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Science-Technology Division Member Spotlight

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Science-Technology Division Member Spotlight

Submitted by Diane Foster, Chair, Public Relations Committee

Featured Member:

Susan Shepherd
Chair, Professional Development Committee, SLA Science-Technology Division



Tell us why you wanted to become a librarian.

The reason I wanted to become a librarian is that during my undergrad education I noticed that I loved to spend time researching topics for papers, but hated the part where I had to actually write the paper. Becoming a librarian was a way to do what I liked (research) and then hand the results over to the client to do the hard part. I ended up working in a corporate library for 22 years, and was constantly challenged with new and interesting research topics, on everything from patent prior art to market research.

What are some of your interests outside of librarianship?

I'm originally from San Diego and I received my BA from UC San Diego and my MLS from UC Berkeley.

Outside of work I take occasional classes in art history, and like to dabble in mixed media art. I have a great interest in artists' books (<http://www.sandiegobookarts.com/Gallery.aspx>), which blend two of my lifelong loves: art and books. I also like to travel, and seek out art museums and local artists wherever I go. I have a list of places to visit before I die and I've actually checked off a few: Prague, Paris, Edinburgh, the Cotswolds, Pompeii, and Lake Como. Still to come: Burma, Sicily, Spain, New Zealand....

Anyone who knows me well is afraid to call me between 7:30–8:00 p.m. weeknights (Jeopardy!).

What was your background before you became a science librarian?

My first job out of library school was at a corporate research library, supporting the research scientists (and the business/marketing people) at a biotechnology company. This was a challenge because my undergraduate majors were linguistics and literature. Over the intervening 30 (!) years, I've come to consider myself a de facto science librarian.

Tell us a little bit about your current position.

I'm Head of Reference, Instruction & Outreach at the UC San Diego Science & Engineering Library. I work with the students, faculty and staff at UCSD to teach them about the library's resources, and to help them with their reference and research questions. I also coordinate the library's exhibits, events, and other outreach activities.

What organizations are you involved in?

I'm a member of ALA/ACRL, California Academic & Research Libraries (CARL), Southern California Instruction Librarians (SCIL), and the Patent Information Users Group (PIUG). At the local level I'm a member of the San Diego Book Arts because I'm a huge fan of artists' books.

What do you find most interesting about your work?

The variety. It's been that way throughout my career, and I'm sure that's why many people are drawn to this profession. I've always worked in environments where there are lots of different kinds of work to do, and new things to learn. Here at UCSD, interacting with students was a change for me from my previous career as a corporate librarian. I'm learning so much from millennials, and I think that's been the most eye-opening part of this job.

What do you think is the most interesting issue in librarianship today?

Digitization of resources is certainly a prominent issue. UC San Diego Library has been involved with Google in a scanning project and it has generated some debate in multiple circles. It will be interesting to watch as this debate continues; meanwhile the project is enhancing the retrievability of parts of our collection. I also think it's interesting that we're seeing opportunities to be involved with our clients in curation of large data sets, which will give us a new role on university campuses. Finally, I think the explosion in the use of mobile devices is going to change the way we deliver information and reach out to our users.

What has been your biggest professional challenge?

Keeping up with the incredible changes in technology. When I started in this field, we had card catalogs, typewriters, and teletype terminals for online searching (note the acoustical coupler). But it's also what keeps our jobs interesting and our skills competitive.



What advice would you give a new member of SLA, new librarian, or someone starting out in science librarianship?

- 1) Learn everything you can about new technologies.
- 2) Be a strong advocate for yourself and the profession.

**Format of column and interview question ideas derived from Medical Library Association News Bulletin, member spotlight section. ❖*