims.

In your current position, you are the manager of a division that includes an "Education and Outreach" department, and also an "Access and Public Services" department. How do you see these services as working to benefit each other? What challenges, if any, are the competing demands of each department?

The two departments may seem dissimilar at the outset— one is primarily comprised of staff and addresses impromptu needs of patrons on a daily basis, and the other

consists of faculty and a small team of graduate assistants who facilitate planned learning experiences focused on curricular needs. However, these two units are quite complimentary and embrace the shared goal of student, faculty, and staff success. The challenge working with these two departments is determining how quickly to implement change and how best to communicate. It's imperative that procedural improvements and new services and initiatives be shared, but it's all the more important that we discuss the potential impact on other library units before moving forward. To be successful, I rely on informal discussions and strategic communications to maintain healthy relationships and build consensus.

As mostly an instruction librarian in your career, have you encountered any challenges in managing non-instruction librarians?

As an educator, I have an intimate understanding of what motivates many instruction librarians to design and deliver exemplary learning experiences. When I began managing teams with very different responsibilities and in unfamiliar content areas, I spent time trying to understand their unique motivations for doing good work. For example, one of my urgent tasks was to ensure consistent coverage of our circulation desk. Having never served in a circulation position, my first instinct was to increase the desk shifts for our existing personnel. Upon further reflection, I realized I needed to learn about the people themselves rather than simply taking an operational approach. Having one-on-one conversations about past experiences, perceived self-confidence, and future goals were an important part. This seemed daunting, but I had been developing this management philosophy for years. I spent much of my time determining how to motivate students and determining ways to bring their existing knowledge and experiences into the fold.

Over the past couple of years, you have been the chair of the ACRL Standards for Libraries in Higher Education Review Task Force. What is your biggest takeaway (or two) from your participation on this task force?

Chairing the Review Task Force was the most influential growth opportunity for me thus far in my career. I needed to encourage and balance differing perspectives from across all types of academic libraries. All organizations have unique missions, personnel structures, and strategic plans. The Standards need to balance specificity and

flexibility in order to accommodate all these institutional ecosystems.   I relied on my experience as an educator when working with the task force and embraced active listening, outcomes setting, and clear and consistent communication. It's tough to pinpoint one or two takeaways since I believe the experience will continue to influence my work, but I did have a renewed assurance that our profession is proactively evolving, and I was inspired by the collective passion for the future of our profession, the institutions that we serve, and our users.

How might instruction librarians use the instructional elements of the Standards for Libraries in Higher Education? How might this be contrasted with the <u>Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education</u>?

I've engaged in many conversations with instruction librarians struggling with their identities—are we an academic unit or a service unit? Why chose when we can demonstrate the value we bring to both roles? One way academic units demonstrate their value is through successful student learning assessment. For instruction programs, the Framework can serve as a tool for demonstrating student learning. It gives you a flexible structure with which to hang your pedagogical successes. Along similar lines, Principle 3, Educational Role, from the *Standards for Libraries in Higher Education* illuminates the value of developing partnerships with faculty and exemplifying our expertise as educators, amongst other important roles. This is not only important to our profession but also to our institutions. In the broadest sense, both documents are powerful tools that guide our work and help demonstrate our value.

As a library leader how do you champion the value of your instructional services to campus stakeholders? Do you utilize your work with either the Standards or the Framework?

My immediate response is that I try to champion our value as frequently as possible! I use a variety of communications that are audience-specific. I share success stories internally through meetings, the staff newsletter, and reports to our administration. I also distill those reports into one-pagers that I give to department chairs and program directors across campus. Perhaps most influential are the face-to-face discussions with potential stakeholders, including faculty, administrators, and support offices—those discussions usually start with a summary of our programmatic student learning outcomes, which are influenced by the *Framework*, and examples of teaching collaborations with other departments to demonstrate the various techniques and flexibility of our program. While I may not

always point directly to the *Framework* or the *Standards for Libraries in Higher Education*, they underpin all the work that I do. I find that these documents help us remain focused on our priorities instead of drifting into areas better handled by our colleagues.

What books or articles have influenced you?

So many great publications come to mind, but I'll limit to three books—each influencing different aspects of my work:

- *Say It in Six: How to Say Exactly What You Mean in Six Minutes or Less* (1996) by Ron Hoff

As a manager, you are often asking for things, and this book guided "asks" that mattered significantly to the department. For example, I've successfully requested additional personnel and classroom space, made significant changes to our long-standing curriculum committee, and formalized teaching as a departmental priority. While success cannot be guaranteed, the strategies in this book have served me well on many occasions.

- *Transforming Information Literacy Instruction Using Learning-Centered Teaching* (2012) by Joan R. Kaplowitz

A few years ago, I requested copies of this book for everyone in the department, which I hope signaled a commitment to and confidence in the influential content. If you are aiming to develop a student-focused teaching team and cultivate an educator mindset, this book is for you. I especially love the teacher self-assessments because they have the power to generate reflective conversations amongst colleagues. Admittedly, I've read this book more times than I know. Whether you are new to teaching or have decades of experience under your belt, you will learn something.

- *Reframing Academic Leadership* (2011) by Lee G. Bolman and Joan V. Gallos

When I first took a middle management position, I struggled to resolve miscommunications and to explain decisions. This book helped me better understand the difficult yet powerful role middle managers play in our organizations. As a result, I altered my interpersonal approach to focus on what I can do differently, which included being direct with colleagues as soon as difficult situations arose.