

PLACE: RECRUITING AND RETAINING LIBRARIANS IN INDIANA

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This issue is a collection of articles gathered to help us think about the idea of “place.” If we understand the concept of place physically and metaphorically, we can better encourage new people to join our field. Place can connote a sense of belonging as shown in phrases such as: “This is my place” or “I belong at this place.” There can be changing places, new places, unique places, dangerous places, imaginary places, forgotten places, unknown places, curious places, and more. We have invited writers to help address the idea of place from different perspectives: their own experience, their library’s building as a place, their community, unique collections, historical views of Indiana, etc. There is an underlying wish or theme to help encourage the next generation of librarians and information professionals. We hope readers will leave the issue with a sense of pride in Indiana and in the profession. We hope readers will think about what is unique about their place (of work), and what is their own unique place in the field.

In my role as Director of Admissions and Placement for the School of Library and Information Science (SLIS), Bloomington campus, I have spoken to a number of librarians and information officers about hiring SLIS graduates. Many ask: how do I get students interested in working at our place? Several libraries have been particularly good at highlighting the strengths of their place. I want to mention a few interesting examples. Librarians from Collier County, Florida came to SLIS to interview students for job openings. Part of their day included being available for walk-in questions. Outside of the room they placed an inflatable green alligator (about 4 feet long). Once inside the room you were given a brochure, a pencil, and a small baggie with sand and seashells. They had me sit down and close my eyes for a minute - then proceeded to open a bottle of suntan lotion for me to smell. Granted, it helped that it was snowing outside in Bloomington that day - and, that visions of beaches and water and sun were especially appealing - still, they found a way to highlight their place in a fun and creative manner.

The Toledo-Lucas County Public Library (Ohio) staff came to Bloomington one day. Their approach was different, but also appealing. They presented an information session for students on interview skills. Students were grateful for the tips and advice. The session included an informal time to talk about the Toledo Library, too. Students left the session with both contact names and with helpful interview guidance. One of the scariest parts of the graduate school is “will I find a job?” when I graduate. Help in understanding the job search process means a lot.

One of my favorite recent interviewers was a public library director from Wyoming. He asked me what would help students to become interested in his library or place. I told him about the folks from Florida - and the inflatable alligator; and about the guests from Ohio who did the interviewing tips session. Well, for props, he showed up with cowboy boots and a fly-fishing rod. He held a multi-purpose information session with interviewing tips, a Wyoming overview, and highlights on job openings at his library. The job ads he posted included tourism information about his area that included, “...historic Oregon trail, rodeos, fishing, theater, symphony, access to outdoors (20 minutes to skiing)... a city rich in pioneer history.” He did hire a student who was getting ready to graduate. The soon-to-be-graduate was excited about the library, about having a supportive director, and about moving to an interesting place.

Indiana is a state rich in history, natural resources, sports, music, and art. Each town is unique and has interesting elements to offer to a person who is considering a job. As we write job announcements, we need to consider both our institutions, and the communities where they are located. What is your counties’ equivalent of an inflatable alligator? We are happy to welcome Indiana librarians to host information sessions at SLIS. You can email me (Rhonda Spencer) at: spencerr@indiana.edu or call (812) 855-2666 or toll-free: (888) 335-7547. Our Indianapolis campus (317) 278-2375 welcomes employers, too.



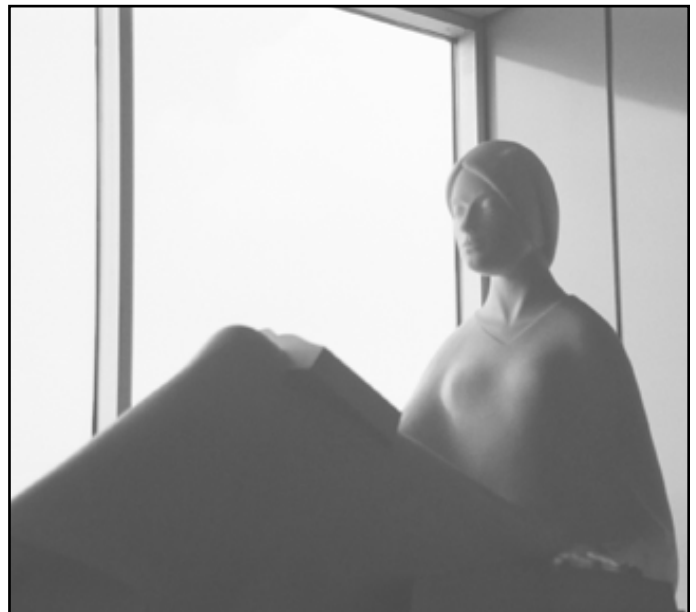
“The Reader”

Photos by Margaret and Neil Gambow, Evanston, Illinois.

Other than physical places, Indiana can be proud of the professional associations and networks available for librarians and information professionals in this state. Continuing education is abundant. Conference workshops at the local, district, and state level are available. There are opportunities to develop a professional niche via conference presentations, articles, committee work, etc. Librarians need to think about place from this context too. Where do I fit in? What can I contribute? Where is my place in this field? Philip E. Agre wrote a helpful article on developing a professional niche. His article “How to be a Leader in Your Field: A Guide for Students in Professional Schools” (<http://dlis.gseis.ucla.edu/people/pagre/leader.html>) offers meaningful reflections that can help all of us. He opens this article with: “A profession is more than a job — it is a community and a culture. Professions serve society by pooling knowledge among their members and creating incentives to synthesize new knowledge. They also help their members to build networks, find jobs, recruit staff, find collaborators, and organize around the issues that affect them.” Each of us brings to the field unique backgrounds and experiences. How we build upon our own histories helps to give us a sense of place personally. Libraries and organizations can attract employees by guaranteeing continuing education and professional networking opportunities as a part of their job ads. If you can establish a network of colleagues in the state, then the changes involved in moving to a new job - or even starting your first job are not as overwhelming.

One of my personal niches is the reading of mysteries, particularly ones with themes of art, books, academia, archaeology, and libraries. I am delighted that one of the articles in this issue includes a list of books about libraries and librarians. I close with a quote from a good mystery, *The Caravaggio Books* by Bernard Peterson:

“Professor Alardyce Stallings had spent thousands of hours in libraries. Their tall, booklined walls and long rows of publications on open racks had always exuded a hospitality that seemed to hug him and hold him snug, even in the coldest of British winters. The volumes themselves were, to him, individual packets of soft delight, immediately responsive to his opening touch and subsequently devoured through greedy eyes and grasping brain. Foreign lands, alien faces, other lives, all surrounded him in libraries. Ships, tastes, cities, thoughts, the sheer naked power of information, were all available to him in libraries. Over the years of his life since the age of seven, when his family had moved from a Cornish fishing village to Bristol, the library had evolved from a place of wondrous discovery to the place of his life’s work. As far back as he could remember, library work had been accompanied by a never-wavering, pervasive pleasure. To this day, his heart rose when he entered a library and, often without realizing it, his face smiled.”



“The Reader”

Photos by Margaret and Neil Gambow, Evanston, Illinois.