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A Day in the Life:

My Job is Changing

by **Susan R. Gilmont**
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*Change is inevitable,
except from vending machines.*
—Anonymous



Date selected: Tuesday, May 3, 2005.

Workplace: Marilyn Potts Guin Library, Hatfield Marine Science Center, Oregon State University.

Type of library: Academic, specialized branch library.

7:55 a.m.

I arrive at the library. There's a light fog and a salty tang in the air. I can hear seals barking from the docks across the bay. On my way in, I walk past potted flowers and an articulated whale skeleton. I open the building and turn on computers. One student is already in the library (we check out keys to HMSC students), and greets me blearily as I turn on the lights. I am one of three permanent employees here: the librarian and two library technicians. Today, the librarian is attending meetings on our main campus. My part-time co-worker won't arrive until later, so I start the day alone.

I usually don't turn on my computer immediately. Instead, I check the Ariel

workstation to see if any interlibrary loans have come in overnight. One has, and I forward it.

8:10–10:00 a.m.

I open my office, fire up the computer and read my mail. The libsup-l list is quite active, but the current subject doesn't interest me, so I delete the messages. Libsup-l has expanded my horizons, but they do go on sometimes. I check the "generic" library mailbox where requests are sent. My co-worker handles most of our interlibrary loans, but with so small a staff, we have to be cross-trained to cover for one another. Handling mailbox requests helps me stay current.

Today, there's a request from Mexico via the IAMSILIC Z39.50 Distributed Library (<http://library.csUMB.edu/cyamus/ill/search.php>). The Distributed Library is an initiative of the International Association of Aquatic and Marine Science Libraries and Information Centers (IAMSILIC). It's a Web-based portal to marine library holdings, and provides a way for marine libraries around the world, many of which don't have OCLC, to access needed materials. The Distributed Library became active in 2002. Every year since, my library has been its most active lender. I print two copies of the request. A patron asks how to get set up for wireless service for her laptop. I tell her who to contact.

OCLC's ILLiad software has changed my job. It makes it possible for me to telecommute to our main campus and support operations there. ILLiad was such a huge success with students at our main campus that when it was inaugurated the ILL workload surged by 20 to 25 percent. I began helping the main campus ILL staff with their requests when they were struggling with staff turnovers and the increased workload. Obviously, I can't help with their lending, but I can assist with borrowing and place requests for OSU students and



personnel. I'm still a little bemused by the fact that this technology makes it possible for me to work "alongside" colleagues fifty miles away. I process borrowing requests for the main campus.

I rarely get through my "on-campus" time without interruptions. Today, I register two visiting scientists from New Zealand and give them keys to the library. They've been here before, so no orientation is needed. I note their names; the Center's administration has asked the library staff to help them track visiting researchers. Shortly before 10:00, my co-worker arrives.

10:00 a.m. - Noon

The Mexican library ILL is for an article available at our main library. OSU's Valley Library has generously agreed to help us support IAMSILC libraries. I request the article from the Valley Library. While checking the catalog, I notice two incorrectly barcoded volumes and report the error. I send out a request for duplicate document serials to another marine library. I have some claims for missing journal issues left over from yesterday, and place them.

This term, students from the Corvallis campus are in residence here in Newport taking an intensive course in marine biology (Biology 450). A current class assignment involves a paper on coastal ecology. I help a student use the Aquatic Sciences and Fisheries Abstracts database to find some relevant journal articles. I am a bit surprised to learn that this Oceanography student has never used our most popular database.

I put in some time on one of our major projects. Last year, the Center's administration asked the library staff to develop a bibliography of publications by HMSC authors and post it on the Web. The HMSC Station Bibliography (<http://osulibrary.oregonstate.edu/guin/StationBibliography.html>) now has over 1,700 entries. My current task is to unify and standardize HMSC

authors' names. I go into the main ProCite file and edit authors.

1:00-3:00 p.m.

I sort and distribute the incoming campus, Summit and U.S. mail. The mail is changing these days: there are fewer print journal issues and more online subscriptions. Our journal display area is pocked with fliers advertising online subscriptions. Within two or three years, I should need to spend less time claiming and binding paper copies. Freed-up time will be shifted to other projects.

I check out incoming Summit (a Northwest academic library consortium) items and books requested from our main campus. I process Summit returns. I check in new and returned interlibrary loans. One incoming ILL is for an "all-but-thesis" graduate student living out of state. I make sure the book will go out by Priority Mail tomorrow.

My co-worker usually gets the phones, but while she is at lunch I take an interesting call. Someone wants to have their wedding in the Library Seminar Room. The father of the bride is a retired HMSC faculty member. At times like this, I'm happy to punt to the librarian.

A library student assistant arrives for work. Our student workers are high school and community college students; the graduate students here usually prefer to work in laboratories rather than the library, and we don't have any permanent undergraduates. This one plays bass in a grunge band, and often comes to work with tales of his musical adventures. Not today. There's a lot of photocopying, so I get him started on copying and document delivery.

3:00-5:00 p.m.

I register another patron, a new researcher on a one-year appointment. I give him a brief orientation to the library. I try to update our Web pages, but new security



blocks me. I e-mail the library Web group to request help. I help another student use the ASFA database. More student workers arrive. I assign tasks and resolve minor problems. Our student assistants' daily jobs revolve around circulation, shelving, journal check-in and a good deal of photocopying. They are cross-trained to work in all these areas.


The last hour of the day, I prepare for tomorrow's team meeting. We are gearing up for summer term and considering how to enhance services for resident graduate students, summer students, and students in the Oregon Coast Community College's Aquarium Science program, a cooperative venture with OSU. My assignment is to provide lists of summer classes and old help sheets, to see what needs updating and what can be used with minor changes.

As the day ends, I sweep through the library. We have to be sure that library users who are not affiliated with HMSC leave when the building closes at 5:00. At times, we have had members of the public who didn't want to leave the computers.

I suppose to someone from a large library, my day must seem like a month in the country. What can those who work at small branch libraries have to say to those who work in production environments? Well, we do have our hectic days. More importantly, branch library staff can make unique contributions to their main libraries. Because I work across departmental lines, I sometimes have a better grasp of the workflow. My point of view is not limited to one department or one task. As a staff member at a small library, I have the luxury of getting to know our patrons, and I am at times better able to see the impact of changes in services on those patrons. I can offer these gifts of connection and perspective to our main library.

You wear a lot of hats at a branch library. You have to be versatile. As libraries move towards more fully exploiting the potential of the electronic environment,

workers will need to be more versatile, too. At this point in my career, I find that I want to expand my skill set in order to be able to do more. Ten years ago, that would have been a bigger problem, because I live in such a rural area. Nowadays, it doesn't matter so much if you live in town or in the country, because you can sharpen your skills online.

May 3, 2005 was a quiet day at the Guin Library. Today, there were no phone calls from bars asking what fish lives the longest, or upset landowners convinced that their neighbors are causing their beach front property to erode. Nobody complained about a fine, and all the student assistants came to work. All the same, change is in the air, and I feel it. 

About the Author

Susan Gilmont has worked for the OSU Libraries for 26 years. She writes, "I'm a poetry hound: the Guin Library has a poetry corner in the staff office and a haiku page by the copier where students and patrons can make contributions."

