



Importance of Mentoring

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I was asked last year what my agenda would be as ALA GODORT Chair. My answer was centered on my feeling that ALA GODORT members are uniquely positioned to play a primary role in fostering collaboration, cooperation, and leadership. All of these are keys to overcoming the challenges faced in the preservation and access of local, state, federal, and international government information resources. In my last column I discussed some of the ways that government information librarians collaborate with their communities to increase access to resources. In this column, I would like to focus on something that I feel is essential for maintaining strong leadership among our community of government information specialists—mentoring.

I believe if you ask any seasoned documents librarian, they would tell you how important at least one person was in helping them to develop their passion and skills for government information. I was very fortunate to have more than one. My first day working for the Tulsa City-County Library (TCCL) System, I was introduced to Doris Westfield, the Government Documents Librarian. As a member of the periodicals support staff, it was my job to check in depository shipments at night while working the service desk. Doris instantly picked up on my interest for government information as I assisted her with the processing of incoming shipments. She took me under her wing and taught me everything I needed to know to manage a documents collection, including how to answer difficult reference questions pre-Internet. She inspired me to pursue a master's degree in library science. When she retired in 1997, she recommended me as her replacement and helped me transition into my first full-time job as a librarian.

It was at Doris's retirement party that I was introduced to John Phillips, professor and head Documents Department at Edmon Low Library, Oklahoma State University, whose influence on me as a professional is second only to that of my father. Where Doris taught me how to focus my passion into a job managing a small documents collection, John taught me to funnel that emotion into forging an entire career. He helped me to expand my network of colleagues and added to my knowledge of government information. He showed me, through his own actions, how to make a difference in the lives of students and colleagues. He also became a treasured friend. When my father passed away in 2003, John became the person I turned to for not only career advice, but personal advice as well. I would not

be where I am today without his guidance and friendship.

Working at a selective depository in Oklahoma also put me into contact with Steve Beleu, regional depository librarian for Federal Government Information, Oklahoma Department of Libraries. Steve's passion for training individuals on how to access government resources is highly contagious. I was fortunate to be able to work with him on a pilot project to integrate geographic information system software into the government documents services at TCCL many years ago. His outreach to small public libraries and tribal libraries even in neighboring states was a great inspiration to me as I was developing my career.

My good fortune continued to overflow when I accepted the position of head government documents for the University of North Texas (UNT). In my new position I was able to work closely with Melody Kelly and Cathy Hartman who had both been in charge of the UNT documents collection before moving up into administration. Melody is a strong advocate for preserving no-fee permanent public access to government information and still teaches the government document course for the UNT School of Library and Information Science. She helped me transition to the academic library setting and continues to advise me on my advocacy efforts.

Cathy Hartman, associate dean UNT libraries, is my current supervisor and continues to push me to set higher goals for myself. She is always willing to listen to me and provides me with sound advice on how to continue to grow my career. Like John, she helped me by introducing me to influential individuals in both the depository community and the federal government. When opportunities come up that she thinks will benefit me, she always sends them my way. She also sets an example for me to follow through her dedication to her own career. Cathy also advises me on how to be a better advocate for the library and preservation of government information. Her support is invaluable to my continued career.

I wanted to share with you my personal story of mentors to illustrate how important mentorship has been in developing my career. It seems impossible to me that I am now counted among the more experienced librarians, but it gives me a chance to be a mentor. At UNT I have had many opportunities to visit with new depository coordinators in the North Texas region and help them with the basics of managing their collections. I have multiple opportunities to work with students and support staff, training them in reference services and encouraging them to pursue a degree in library science. It is extremely satisfying to

watch the careers flourish of librarians that I have had a chance to work with and advise.

There are formal ways to be connected like the ALA GODORT “Buddy” Program that is conducted at both ALA Mid-Winter and Annual Conferences. The program is administered by the Membership Committee and pairs new and prospective GODORT members with active members for a single conference to provide a personal introduction to GODORT. Another way is to encourage up and coming librarians to get involved with GODORT. Helen Sheehy, chair-elect, will be looking for individuals to nominate to committees for 2014–2016. Suggest that they send an e-mail to Helen to communicate their interest or send that e-mail yourself. The Nominating Committee is also looking for individuals to run for elected offices. Sometimes all it takes is a vote of confidence from a colleague to encourage someone to run. They may be doubting that they have enough expertise to contribute.

Informal opportunities to be a mentor are many. When attending conferences, seek out first-time attendees and invite

them to lunch or dinner, introduce them to other experienced documents librarians, encourage them to maintain contact with you throughout the year should they have any questions. If you notice a spark of interest or passion for government information in a library school student or a support staff member, encourage them to pursue a career in documents. Another way to mentor new librarians is by helping them gain confidence in presenting at conferences or serving on committees. Offer to co-author or co-present with them and send them information on call for proposals or papers.

Seeking out opportunities to be a mentor will allow you to continue a legacy established by your predecessors, while at the same time ensuring that someday your name will appear in a paper on shining examples of leadership in the government documents community. My desire is that individuals reading this column will be rededicated to seek out new documents librarians and encourage and inspire them. Mentoring is a huge step forward in developing the next generation of GODORT leaders and keeping the organization strong for the next forty years.

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For information about ALA membership contact ALA Membership Services, 50 E. Huron St., Chicago, IL 60611; 1-800-545-2433, ext. 5; e-mail: membership@ala.org.