

**An Interview with Ann Zawistoski  
Head of Reference and Instruction  
Gould Library  
Carleton College**

This paper describes and discusses a phone interview that took place on November 17, 2014, between Ann Zawistowski, the Head of Reference and Instruction at Carleton College's Gould Library, and me. Ann and I were on the phone for roughly one hour. We discussed specific items relating to references services at Gould Library, how the library works with other libraries in the area, the challenges facing Gould Library today and the programs Gould Library runs that Ann feels are particularly successful and relevant to research. This paper provides some background on Carleton College and on Gould Library. It then discusses the interview with Ann in some detail. It ends with some observations and reflections on my conversation with Ann and the role of the reference librarian in an academic library.

### **I. Carleton College and Gould Library**

Carleton College is a small liberal arts college located in Northfield, Minnesota, approximately 30 miles south of Minneapolis-St. Paul. Northfield has a population of 19,000 and its motto is "The town of cows, colleges and contentment." Carleton is one of two well-regarded liberal arts colleges in Northfield. The other is St. Olaf, a school of similar size a mile away from Carleton. Carleton is widely regarded as one of the pre-eminent liberal arts colleges in the United States, appearing on many "Top Ten" lists, including U.S. News' annual ranking of colleges and universities. It enrolls roughly 2,000 students from across the country and around the world. It was founded in 1866 and offers 36 majors and 15 concentrations in the arts, humanities, natural sciences and social sciences. The school has a 1,040 acre campus which

includes an 880 acre arboretum. The school is known for its academic excellence and for the warm and open feeling of its campus and community.

Laurence McKinley Gould Library is the main library for Carleton College, and its primary purpose is to serve the academic needs of Carleton College, although the library also serves the research needs of the St. Olaf College community and is available for use by the general public in the Northfield area. Northfield also has its own public library that is primarily responsible for serving the general public. Gould Library's operating budget for the 2014-2015 academic year is \$2.7 million. The library's collection includes over 563,000 books, 937 active print journal subscriptions, over 39,999 electronic journals and over 400,000 U.S. government publications, along with an extensive collection of DVDs, online videos, microforms and maps. Access to the collections is provided through The Bridge, a shared online catalog between Carleton and St. Olaf. Visitors to the websites of the libraries of both schools see Bridge's online search form on each website's home page. Gould Library is open from 8 am to 1 am during the week, from 9 am to midnight on Saturdays and from 9 am to 1 am on Sundays. The reference desk is staffed from 10 am to 5 pm and again from 7 pm to 9 pm Monday through Thursday, from 10 am to 5 pm on Fridays and from 1 pm to 5 pm and from 7 pm to 9 pm on Sundays. The library's website has a link to a help page which includes extensive research guides, email links to reference librarians by department and questions and answers about library resources. The Q&A page, in turn, includes a link to a live chat feature and a place to submit feedback and suggestions. Gould Library issued a five-year strategic plan in 2013 which focuses on improvement and expansion in the core areas of services, curriculum and teaching, the co-curricular student experience, collections and access, staff and the library's physical plant.

## II. The Interview

I wanted to interview a reference librarian at a college or university because of my own interest in becoming an academic librarian. I chose Carleton because my older daughter is a freshman there and is very happy with the school. I found Ann Zawistoski by going to the Gould Library website and looking through the staff list for a reference manager. I emailed Ann, explaining who I was and why I wanted to interview her for this paper. Ann responded quickly and enthusiastically. I called her early one Monday morning in November, and we spoke for about an hour.

Ann is the Head of Reference and Instruction at Carleton's Gould Library. She is a member of the Carleton Class of 1997. She majored in geology with a concentration in environmental studies. Ann worked at Gould Library's circulation desk throughout her four years at Carleton. After she graduated, Ann worked in the software industry for seven years and became interested in knowledge management. Ann started studying for her Masters in Library and Information Services while working by attending classes at night and on the weekends, and her employer covered the cost of tuition. She had planned to be a corporate librarian but realized fairly quickly that she was more interested in academic librarianship. Carleton posted a job opening for a science reference librarian six months after Ann received her MLIS, and she started working at Gould Library in that capacity in 2004. In 2010, Ann's predecessor as head of reference retired, as did the Director of Gould Library. Ann was made interim head of the reference department until Carleton hired a new Director, who would in turn appoint the permanent head of the reference department. Ann served as interim head of reference for two years, which is how long it took for Carleton to hire a new Director of the Gould Library. The new Director appointed Ann to the Head of Reference and Information position on a permanent

basis. Ann still performs some science research work, but much less than she used to. She also is responsible for maintaining the library's website.

Ann spoke to me with warmth and enthusiasm about the various programs offered by the library, all of which are collaborative and related to the college curriculum. These include exhibits created by the students in a particular course (the one on display when we spoke is entitled "History of Manuscript Illustration" and was developed by the students in a history course that term), a speaker series organized in collaboration with one or more academic programs and a series of training programs designed to help faculty understand the increasingly overlapping world of technology and teaching. Ann was very clear about the library staff's efforts to partner with the rest of the Carleton community. Librarians make presentations to faculty and staff on teaching trends, and the Student Activity Office runs study breaks in the library during reading period, providing bagels and a way to help students release the stress of studying and exams.

When we spoke about usage trends, Ann shared a lot of information about the shift to electronic resources as compared with physical books and print journals. She said that digital scholarship, especially in the humanities, has become a very important topic on campus. Gould Library has always been a curricular library with resources that are focused around the classes offered at Carleton. It has not previously been a library that provides research materials for faculty projects. Historically, Carleton professors have used the resources of the University of Minnesota library system for their research needs. Recently, Carleton students have become more involved in assisting professors with their research, and that in turn has caused Gould Library to expand what it offers in terms of research materials to be more helpful to the students in their role as research assistants. In addition, the college has launched an initiative on life after

Carleton, and in that regard Gould Library has started performing outreach to students who are interested in library and information science as a career. The library currently has three student interns who are interested in librarianship after college. Librarians have also started teaching financial literacy.

Carleton shares a library system with St. Olaf, and Ann had a lot to say about the limitations of such a shared system when it comes to online resources. If a student wishes to use a book or other physical resource from St. Olaf's library, it is delivered to Carleton's library. As usage shifts towards electronic resources and away from physical resources, the availability of electronic books and articles depends in large part on the license that the college has negotiated with the provider of the electronic resource. Often this means that if a Carleton student wants to use an electronic item available via the St. Olaf database, the student must go to the St. Olaf library to access it. This of course defeats the purpose of offering electronic resources. Although students from either school may be able to perform research online, actual access to an electronic item often depends on what school the student attends. In order to conserve costs and share resources in the most efficient manner, the librarians from both schools actively attempt not to duplicate collections, apart from the core components. The goal of the shared system is that the two libraries promote and market themselves as two branches of the same system, but this breaks down when it comes to electronic resources.

Gould Library recruits reference librarians via library job websites and web boards. There is a current focus on increased diversity in hiring, which Ann noted is an issue across the state of Minnesota. Carleton tries hard to make clear what specific areas of expertise are required for various hiring needs. Focus is on the needs of the college and specific professional or academic backgrounds of applicants.

The library organizes its research services around four main areas: classroom instruction, the reference desk, one-on-one reference appointments and online research guides. Although the library offers an online chat, only approximately 100 questions come into the reference desk via that service. Ann explained that Carleton is a very residential campus, so students and other library users are willing to come in and work with the reference librarians in person. Minnesota offers a service called “Ask Minnesota” which is a virtual reference service available for users of both academic and public libraries. There are plans to offer Carleton students access to that service when the Gould Library reference desk and online chat service are closed. But Ann noted that this is not ideal because the students would be working with librarians who are not part of the Carleton community and thus not as connected to the Carleton curriculum. Carleton librarians are invited to the classroom by the majority of Carleton’s professors to speak to students about library research and resources, often in connection with a specific class assignment. Ann estimated that Carleton librarians visit between 150 and 180 classes each school year usually for one entire class period. She noted that the types of classes that tend to generate the most need for research are in the social sciences. Ann specifically mentioned psychology, geology, economics and sociology. She also said that the English and history departments generate a tremendous amount of research needs.

Ann noted that she and the other members of the library staff are spending more time looking at the data and statistics on student research to try to respond to the changes in how students are doing research. In terms of assessing information literacy, Ann spoke at length about the use of student writing to assess students’ information literacy skills. Carleton students must submit a writing portfolio containing writing samples before the end of their sophomore year. Gould librarians review approximately 25% of these papers for evidence of information

literacy habits. The papers are chosen randomly but are meant to reflect the entire Carleton student population. Ann explained that librarians are specifically trying to determine if the student's argument would have been strengthened by the use of additional resources available through Carleton's library system. The librarians rate the choice of sources, how appropriate they are, how well integrated into the paper they are, how they are used and how they are cited. This assessment process not only provides data to strengthen the information literacy curriculum for freshman but also gives the librarians information that they then use to help the students in their junior and senior years.

When I asked Ann about whether Gould Library uses surveys, she told me that Carleton actively does not want to over-survey or over-assess the students. She said that there is outreach to students who make appointments to work with a reference librarian one-on-one. Those surveys do assess the effectiveness of the reference session. Carleton also participates in a research practices survey developed in partnership with St. Olaf and Grinnell College. This survey is done through the Higher Education Data Sharing Consortium (HEDS) before students begin their freshman year and then again during the spring term of freshman year to assess their research skills progression from the beginning of their time as college students to the end of the freshman year. Each Carleton freshman must take an "Argument and Inquiry" seminar in the fall of the freshman year, and the survey focuses specifically on those seminars and whether the students produce papers containing appropriate levels of research in those courses.

### **III. Observations and Reflections**

In their book *Reference and Information Services: An Introduction*, Cassell and Hiremath note that "ongoing assessments of the reference environment are an imperative...each reference library will of necessity need to establish as conclusively as possible what makes the current

reference library successful and what to project as long-range reference needs.” (Cassell and Hiremath 2013, 422). In their discussion more specifically of the assessment of reference services, Cassell and Hiremath comment that “the evaluation of reference services is of predominant importance simply because it gauges the satisfaction of the end user...” (Cassell and Hiremath 2013, 407). Cassell and Hiremath suggest several methods for assessing reference services, as they point out that “the evaluation of services is also abstract.” (Cassell and Hiremath 2013, 407). These methods include suggestion boxes, surveys, interviews, observations, focus groups and case studies.

What was most striking to me about my interview with Ann was that, while the Gould Library staff at Carleton College monitors usage trends, and while it has some very specific assessment tools embedded into its system, it appears to have chosen not to assess reference services in as broad and comprehensive a manner and Cassell and Hiremath suggest, and to have made a conscious decision to ensure that Carleton students do not feel that they are being assessed too much. There is no use of suggestion boxes or focus groups or case studies. No member of the Gould Library staff observes reference librarians at work. The library website contains a link where users can provide suggestions and feedback, and students who make appointments to work with a reference librarian one-to-one are surveyed for feedback on their experiences. Those assessment tools appear to be the only ones the library uses to gather direct feedback from individual users.

The more comprehensive assessment that the library does is, in a way, performed on the Carleton community as a whole, rather than on individual students at Carleton. It is without a doubt a significant undertaking to review the writing portfolios of approximately 25% of the sophomores each year. Moreover, the nature of the review, in terms of its analysis of the



reference sources used, how they are integrated into the paper and whether other sources might have yielded better results, requires a careful reading and assessment of each paper, not merely a cursory review. This work provides the library with information on how effective its information literacy programs are and on what research skills to teach to rising juniors as they prepare for the research demands in their chosen majors. Similarly, the library's participation in the HEDS survey means that the librarians are monitoring the growth in students' research skills at a very early stage in their college careers, looking for areas to improve information literacy teaching for future freshman and to provide additional instruction for rising sophomores.

I was also struck by the relatively low usage of the online chat feature that the library offers and the ambivalence about including access to non-Carleton librarians during Gould Library's off hours. In an era where library users appear to prefer virtual reference services to in-person reference services, Carleton students seem to continue working with reference librarians in person. The library is situated very close to Carleton's student center, several of the main classroom buildings and a complex of dorm buildings. In addition, if the arboretum is excluded, the campus is less than 200 square acres, and the vast majority of Carleton students live on campus. The school appears to foster a strong sense of community, which includes a personal connection between reference librarians and students. The number of classroom visits that the librarians make each year and the care with which librarians review students' written work suggests a further degree of connection between the students, faculty and library staff. The range of programs that the library offers, including exhibition space for work produced in the classroom and various learning programs for faculty, further suggests that the library's connection to the rest of the Carleton community is strong and deep.

It is not surprising that an academic library located on a college campus would be a core component of campus life, nor is it surprising that the references services provided by such a library would be integrally related to the curriculum of the college and the needs of its students. In that sense, Gould Library's method of assessing its reference services is a natural corollary to the overall role that the library plays in the academic lives of Carleton's student body. It asks for feedback after one-on-one reference sessions, it offers a link on its website where students can provide feedback and make suggestions as they wish, and it otherwise looks to the work being produced by the students to assess whether the students have the necessary information literacy skills to produce well-researched papers and other work product. In this way it is collaborating with the students in a less obvious manner. By making the effort to analysis student work and see areas for improvement, and then revising the information literacy curriculum accordingly, the Gould Library staff members are actively and continuously engaged in the process of teaching and connecting with the students, the faculty and the curriculum.

## Bibliography

### References

Cassell, K. A., & Hiremath, U. (2013). *Reference and information services: An introduction*.

### Websites

Carleton College: <http://www.carleton.edu/>

Carleton College Campus Map: <http://apps.carleton.edu/map/>

Carleton's Gould Library: <http://apps.carleton.edu/campus/library/>

Carleton's Gold Library Strategic Plan: 2103-2018:

[http://apps.carleton.edu/campus/library/assets/Gould\\_Library\\_Strategic\\_Plan\\_2013\\_2018.pdf](http://apps.carleton.edu/campus/library/assets/Gould_Library_Strategic_Plan_2013_2018.pdf)

The Carleton Information Literacy in Student Writing Project:

<http://apps.carleton.edu/campus/library/about/infolit/projects/portfolios/>

HEDS Research Practices Survey: <http://www.hedsconsortium.org/research-practices-survey/>

St. Olaf College: <http://wp.stolaf.edu/>

St. Olaf College Libraries: <http://www.stolaf.edu/library/index.cfm>

US News & World Report College Rankings:

<http://colleges.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-colleges/carleton-college-2340>

## Appendix A

### Text of Phone Interview with Ann Zawistoski, November 17, 2014

#### 1. General Information about Gould Library

*What is the library's annual budget?*

\$2.7m for the 2014-15 year.

*How many cardholders/account holders does the library have?*

We have roughly 2,000 (the community). If you count St. Olaf, it's more. Their cards work at Carleton's library.

*What is the library's annual circulation?*

46,000 books checked out through regular circulation. 63,000 for reserves (includes downloads of 52,000).

*What is the visitor count?*

277,541 (7/1/2013 - 6/30/2014). This is down from previous years, likely due to how horribly cold last winter was. There are also two classrooms in the library, and they were used less often than had been the case in previous years because other classrooms opened up on campus.

*How many programs does the library offer, and across what types?*

There are several. There is the Athenaeum Program. The Athenaeum is a big room at front of library. From time to time, the library co-sponsors with one or more academic departments to bring in speakers, and those programs take place in the Athenaeum. They are open to whole community. Sometimes the speakers are faculty members, sometimes students run the programs, and sometimes outside speakers are brought in. The schedule of events is listed on website. There is also an Art & Exhibition Program, which provides a series of rotating exhibits, almost all of which are curricular. The current exhibit is the History of Manuscript Illumination, which was put together by a history class. There is a program called ITS, which is an academic technologist program that offers learning communities for faculty and staff about technology and teaching. In the 2014 fall term, the program has 4 sessions on digital scholarship. There is also an outreach program. The Student Activity Office runs bagel breaks during reading period. The library tries to partner with the rest of campus. It maintains a learning and teaching center where the librarians make presentations to faculty and staff on teaching trends.

*What usage trends have you noted over the past 5 years?*

Gould Library is currently looking at implementing a new library management system that will allow more access to the data. Digital scholarship/digital humanities has been a big deal on campus. Gould has always been a curricular library with reference services and resources geared towards the classes. It has not been much of a research library for the faculty's research needs (they go to the libraries at the University of Minnesota), but now that students are getting involved in faculty research, Gould has to expand what it does to help the students. There is a big initiative at the college on life after Carleton, so the library is involved in that. The library currently has 3 student interns who are interested in LIS as a career. Trying to do more outreach for students with that interest. Also teaching financial literacy.

*Is the community of users of the library broader than the students and faculty of Carleton College?*

We have a shared system with St. Olaf. But in terms of online resources, it depends on the license. For most electronic items, you have to actually go to the other library to get it. This is an issue because they are moving more to electronic resources, even though Gould will always be a physical book library. Vast majority of journals are online. Research can be done online but to collect the item, you have to go and get it if you are a member of the other school. Sometimes an inter-library loan works but often the licenses don't allow it. The two libraries are making a concerted effort not to duplicate collections, apart from the core, to conserve costs and share resources. They are trying to promote themselves as 2 branches of the same library (run vans twice a day between the 2 libraries), but it breaks down with electronic devices. Alumni have access to check out books, as do the members of the Northfield community. Alumni only have access to JSTOR and Mergent electronically. That is due to the cost of the subscriptions. We don't overlap too much with Northfield's public library, but we do refer people there and share a holiday party with the librarians there. We also send students there to find books to read for fun.

## **2. Types of Reference Services**

*How are the members of the reference staff recruited?*

We went to the University of Michigan to recruit for a specific position (early career). There is currently a focus on diversity in hiring, which is an issue in Minnesota. But generally we use library websites and web boards and place ads.

*How do you determine specific subject matter expertise of your research staff?*

Advertising makes clear what areas we are looking for. We did major reshuffling of liaison areas a year ago. We are constantly looking at the needs of the college and also sat pecific professional or academic backgrounds of applicants.

*What is the range of research services offered?*

There are four big areas of research services within the library: classroom instruction, access to reference librarians at the reference desk, one on one appointments and online research guides. We do a little bit of virtual reference, but usage is pretty minimal (roughly 100 questions per year via chat). Carleton is a very residential campus so people are willing to come in. "Ask Minnesota" is a virtual reference service in the state for public and academic libraries. We are current planning to join that for off-hours reference. But it's not ideal because then the students will be using non-Carleton librarians. Members of the faculty ask librarians to come to class to talk about library research and resources in relation to one of the class assignments. We do approximately 150-180 classroom visits per year, and most of those visits are for a full class period. I work with sciences. I do a lot of classroom visits within the psychology and geology departments. We don't really visit the computer science or math classes, although computer science students have research needs in connection with their senior year comp projects. We work a lot with English and history classes and with economics and sociology classes too – there are lots of research needs in those departments.

**3. Area of Research Service** -- for these questions, please choose one specific area of research service provided by Gould Library that you would like to focus on.

*How do you determine or assess the effectiveness of this area of research service?*

Our biggest program is Information Literacy in Student Writing. Students have to turn in a writing portfolio with writing samples at the end of sophomore year. The library takes a subset of the papers and reads them for evidence of information literacy habits. We look at the argument or point of each paper, and then we assesses whether the paper could be stronger if other outside evidence had been used. We rate the choice of sources, the appropriateness of sources, how integrated they are into the paper, how they are used and how they are cited. We use this information to see where the sophomore is at in terms of his or her information literacy skills. It gives us ideas for what should be added to the first year curriculum and also what needs to be added for juniors and for senior comps. We take a random sample of papers but the sample is meant to reflect the student body population (we review roughly 1/4 of actual papers).

*Do you use suggestion boxes? Are there surveys? (if so, are they in-house, via telephone, via email or other online survey site, do you use mail or do you do interviews?) Are research sessions monitored? If they are, are those direct, or hidden or self-imposed?). Do you run focus groups? Have you conducted any case studies? Once the assessment is done, what happens then? How is the information used by the library, you or various staff members?*

We do specific survey outreach for people who use one-on-one appointments. We also survey research practices through HEDS (developed by Carleton, Grinnell, St Olaf). We do this survey twice, once before students start and then again during spring term of freshman year to see where they started and how they have progressed. That looks very specifically at the A&I seminars and how the library is meeting the needs of students. We do look at statistics and numbers for workload and trends or changes. But Carleton actively does not want to over-survey or over-assess the students.

#### **4. Professional Path**

*I'd be interested in learning about your own route through the profession to your position at Gould Library.*

Well, I am a Carleton alum. I was a geology major with an environmental studies concentration. I worked at the circulation desk at the library for all four of my years at Carleton. Then I worked in the software industry for seven years and became interested in knowledge management. This was before the dot com bust so I was able to go to library school while working (attending classes on evenings and weekends) and my employer covered the cost. I had expected to be more of a corporate librarian but I realized quickly that academic librarianship was what I was really interested in. Carleton had a science librarianship opening six months after I graduated with my MLIS. I started in 2004 as science reference librarian here at Gould and I had that position through 2010. The Head of Reference retired in 2010, as did the Library Director. I was named interim head of the reference department so that new Director could hire a Head of Reference after he or she was appointed. So I moved into the interim position in 2010. The first search for a library director failed so I wound up being interim head for two years before our new Director came on board, and then I just shifted into being Head of the Reference Department permanently. It meant cutting back on the work I do with science reference, but I enjoy my job a great deal.