



Visiting Lecturer Sherry Koshman is an instructor that every student should try to take a technology course from. Speaking from personal experience, Dr. Koshman has the ability to relate complex technical information to even the most novice students. Earlier this semester, Dr. Koshman was kind enough to sit down with SCALA and answer a few questions:

CB: What made you decide to go into library science?

SK: The field's user orientation toward technology inspired me to go into library science. Library and information science is unique in that we are not necessarily developers or programmers, however we can quickly learn, use, test, teach, and adapt new technologies and make them palatable to our users.

CB: How has working in an academic setting with the new waves of library students affected your view of library science/the role that librarians play in society today?

SK: I have frequently told students that the role of the intermediary will never disappear since the technology keeps changing and people require help in using it effectively. The Web presents an excellent example of the volatility we face. The new waves of library students seemingly have a little more pressure to get up to speed on technologies that affect their specialization. The students going through the program have the potential to learn both theory and practice in a meaningful way that will help them successfully contribute to their jobs and to society at large. It is a great time to be in this field.

CB: What do you consider to be the greatest obstacle today for students entering the workforce? What should students work on improving to make themselves more "hireable?"

SK: The perception of what a librarian can do is probably one of the biggest obstacles for students entering the workforce. We see the emergence of terms such as knowledge managers, and information architects that have been used in our field to label jobs. There is little doubt that the outside world is taking interest in what librarians have to offer. For example, I am collaborating on a thesaurus expansion project and last semester I had the opportunity to attend a meeting regarding this project at the U.S. Institute of Peace in Washington, D.C. Several lawyers, judges, a former ambassador, librarians, and directors from the USIP, World Bank, and the United Nations attended this meeting. I was asked to present the merits of applying a controlled vocabulary to an electronic document collection that is to be made available through a new government document

portal. People were nodding their heads and understood the role we had to play in this project.

To become more “hireable” students need to develop a framework for understanding users, their own specialization, and the technology associated with it. This shows potential employers that you thought about your contribution to the job and that you can adjust to changes in the field. Also, if you have the time, then become involved in student professional associations to learn about professional activities. Internships are a good option for those who have little library experience. Explore technology through your course work. Even though we are addressing current skill sets for students to be marketable, there exists the possibility that your organization will be using different technology than what you learned in school. To be more “hireable” is to demonstrate that you understand how to adapt to new situations or technologies and will become a productive employee as soon as possible.

CB: Every librarian seems to have a type of laughable "horror story" from their first years on the job: the patron who asked if they could have an extra copy of a book on the shelf, children bringing wildlife into the library, etc. Do you have one?

SK: One amusing moment is when I worked in a law firm library in downtown Montreal. One afternoon I picked up a telephone call from one of the lawyers, who was not bilingual. Luckily my exposure to French allowed me to parse the torrent of French from the person who asked for an online commercial database search. I kept reiterating phrases back to the caller to make sure I understood. It must have been quite funny to overhear that conversation. Needless to say, I worked harder on my Quebecois French! Today this problem would probably not exist due to the pervasiveness of e-mail services and requests.

CB: When you were getting your degree, what class affected you the most?

SK: During my Master’s degree, I took an outstanding management course taught by a former special librarian. The textbook was excellent and I never forgot the principles of planning, organizing, controlling, staffing, and budgeting. These principles are timeless and can be applied to project management, technology development, and any work situation that requires administrative vision and direction. I have shared these with my students and taught them how to utilize current technology to realize these management principles in a library and information services environment.

CB: If you could recommend a class taught at Pitt (that you don't teach!), which would it be and why?

SK: That’s a difficult question, since there are many good courses available!

CB: Getting away from libraries, many students are new to Pittsburgh; can you recommend one event or restaurant or attraction that they should see during their time here?

SK: I enjoy going to a new Indian restaurant on North Craig Street called “Indica”. The food is good and the building’s interior is reminiscent of restaurants I used to go to while living in Montreal.

CB: If you could sit down with all the new students entering the program this semester, what piece of advice would you give them for being successful at Pitt?

SK: We have students who enter the program for various reasons so that is an interesting question. Pursuing a graduate level education is analogous to running an obstacle course. Do you evaluate the obstacle and surmount it, or do you feel defeated and retreat? When confronted with a new technology, theory or assignment, analytical enthusiasm is the key to being successful at Pitt and in your future career.