

# InfoLink

A Community Newsletter of the  
Graduate School of Library and Information Science

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## GSLIS Continuing Education *Founded for alums and designed for alums — but CE workshops are also meant for alums-to-be, as well as anyone who's interested in LIS* by Sasha Nyary, Dean's Editorial Fellow

Are you about to graduate? Are you a recent graduate? Been a graduate for, ahem, some time now? How about not even close to graduating? The GSLIS Continuing Education (CE) program is for you, and you and you and you. It's for people who want to keep up their skills and stay current with the vast and rapid changes in library and information science. Why take CE workshops?

- **To keep current in the field.** Learn about QR codes, say, or digital copyright.
- **To position yourself for another job.** CE offers workshops in reference, information management, archives, technology, and more.
- **To learn from leading professionals in the field.** Take Graphic Novels 101 from Robin Brenner. Study Online Research with Amelia Kassel. Learn Strategic Information Arrangement from Katherine Bertolucci. All are professionals and experts in their areas.
- **To network, work, and make friends with LIS professionals in the business.**
- **To earn continuing education credit.**
- **To satisfy your curiosity:** What's the difference between graphic novels and anime, anyway?

The bottom line is: The workshops are practical. "The more practical the better," says Kris Liberman '87LS, CE program manager. "Everyone wants to learn something new, and they can also put it on their resumes." The cost is practical too: GSLIS alums get a discount, and current GSLIS students get 50 percent off. In addition, LISSA, the student association, reimburses 75 percent of professional development, so a current student ends up paying a quarter of a half of the cost, which is a good deal. And graduating students are given a voucher for 50 percent off their first CE class.

As for why current students might want to take CE workshops on top of their regular classes, Liberman can answer that too: "Students get to hear about people who have real day-to-day issues, and I think that opens them to another world. The CE courses can fill in some things that aren't comprehensively

covered in the curriculum, such as Zotero or bookmaking. They might find something they're interested in that they can do in depth."

CE runs courses in two terms, spring/summer and fall/winter, with 35 to 45 workshops offered each session. Most are asynchronous online workshops that run over a calendar month, with a few lasting six weeks. CE also offers face-to-face workshops, which Liberman describes as "a quick hit." These half- or full-day sessions are particularly easy for students

because they mostly meet on Saturdays on the Boston campus and Sundays at GSLIS West. "You do it, you get a certificate, it's done," she says. The workshops are not graded, although GSLIS does offer continuing education units (CEUs) and professional development points (PDPs), per the Massachusetts Department of Education. Online classes are usually held using Moodle, and the Dean's Fellow for Teaching Assistance, who works in the GSLIS Tech Lab, provides technical

support for the instructors and students. There's no specific online class-meeting time, such as an instructor lecture; workshops are usually taught through readings, conversations, activities, and assignments.

"The convenience of being able to work on any Internet-connected computer is what I like most," says Maria Touet, '93LS, librarian at Pope John XXIII High School in Everett, Mass. "But the content of the classes is what makes them so valuable. I like using Moodle; it has been easy, and it is set up in a great format, with assignments, grades, discussions, and more."

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## Snapshot

# Amelia Kassel



Amelia Kassel,  
photo courtesy of  
Amelia Kassel

When Amelia Kassel isn't teaching one of her half-dozen workshops for the GSLIS Continuing Education (CE) program, she runs a company called MarketingBase (<http://www.marketingbase.com>), which specializes in industry, company, and competitive and market intelligence research. Kassel has also taught at the University of California Berkeley Extension, University of Tennessee School of Information Sciences, and San Jose State University School of Library and Information Science. She is a two-time recipient of the Association of Independent Information

Professionals' Sue Ruggie Memorial Award, given to a member of the organization who has significantly helped another member through formal or informal mentoring. She also won the Gale Group Writing Award. She is the author of *The Super Searchers on Wall Street: Top Investment Professionals Share Their Online Research Secrets* (Cyberage Books).

### Q: How did you get into LIS?

I was a teenage mom and I went back to school to finish high school and then college. In my last semester as an undergraduate, I was trying to decide how to support my two small children as a single mother — this was 40 years ago — and began looking into teaching. My sister was in library school at the time and encouraged me to apply. She showed me several library journals, and between the photos and articles, I became interested and excited about the field. I got my MLS at UCLA in 1971, after which I applied to and was selected for a one-year pre-doctoral fellowship at the UCLA Louise Darling Biomedical Library. It was an honor; I wanted to stay on and I was hired.

I remarried in 1974 and we moved to Northern California. With no medical library jobs in the area, I went to work in a public library in adult services.

### How did you decide to start your own business?

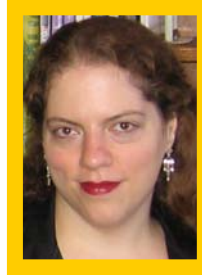
After ten years as a public librarian, I was ready for a different career. In 1981, I learned online searching. At the time, online databases were coming into their own, and information professionals used fee-based aggregators, which offer many databases. I learned how to use Dialog and then Nexis. Not all my colleagues were interested in online searching, but I loved doing that kind of work.

That year I went to a conference and met a woman who was demonstrating how she did online searches for clients. She had created a business in which people paid for customized research. I thought, "If she can do it, I can do it!" So I began to prepare to become what is now known as an information broker — which has also been referred to as a freelance researcher, research consultant, or research analyst. I started a business the next year. I began by doing a few searches for private clients. I launched Ask (my initials) Information Specialists; I also cofounded and acquired MarketingBase from two informal business partners. I've been doing research as a business ever since. I love my work.

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## Snapshot

# Robin Brenner



Robin Brenner,  
photo courtesy of  
Robin Brenner

Continuing Education instructor Robin Brenner is the teen librarian in Brookline, Mass., where she combined her vocation with several of her avocations, particularly comics, graphic novels, and anime. A 2007 Library Journal "Mover and Shaker," she created and runs the graphic novel review website No Flying No Tights ([www.noflyingnotights.com](http://www.noflyingnotights.com)), and she is the author of *Understanding Manga and Anime* (Libraries Unlimited, 2007), which was nominated for a 2008 Eisner Award. Her reviews and articles are frequently published in Library Journal, School Library Journal, VOYA, and Early Word, and she has served on numerous YALSA committees.

### Q: Did you read a lot of young adult literature growing up?

It didn't exist as much as a category, or certainly not in the way it is now, where it's this giant marketing category. I made the shift quickly to adult fiction, mainly because I read fantasy and science fiction, and adult fiction is where you would find it. Also, my parents are physicists, and my dad has a giant bookshelf of science fiction from the fifties through the seventies, and I read all of those. So I grew up with a lot of diversity in terms of what was considered interesting in the household because I was naturally inclined toward the humanities and arts. Not that my parents don't have that as well, but they brought in the science and math aspect more than I think other parents might have. I've always had a healthy respect for all disciplines.

### And how did you end up as a teen librarian?

I knew already that I enjoyed doing teen services, and the folks in Lexington were incredibly lovely about letting me do a lot of teen services work, even though I wasn't an official teen librarian. I quickly realized that I liked working with the age range, I liked the literature, and I loved the idea of being a part of a teenager's growing-up experience. My boss forwarded the job ad in Brookline. She said, "This is the job you've been looking for and I think you should apply for it." When I got there, it became clear they wanted to create a space, create collections, and highlight teens as an audience who had been previously underserved. I knew the director was and still is strongly supportive of teen services, as are the Friends of the Library, who fund the bulk of our programming. So I knew it was an environment that would be encouraging of what I was aiming to do, and that was exciting.

### What do you like specifically about working with teens?

The thing about teens is that is when you are figuring out who you are, and who you're going to be, and the right book at the right time — or the right story, whatever format it comes in — can be incredibly important. And I want to be a part of helping kids find those. I also find in the long run that I like working with teenagers, which is important. Many people like the literature, for example, but don't actually like handling teenagers. But I actually do, and I don't get overly frustrated by them, or upset, and I like being an advocate for them as a group.

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# Continuing Education

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Between 375 and 450 participants register for CE workshops each semester; class size ranges from 5 to 25, with an average of 10 to 15. Many tend to be from New England, but increasingly, people from outside the United States sign up, says Liberman, including people from Canada, Trinidad and Tobago, Japan, Saudi Arabia, Australia, and various European countries. All they need is a computer with Internet access and a facility with English. Participants are of various ages and levels of experience; about a quarter are GSLIS alums, and a few are current GSLIS students. “The Simmons name is known,” says Liberman. “Even if people aren’t alums, if they work in libraries, especially in New England, they’re going to know Simmons. They look to Simmons to provide something like this.”

The instructors find Simmons too, she says. All are from the U.S., just about all are prominent working professionals, and a number are Movers and Shakers, as named by *Library Journal* and the American Library Association.

“We have a good reputation and I don’t have to recruit teachers very often,” Liberman says. “Mostly people come to me with proposals for classes. We end up with a great mix. And students tend to make connections with the instructor, and with others in the class, which is always good for professional development.”

Absolutely, says Jennifer Beauregard ’00LS, assistant director of library services for the Alumni Affairs and Development Office at Harvard University. She has taken a couple of workshops, including Strategic Information Arrangement with Katherine Bertolucci. “She [the instructor] provided creative assignments for us to develop our own ways of information arrangement. She is at the top of her profession, and her passion for her field infused the classes with a lot of energy. Along with the great instructors, the students who took the classes with me were amazing. I received great support and encouragement from my classmates. The collective knowledge and experience that was shared was incredible.”

The most important part of the classes, Beauregard says, were the examples of scenarios that the instructors had with their clients. “It was helpful to be taught by current professionals so that we received the most up-to-date information. It was helpful to receive the technical information as well as the techniques they used to work with their clients.”

CE workshops are organized by category: academic libraries, archives, book arts, careers, children’s/YA/school librarianship, information organization, management, reference/research, technology/Web 2.0, and user instruction/information literacy. “We have a robust LIS school continuing education program with a broad subject matter,” Liberman says proudly.

Amelia Kassel, a popular instructor and 40-year LIS professional with legendary expertise in research and databases, and a deep knowledge of business and marketing strategies, agrees with this. “Simmons has a great menu of workshops, with a lot of good options,” she says. “I’ve seen the program grow, with an increasing number of workshops, teachers, and topics.” Kassel

began teaching CE workshops in 2007 and teaches four to six each year. “I tell students, look at the other classes too,” she says. “All the people I’ve worked with at Simmons have been wonderful, and the student tech support is phenomenal.”

As the CE program expands, Liberman is always on the lookout for ways to meet the needs of its users. She offers special pricing to organizations that register a significant number of participants in a workshop. CE has also provided customized training for libraries and other organizations and hopes to do more of that. “We provided 10 online classes for 300 school librarians in New York state last year,” Liberman says. “We’re interested in doing more of this. We can be nimble in sourcing faculty and tailoring our online classes specifically for a certain group.”



The asynchronous online part had a big appeal to teen librarian John Kenney ’97LS, who works at the Hyde Park branch of the Boston Public Library. “It was incredibly helpful for dove-tailing my class work into my work schedule,” he says. “Librarians can have odd schedules. Since I didn’t have large blocks of time, I needed to do most of my work later at night. Attending a seminar class would have hampered my work schedule during the day.” Kenney says the three workshops he has taken so far, Young Adult Book Discussion

Groups, Graphic Novels, and Anime, helped him cross-train and strengthen his resume in these times of layoffs and economic challenges. Best of all, he’s enjoyed them. “The most useful was probably the Graphic Novels 101 class,” he says. “I’m using that material every day, and even started reading the classics on my own.”

The teacher of that workshop, Robin Brenner, is an expert on graphic novels who has given presentations and workshops around the country. She is also a graduate of the online LIS program at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. “Because I had attended library school online,” Brenner says, “teaching at Simmons felt like a natural fit. I’d seen how you do it as a student, and I had wanted to mimic what I had liked about my own classes and make sure that I could provide something that could be similar.”

Brenner teaches, she says, in part because she has been given a lot. “I like the idea of giving back,” she says. “I want to be a resource to my colleagues.” Passion for the subject, expertise in teaching, and a desire to be helpful add up to terrific workshops and satisfied students — that’s what CE offers.

To see the full list of current CE workshops, please see <http://alanis.simmons.edu/cweb/>. ▲

## CEC Career Corner:

# Perfecting Your Networking Introduction Speech

A Networking Introduction Speech, also called an Infomercial, is your brief presentation designed to inform the listener about your most important strengths, professional accomplishments, and career goals. It is a verbal snapshot that helps people know who you are and what type of opportunities you are exploring.

When you have the attention of a networking contact, it is best to introduce yourself within two minutes. However, you may have less than a minute for this introduction. This briefer introduction is called the “Elevator Speech.”

You will have many opportunities to practice this concise introduction with classmates and faculty, as well as during social events with family and friends. When you begin your job search, it is essential to introduce and market yourself professionally so you make a good impression and pique the interest of your listener. With a carefully crafted elevator speech you will be able to promote yourself effectively at interviews, career fairs, professional association meetings, and network events where you make people aware of your professional goals. Some people you meet may be in a position to provide useful information and resources, refer you to other contacts, and reveal potential career opportunities.

During job interviews, when presented with the popular opening statement, “Tell me about yourself,” you can convince interviewers that you are qualified for their positions and have the knowledge and experience necessary to be successful on the job. The employer will be curious and want to know more about the details of your successes.

### Guidelines for Introductions

- Describe your current situation including if you are a graduate student, a recent graduate, or a professional librarian. Include related work experience, internships, and volunteer activities.
- Showcase your accomplishments with brief stories and focus on the results of your actions using clear, powerful statements.
- Identify your professional goals and/or the library settings you are exploring.
- Be enthusiastic and make sure you do not sound rehearsed. Practice presenting yourself in an organized, articulate way with others who can give you feedback.
- Adjust the length of the introduction depending on your audience. The introduction at a career fair or networking event will be briefer than it will be during a job interview.

## Sample Introduction

Hi, my name is Barbara Brown, and I will be graduating from Simmons College in May with my MLS. My goal to work in an academic library after graduation evolved while I was a library intern with ABC University Library. I enjoyed the work environment and demonstrated my ability to provide quality service to students, faculty, and staff. Frequently I receive feedback regarding my approachability and quick response to patron requests. I also enjoy introducing students to e-resources and helping patrons locate digital and analog materials. My supervisor commented on my ability to engage patrons by creatively designing interactive classes and webinars to teach library research skills. I would love to hear more about your library and how you introduce new technology to library patrons.

*Adapted from the article “Marketing Yourself Professionally: The Two-Minute Infomercial” by Roxanne Jackman, Assistant Director of Career Counseling, Simmons College, CEC.*



Make sure to visit the CEC website for the CareerSpots and CareerBytes Videos: [http://www.careerspots.com/vidplay\\_links\\_ext.aspx?aid=369&partid=0&vidnum=-1&](http://www.careerspots.com/vidplay_links_ext.aspx?aid=369&partid=0&vidnum=-1&)

View Your *INFO*mercial and The Elevator Pitch

Visit these links for more information:

<http://talesfromanopenbook.wordpress.com/2008/10/14/elevator-speeches/>

[http://www.quintcareers.com/writing\\_elevator\\_speeches.html](http://www.quintcareers.com/writing_elevator_speeches.html)

<http://www.resumewonders.com/blog/2011/01/10/close-encounters-elevator-speech-tips-for-job-seekers>

### Additional Questions?

Contact the Career Education Center (CEC) to schedule an appointment with a Career Coach.

Article by Roxanne Jackman and JoAnne Amann

## SAVE THE DATE: GSLIS Career Fair, 4/20

**Wednesday, April 20, GSLIS Career Fair.** The GSLIS Career Fair will take place on Wednesday, April 20, from 12-2 p.m. in the Linda Paresky Conference Center. Formal dress is required. Students should bring copies of their resume for the representatives from hiring employers. For more information, email Angela Kelly at [angela.kelly@simmons.edu](mailto:angela.kelly@simmons.edu).

For more information visit the Career Fair website at [gslis.simmons.edu/blogs/jobs/gslis-career-fair](http://gslis.simmons.edu/blogs/jobs/gslis-career-fair).

## Snapshot: Amelia Kassel, cont.

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### How did you find your way to Simmons?

I had been teaching distance classes at San Jose State, which I still do, and around 2007 the GSLIS CE program director contacted me and asked if I'd like to teach. I've always had respect for Simmons. It's a major brand name as a leader and high-quality school. I was thrilled to be invited to teach a workshop.

### What are you teaching at Simmons?

Four workshops this year. On average, I have 15 people in my classes. I just taught *Secrets of Successful Searching* in March, which I give once a year. I'm giving a workshop in May about starting a research business similar to mine. In October I'm teaching a workshop about U.S. private company research. The workshop has grown — nearly 30 students enrolled last year — information professionals and librarians from law, investment banking, and public and academic libraries. I've had students from Canada, Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. Many students are Simmons GSLIS alums.

### What changes have you seen with the CE program?

I've seen the program grow. GSLIS offers more workshops, more teachers, and more topics than ever before. I'm getting people from many geographic locations, walks of life, and from backgrounds other than library and information science who are interested in learning how to do research, expand their knowledge, or move into other careers. Simmons has a great menu of workshops, with a lot of good options. I tell students to consider taking all the workshops they can.

### What do you like about teaching?

I've always loved to impart my knowledge. The other thing that I love is that I learn from the students. You learn a lot from people's questions and contributions. One of the ways I stay up to date is by listening to what they want to know. I was recently giving a lesson on government sources, and a student from Saudi Arabia said, "All of these sources are from the U.S. What about international government sources?" I think international could be three workshops. But I whipped up a list of the types of sources with links to 200 countries.

### What else do you do professionally, besides teach?

I conduct research for a wide range of clients, including small companies, large companies, book authors, and individuals. I usually attend several annual conferences a year, such as the Association of Independent Information Professionals; Online Information UK in London, the biggest online conference in the world; and the Special Libraries Association. Most the time I'm invited to speak or give a workshop.

### What do you do for fun?

That's my big problem. I don't have a lot of hobbies. I've done things in the past — birding, quilting, and gardening — but I've chosen to dedicate myself to my business. I work hard. I work a lot of hours.

Read the rest of this interview online: [gslis.simmons.edu/infolink](http://gslis.simmons.edu/infolink).

Interview by Sasha Nyary

## Snapshot: Robin Brenner, cont.

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### How did you become the graphic novel go-to person?

I happened to be lucky to get interested at precisely the right time. I had not been a comics reader growing up. I had read *Garfield*, and *Archie*, and *Calvin and Hobbes*, because everybody reads *Calvin and Hobbes*. And I am also an artist and a writer, and I've taken a cartooning class. But I had no idea that comic books existed. I had no one in my life who read comics, who would bring me to a comic store, because that's where you buy them now. You don't find them in a grocery store anymore. I was working at Lexington and I was assigned to figure out graphic novels. I fell in love with the format as soon as I started reading them. "Why has no one told me about this! It's the perfect medium for me!"

I created a website as part of my YA literature course with the idea that it would continue after the class. And that is what started people noticing that I could talk about graphic novels, and I enjoyed talking about them. And I started networking online through the Graphic Novels in Libraries Listserv (GNLIB-L). That is what got me started to have a wide reputation. It was all one big string of events. Graphic novels completely became my thing. You can ask me a question about them at any time and I can go on about it for half an hour. I became excited and wanted to share what I have learned. Over the years I've developed more formal workshops and articles and books and things. I was glad to have discovered that I certainly can speak in public, and I like it, and I like writing, I like helping people, I like to share what I've learned.

### What do you tell first-time readers?

It's a format, not a genre. That's the first thing I say every time I talk about them. Everybody thinks of them as a genre, and they're just not. I spend a lot of time saying, what do you like to read? I would not give *Watchman* to someone who likes cozy mysteries; it's a fairly grim, complicated, dense book. Nothing says you have to become a giant fan, but if you want to read one and find out why it's interesting, you need to find one you're going to like already. There are many stories, many age ranges that they are aimed at.

I have never understood the concern about format, and that's something obviously I deal with a lot, with comics. People have a lot of prejudice because of the format. I find that in the library world, with television and film. People generally think of television as inferior to books. My thing has always been, I don't care what format the story is in; if it's well told, it's well told. I love all kinds of stories, and there is no reason that I can't enjoy all of these things equally. It doesn't make them better or worse than the other. I think it's too bad when people limit themselves too much in what they're willing to read or willing to look at.

I have the same feeling about genres too. I always get defensive if people start implying that fantasy or science fiction are automatically lesser than literary fiction. I just don't believe that. Teen literature gets that as well, of course. I spent a lot of the past few years defending *Twilight* to the end of the earth.

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## Welcome New GSLIS Faculty

As you may have heard, we are pleased to be welcoming two new full-time faculty members to GSLIS in Fall 2011. Or, we should say, welcoming one brand new faculty member while also seeing one of our current visiting faculty members become a full-time, tenure-track assistant professor. At the same time, two of our doctoral students are joining the adjunct ranks here in Boston. Please join us in welcoming the following new faculty members:

### Rebecca Morris, Assistant Professor



Rebecca Morris, photo courtesy of Rebecca Morris

Rebecca Morris is completing her Ph.D. at the University of Pittsburgh, School of Information Sciences; her dissertation topic is the response of listener-viewers in digital storytelling in the school library. She has taught courses in school library management, young adult resources and services, and storytelling; she also supervised school library practicum students. Rebecca has a professional background in K-12 teaching and librarianship as an elementary classroom teacher and middle school librarian. She

earned her MLIS and School Library Certification from the University of Pittsburgh. Her undergraduate degree is a Bachelor of Science in Elementary and Kindergarten Education from The Pennsylvania State University, Schreyer Honors College. Rebecca is a runner and novice triathlete; she completed several half-marathons and triathlons recently and is preparing to run the Pittsburgh Marathon in May. She will be teaching LIS 426 and supervising SLTP practicums in the fall.

### Peishan Bartley, Adjunct Faculty

Peishan Bartley received her B.A. in Business Administration from National Cheng Chi University and her MBA from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. After spending two years as a marketing specialist for a software company, Peishan switched paths and got her Master's degree from Simmons GSLIS. She worked for a year at Rivier College Regina Library in the technology department and is now back at Simmons and working on her Ph.D. in Library and Information Science. Peishan's interests include user tagging behavior, usability evaluation methods, and cross lingual information retrieval. She will be teaching a section of LIS 488 in the fall.

## Snapshot: Robin Brenner, cont.

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I think people forget all the reasons they like stories, all the reasons that they read stories, and that they don't read every book for the same purpose. And especially with teenagers, they are encouraged to find why it is fun to read, and it's something they'll want to keep doing. It's not just about making them read "good" literature, or "approved" literature; they should understand why reading in general is fun and they should continue to read as they grow up.

Interview by Sasha Nyary

Read the rest of this interview online: [gslis.simmons.edu/infolink](http://gslis.simmons.edu/infolink).

### Laura Saunders, Assistant Professor



Laura Saunders, photo by Olivia Gatti

Laura Saunders received her Master's from Simmons GSLIS in 2001, and, after working as a reference and instruction librarian for several years, returned to GSLIS to get her Ph.D., which she completed in 2010. As an adjunct and then visiting faculty member, she taught Reference and Information Services, User Instruction, Evaluation of Information, and Academic Libraries. Her dissertation, "Information Literacy as a Student Learning Outcome," won the Jean Tague-Sutcliffe award at the 2010 ALISE

conference. She has published in the *Journal of Academic Librarians*, *College & Research Libraries*, and the portal "Libraries and the Academy" on the topics of information literacy, learning outcomes assessment, accreditation, and government documents. Laura will be teaching LIS 403 and LIS 407 in the fall.

### Asher Jackson, Adjunct Faculty

Asher Jackson began his libraries and archives career as a records manager in the late 1990s. His experience dealing with issues related to corporate records management eventually led him to pursue a Master's degree at Simmons GSLIS, where his primary area of study was Archives and Records Management. After graduating in 2005, Asher was selected as the 2006-2008 Pauline A. Young Resident at the University of Delaware, where he worked in the Special Collections and Cataloging departments. His professional experiences during his time in Delaware sparked a further interest in conducting research involving the curation of electronic documents, focusing on the role that archival institutions might play in providing support for user-created, community-based online archival projects. Asher will be co-teaching LIS 444 with Ross Harvey in the fall.

## Folks on the Move



Assistant Professor Naresh Agarwal was featured in the March issue of *Talk Sikkim*, a monthly news

magazine in his home state of Sikkim, India. The magazine has a readership of more than twenty thousand and is popular in Sikkim and North Bengal.

GSLIS student Seth Kershner has been busy researching the grassroots movement against the military presence in public schools. An article he co-authored with Dr. Scott Harding (University of Connecticut School of Social Work), "Just Say No: Organizing Against Militarism in Public Schools," has been accepted for publication in the *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare*. He has also recently had a proposal accepted for a panel presentation at the annual meeting of the New England Peace Studies Association on April 16. He graduates in May and looks forward to attending the Social Sciences Librarians Boot Camp at Tufts over the summer.

Got news? Please send it to us at [infolink@simmons.edu](mailto:infolink@simmons.edu).

## Interview: Marilyn Johnson

*The world needs librarians, says Marilyn Johnson, author of This Book is Overdue! How Librarians and Cybrarians Can Save Us All (HarperPerennial, 2011). Her book is an exploration of the world of information experts, and with its superhero librarian soaring across the cover, a valentine to them, as well. Johnson began speaking to library groups months before her book was published in February 2010 to critical and popular acclaim; it was recently issued in paperback with a new epilogue. She came to GSLIS West recently to talk about her love of librarians and why she wrote the book, and also to deliver her inspiring message: This is an exciting time to be a librarian. The world is run on computers, and millions of people across the digital divide are being behind left behind. We need librarians more than ever before.*

### **A lot of people seem to think you're a librarian. Have you ever worked in a library?**

I'm just a patron now. I worked as a page for 95 cents an hour when I was younger. It was about 1969. After a year I asked for a nickel an hour raise, and they consulted about it, and decided they couldn't give it to me. It was a matter of pride — I had to walk. Basically, I got drummed out of libraries. I don't think I could have passed cataloging, anyway.

### **Your book doesn't get too technical about cataloging.**

I interviewed people who had the inside scoop on cataloging. I followed the controversy with the working group on the Future of Bibliographic Control and the never-ending fights over the Library of Congress subject headings. And I finally threw up my hands and said, I cannot both understand this and make it interesting.

### **What is your background, then?**

I have a master's in poetry writing from the University of New Hampshire, which has, by the way, a very nice library. I was the only one from my class who didn't get a teaching job, so I was available when we got a call from *Esquire* that the fiction editor was looking for an assistant. I went on a lark — thought I'd stay the summer — and I stayed five years. I edited fiction and nonfiction, and then I went sideways to be a senior editor at *Redbook* and rather quickly moved on to *Outside*. When my boyfriend got a job at *Sports Illustrated*, we got married and I started bearing children and freelancing, mostly at *Life* magazine.

### **Which is where you and I met, when I was a reporter and editor. I remember you as a workhorse.**

Thank you. I wrote anything. I did everything. I wrote essays, I wrote profiles, I wrote obits. I wrote the Diana piece that ran after she died. I wrote the fifth-year anniversary tribute to Jackie. I wrote a salute to Elvis. I loved that. Mainly, everybody else would get to go to, like, basecamp on Mount Everest. I would go to Gainesville and talk to Marilyn Monroe's sister. I was good at mourning, good at the tone poems — well, I'm a poet — that *Life* liked to run. I did a lot of deep captions. I understood who the readers of *Life* were; I was from the Midwest. *Life* was perfect for me.

### **You wrote a lot of obits, and your first book was *The Dead Beat: Lost Souls, Lucky Stiffs, and the Perverse Pleasure of Obituaries*,**

### **about obituary writers. How did that come about?**

I had this perfect ability to find somebody who was just about to die. I'd write the tribute, I'd work hard and make 'em sing — and then my subject would miraculously recover. Katherine Hepburn, Marlon Brando. . . . And I wrote a funny piece about that and it appeared in a local newspaper. And someone said, you should write a book about this.

People would laugh at me when I told them what I was doing, and finally, at a certain point, I started saying, I'd rather not tell you what I'm writing. I knew it was a great subject but I had no hope it would be anything but an odd little book. And then it did well. It was a sleeper hit. It was on a number of best-seller lists and it won some awards.

### **And how did you come to write *This Book is Overdue*?**

I kept coming across all these interesting obits about librarians. And then I was standing in front of my local reference desk and I said, "I don't understand how to save stuff anymore, how do I save the article on this website?" My librarian showed me how to make a screenshot — and she changed my life. You don't appreciate what it's like to be an adult and not understand how to use your phone. The whole world opened up. That's all we need: someone to show us. The technological changes, the role that the library can play in our technological adaptation is tremendous. What do you think, that we're all born knowing how to use these devices?

### **At the last magazine I worked at, I showed the top editor how to email a link from a website. She had been cutting and pasting the URL. It rocked her world.**

That's the moment you became a librarian. That is what a librarian does.

So I said, "I want to do a book about librarians; that would be so great." My editor said, "Write a proposal." My agent, my editor, they're all like, "You didn't mention Google! How can you write a book about libraries and not mention Google? Google is going to replace them all!" And when I turned the book in, they kept giving it back, saying, "This Second Life stuff is too crazy." I said, "I will have a character named Hypatia Dejavu in my library book."

### **And what have you learned?**

One thing is clear to me: I understand why cataloging is so difficult. When you're trying to create the paths to discovery, you have to think of all the paths, because if someone doesn't ask the right things, the item is invisible. I try to find something in my files on Zotero or gmail and I think, "Did I put this in travel? Is it in receipts? Did I file it under libraries?" I am frighteningly inconsistent and frighteningly limited when I go to shake Google.

And I'm sensitive to that because I write uncategorizable books. I dare you to try to find either of my books at Barnes & Noble. The library puts it in reference. I think it should be wherever Studs Terkel's *Working* is, but that's just one place my book should be. And the obits book should go with books about the newspaper business, because basically it's an obit for newspapers. I had that great quote from one obit writer, "I am burying my readers."

*Continued on Page 8*



Marilyn Johnson, photo by GSLIS student Lexi Walters Wright.

## Interview: Marilyn Johnson

Continued from Page 7

I'm having arguments with my publisher about my next book. I can't say what the topic is yet, but I've conceived of these as a trilogy, that these three books are about the same thing, only different. They are all about people who are engaged in mostly hopeless tasks to preserve our cultural memory in a society that can't possibly preserve everything — a record of every person who died, a marker for every item read or listened to.

**And they were all wrong, right? *Overdue* did pretty well, right?**  
It sold 30,000 in hard cover. That's pretty good, right? It has exactly *one* dramatic scene, where librarians teach some missionaries how to use a reference tool. That's not a book that's designed to fly off the shelves. I thought it was going to get killed, actually.

**One of the things I love about you is how much you love librarians.**

You know, computers are these potentially meaningful little agents of upheaval. And here we have these ramrod-straight, law-abiding, privacy-loving, curious, intelligent, highly-trained people — could you *find* a better profession to be a safeguard of our computers? Is this not a brilliant way to remain relevant?

**What's the reaction of the library world?**

I got scolded early on, "We're not the ones who need to be talked to," but I think plenty of librarians could use that jolt of confidence and vision. How can you not be completely discouraged by the horrible stuff librarians are getting, with all these budget cuts and staff cuts? Let's put all of our federal business on the computer — you can't file taxes, you can't file for unemployment without a computer. What do they think? Where are people going to go? Do you think Best Buy is going to teach them how to use their smart phone? The beast at the DMV will show you how to move from screen to screen? Plus, all the problems that don't get addressed by the government end up at the libraries' door. The IRS doesn't send paper forms anymore.

An interesting criticism the book has gotten is, "It would have been great if she hadn't been in it." But I was completely ignorant when I started this book. I couldn't send a group email; I could not bcc a message. My story is part of it. I said, "I'm going to put myself in the hands of the librarians and see if they can help me." This was also for my parents, who like me are watching the world get increasingly technically sophisticated while we fall farther and farther behind. It is hard to be an ignorant adult in this society.

**It seems to come down to class in a lot of ways.**

There's a surprising lack of support for public libraries, and some of that comes from educated middle class people who have bought their way out of needing to use these resources. They're wired where they work; they can walk into the Apple store with their credit card or call up Dell; they can buy their own books. They've insulated themselves and they don't understand that we all need libraries, whether you personally use them or not.

How can the president talk about economic recovery without mentioning libraries? How can people compete in the world without tools? Do you think community colleges are going to wire our seniors and walk the jobless through their online

applications? We all need to be educated! And being spit out of the magazine business put me in the ranks of "other." I couldn't afford a private office — of course I went to the library. Where else was I going to go? Starbucks? There has been a rash of pieces about the coffee-house culture. That is a class thing. . . . the place for people with their own computers and \$4 to blow on a latte.

**A last message to librarians?**

Librarians are too damn nice. Politics is not about the just cause. You've got to play hardball, throw some elbows, make some noise, elect candidates who care about libraries. Libraries are all that some of us have. We need you now. Who else can we trust?

Interview by Sasha Nyary

## April-May Events

Wednesday, April 20, **GSLIS Career Fair.** The GSLIS Career Fair will take place on Wednesday, April 20, from 12-2 p.m. in the Linda Paresky Conference Center. Formal dress is required.

Thursday, April 21, **Lunchtime Lecture: "Interesting Stress Research Data"** presented by Assistant Professor Wilkins Jordan. P206, 1-2 p.m.

Thursday, April 28, **Lunchtime Lecture: "Challenges for Information Visualization"** presented by Associate Professor Benoit. P206, 1-2 p.m.

Thursday, April 28, **GSLIS After Dark: An Evening of Recognition and Connection.** Paresky Conference Center, Main College Building, 4:30-8:30 p.m.

More information on events can be found at <http://www.simmons.edu/gslis/news/calendar/index.php>.

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## *InfoLink*

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Copy deadline for the Summer issue is Friday, May 27, 2011.