

KEYWORD

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SILSSA newsletter

*PRATT SCHOOL OF INFORMATION AND LIBRARY SCIENCE
STUDENT ASSOCIATION*

A Librarian for 13 Weeks: My Internship at NYPL's Humanities and Social Sciences Library



by **Liorah Anne Golomb**

It's a wonderful thing when the theoretical becomes practical, when subjects and processes and methods you've only read and written about turn into things you actually do. This past fall I got to use much of what I've learned at Pratt SILS in the New York Public Library's General Research Division (GRD) at the Humanities and Social Sciences Library (HSSL).

GRD was the perfect internship for me. For one thing, how cool

a place to work is the main research library? Even though I had entered this repository of knowledge and monument to wealth many times over the course of my life, I confess that I felt quite special when I entered the library wearing my NYPL I.D. and lanyard. Librarians who have spent their entire working lives at Humanities admitted to me that they never quite got over the beauty of their environment. Second, I love research and reference — I wrote my first research paper (using two sources!) in the fourth grade — and have made them the focus of my program. Online database searching classes, the core reference course, Professor Bencivengo's Introduction to Information Professions -- all

served me well as I stood behind the NYPL's information desk.

And I spent a good bit of time back there. My supervisor, Beth Diefendorf, had me on the schedule for about half of the nine to 11 hours a week I spent at the Library. There are always two librarians assigned to the information desk in the catalog room, working in one-hour shifts that change on the hour. What they do in their alternate hours depends upon their specialty. Some work in special collections such as art or rare books while others might be bibliographers or catalogers. On my alternate hours I sometimes went to special divisions such as U.S. History, Local History and Genealogy;



What are these Pratt SILS students doing? See page 2...

Rare Books; and Art and Architecture. One of the traits these reference librarians share is longevity: most have been working at Humanities for many years, several for 15 or 20. Some started as Pages. Few have worked at other libraries; they are lifers, and while the staff are not without complaints, there's nowhere they'd rather be.

The librarian I was shadowing asked if I would take the next person. From that point on, I was doing reference!

In my first days, I attached myself to one of the two librarians on duty and observed, but one day there was a long line and the librarian I was shadowing asked if I would take the next person. From that point on, I was doing reference! At least, I was handling the simpler stuff such as searching

CATNYP, the Research Libraries' OPAC; helping patrons use the electronic resources; doing mostly secondary-source research; and helping users navigate the Library's peculiar way of accessing books. But although I often acted as a third librarian, I never stopped learning from the experts. Each librarian has a distinct way of doing things, and it was very useful to see so many styles of the reference interview, all of which worked. It gave me a lot of confidence in my own abilities.

I found that I love working with the public, especially when it's intelligent or interesting. One of the great things about Humanities is that it attracts such a diverse crowd, from tourists who aren't certain whether they're at NYPL or the Morgan Library; to famed historians working on their next tome; to deranged visitors who strip down in the middle of the reading room and have to be

escorted out by the Library's fine security staff. A personal favorite was the foreign visitor who wanted to find information on a notorious New York pornographer from the 1970s. The patron was quite proud of being a connoisseur of erotica and discussed various museums he'd been to and material he'd acquired as though speaking of Cooperstown and a baseball card collection.

Before beginning my internship at NYPL my only library experience came from the other side of the desk, as a user. I gained some excellent experience at the General Research Division, met some top-notch librarians, and confirmed that I am entering the right field. And whenever I pass those famous lions on Fifth Avenue and 42nd Street and look at the building they guard, I'll be able to say, "I worked there once."

Tom Baione, Assistant Director for Client Services, Department of Library Services, gave SLA @ Pratt a tour of The American Museum of Natural History Library.



Photo: Gayle Snible

SLA @ Pratt member and SILSSA president Michelle Dollinger.



Photo: Michelle Dollinger

Baione shows a rare book to Pratt student Brian Gannon.

8 Questions for Professor Glen Bencivengo

Interview by
Gayle Snible,
SILSSA Secretary

A graduate of Rutgers, Cornell, and Columbia Universities, Dr. Glen Bencivengo has worked in public, academic and law libraries in addition to practicing law. He has published articles on the Internet and the legal profession, e-discovery, knowledge management and virtual reference, and the Patriot Act. Dr. Bencivengo is a member of the New Jersey Bar and is currently an associate professor at the Pratt Institute School of Information and Library Science. He holds a B.A., M.L.S., and J.D. from Rutgers University and an M.A. from Cornell University. He also holds a Certificate in Advanced Librarianship from Columbia University.

What classes have you taught at Pratt?

I have taught 651 Introduction to Information Professions, 605 Online Database Searching & Services, 617 Legal Research Methods and Law, 623 Online Databases: Social Sciences, 626 Online Databases: Law, and 673 Library Use Instruction.

What are your top 3 reference sources, and why?

I use Cornell's Legal Information

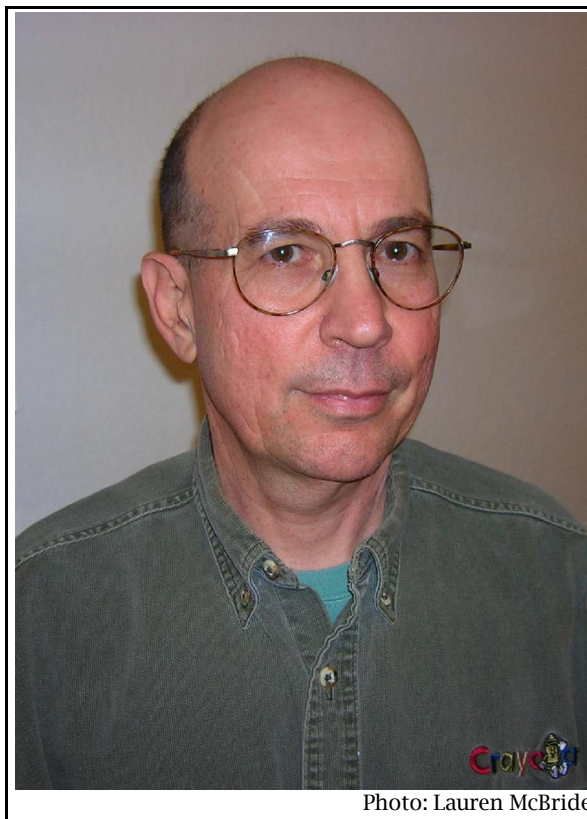


Photo: Lauren McBride

Institute site (<http://www.law.cornell.edu>). It is well designed, comprehensive and current. As for books, I often consult Kent Olson's *Legal Information: How to Find It, How to Use It*. It is well written and very comprehensive. Finally, I often consult Robert Ambrogi's *The Essential Guide to the Best (and Worst) Legal Sites on the Web*. Law librarians (and lawyers) should know how much is available on the Web (and not just use Lexis/Westlaw) and this book will help them find that out.

Keeping in mind that *Keyword's* readers are all library students (non-law librarians and law librarians), what are a couple of "hot" issues in law librarianship that we might not be aware of?

Hot issues: Should law

librarians teach students how to use paper sources? Is "traditional" legal research a thing of the past? I am with the camp that believes law librarian — and lawyers — *must* know how to find things in paper.

Another issue — and this will affect law librarians who work with the public — is how to deal with the pro se litigant, i.e., the person who is acting as his own attorney. More and more people are doing this and it poses ethical and legal problems (although no law librarian has been sued, as far as I know).

Finally the issue of the consolidation of legal publishing has law librarians upset. There are only 2-3 players now, WestGroup and Lexis especially, and working law librarians are up in arms about billing procedures, etc. We here at Pratt don't have to worry about it and in fact I am grateful that West and Lexis give us free passwords and materials. They are always responsive to my requests and even send guest speakers for the LIS 626 class.

What do you consider your biggest professional success?

My biggest success? It would have to be graduating from law school, passing the New Jersey Bar exam, and being selected (it was competitive) to work as a law clerk for a New Jersey Superior Court judge. But I must say that I feel successful

every time I act as a reference and a SILS student gets a job or is admitted to law school. That is most rewarding.

What organizations are you affiliated with?

I am a member of AALL [American Association of Law Libraries] (and on a committee) and ALISE [Association for Library and Information Science Education].

Right now I am hard at work on a two-hour workshop I will be giving in March to a group of judges and lawyers on electronic discovery.

What projects are you currently working on?

Right now I am hard at work on a two-hour workshop I will be giving in March to a group of judges and lawyers on electronic discovery. I also have to act as a moderator for two

panels. The conference is on drug and medical device liability management. I will have to put my lawyer hat on for this one — there will be no librarians in the audience!! Electronic discovery is a very pressing topic for lawyers (I wrote an article on the topic). When I was a law clerk and practicing law, we did not have to worry about electronic discovery — everything was on paper — and even then it could be very problematic. Now it can be a nightmare.

Do you have any hobbies?

I like to read historical fiction, play with my dog, and exercise at my local gym. In the summer I go to Newark Bear baseball games with my son and a few of his friends. I am also a movie buff, although I often do not have the time to go to the movies.

Do you have any advice for library school students?

Take an internship if you can.

The job market is tight, the baby boomers are *not* retiring as much as people predicted. Get that practical experience. Be *very* prepared for the job interview. Go to www.lisjob.com for job listings and advice. Find a mentor, seek out the advice of faculty, don't be afraid to ask for recommendations. Don't get discouraged once you start looking for a job — it may take time and it is not easy finding the right position. Have a career plan. Be aware that library school will provide a solid foundation, but it is up to you to apply that knowledge.

Also be aware of the gap between theory and practice, i.e., library school and the real world. I am especially sensitive to this since the gap exists in law school. If it were not for my judicial clerkship, I would have been lost in the courtroom.

Professor Bencivengo is SILSSA's faculty advisor, and we appreciate his continuous support.

SILSSA visited Ellis Island on November 6, 2005. Twenty students attended and were given a tour by George Tselos, Ellis Island Library's Chief Archivist.



Photo: Michelle Dollinger

WANTED: Unlicensed Information Broker for practicing without an MLIS!



by Christina Braun

As an information broker without an MLS, I felt like I was driving without a license.

Attending library school was never a burning desire I carried from childhood. As a matter of fact, it is an ongoing family joke that I am in library school - my high school excuse for leaving the house on a school night was that I needed to go to the library, which was really an excuse to see my boyfriend. But somehow in adulthood the idea of going to library school just kept creeping into my head.

A few years after I graduated from Northeastern University in Communications, I became a research editor for a Boston-based business writing and editorial service. My boss had an

MLS from Simmons College, and that generated the idea of my going to library school. Being in Boston, I explored the option on and off. I also spent a large amount of time at the Kirstein Business Branch of the Boston Public Library, Boston's equivalent of The New York Public Library's Science, Industry and Business Library (SIBL). I was such a fixture that people used to ask me if I worked there...and the reference librarians would bounce things off me about certain topics!

In 1998, I started Brains and Braun, an information brokerage that specializes in business research.

In 1998, I started Brains and Braun, an information brokerage that specializes in business research. Brains and Braun assists clients in generating market acceptance of their ideas, as well as developing case study content, identifying best practice business stories, and collecting applicable information. Topics focus on industry leaders and laggards, market trends, business innovation, and company profiles for books, reports, briefings, and executive overviews.

The timing was great — dot coms, tons of venture capital

money, and the popularity of virtual teams and organizations made it all possible. What was appealing was all the different topics - that's what drew me to this. But it only kept me engaged for so long and I reached my own glass ceiling and could only go so far without an MLS. Also, the dot com was going dot *gone*.

I went on to become a research manager and later a director, managing research departments that designed, conducted, and analyzed quantitative and qualitative research studies as well as searched, implemented, and analyzed secondary research projects. Topics ranged from healthcare to net worth.

Later, I had a chance meeting with a headhunter who said my experience was good but I needed to get an MLS. Just as I was finally ready to take the plunge, I got a job in NYC — it was too good to be true, and it was too good to be true.

While this is an expensive way to get a confidence boost or self esteem — that is what it has done for me. My challenge has always been how to explain with authority to a lay person that “you just can't Google it” or “Wikipedia is not a valid source for fact checking.” Now I know the structure, philosophy, rules, regulations, and reasoning behind the profession I can become an official card carrying member.

Featured Library of the Month: Midtown's Library of the General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen

by **Karyn Hinkle**, SILSSA Treasurer

WHERE

20 W. 44th Street, between Fifth and Sixth Avenues, near The New York Public Library's Humanities and Social Sciences Library. Take the 4, 5, 6, 7, B, D, F, or V train to 42nd Street. Check the Library's weekly schedule online (generalsociety.org) — the Library is usually open from around 11:00 am until 5:00 pm.

WHY

The Library of the General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen has a long and clunky name, but it also boasts an interesting mix of collections and an absolutely gorgeous building. It was founded in 1820 by the General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen as a library where apprentices could continue their educations both in their trades and in other subjects. Today the Library is open to all researchers, and its circulating collection is open to anyone who becomes a supporting member.

Housed in an 1899 landmark building, the Library's reading room sits under a soaring skylight three stories above the floor. The Society's lecture series provides a good chance to explore the space: this winter's talks included many industrial-historical topics as diverse as steam engines, Thomas Edison, and the creation of Brooklyn's Prospect and Fort Greene parks.

I like visiting the General Society because, in addition to everything mentioned above, the

Keyword editor: Gayle Snible

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Library is home to a unique New York organization called the Small Press Center, founded in 1984 by the General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen. The Small Press Center provides practical information as well as financial and emotional support for independent publishers who are interested in entrepreneurial alternatives to the standard publishing industry. Every year, the Small Press Center hosts workshops, lectures, and book fairs, all devoted to small presses and publishers — an important part of keeping the book world lively.

DON'T MISS

The events planned for Small Press Month in March. This beautiful building on 44th Street houses a quirky and fascinating institution.

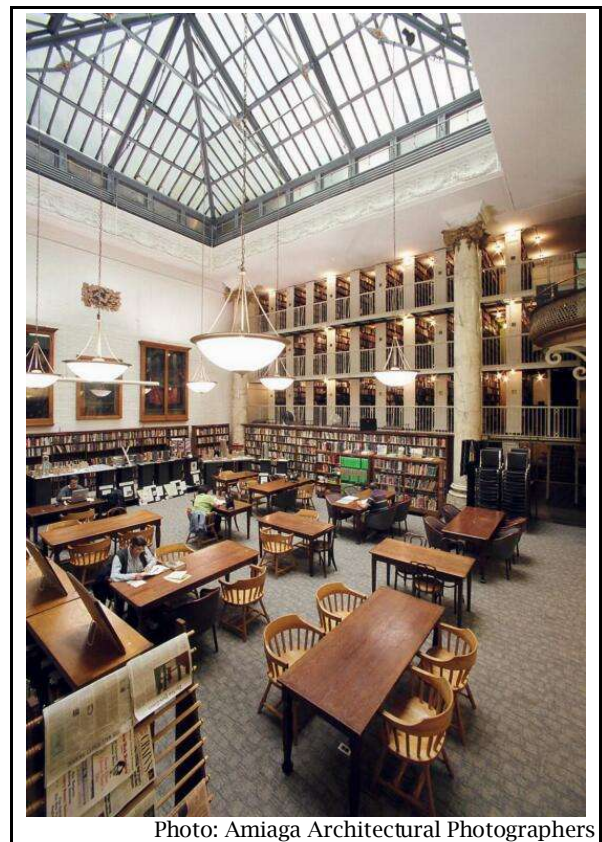


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