



Nomination for Oceana Wilson

Director of Library and Information Services
Crossett Library, Bennington College
Bennington, Vermont

Nominator:
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1. How long have you known the nominee and how did you come to know him or her?

Oceana Wilson has been described as fearless, creative, eclectic, understated, intelligent, enthusiastic, fresh and committed to the success of the students. She has been the Director of Crossett Library at Bennington College for the past five years after having served as a reference librarian for three years. Since that time, she has provided invaluable support for my work as the director of the College's language center and the Master of Arts in Teaching a Second Language program (MATSL), which is a low residency program for French and Spanish teachers. Over the course of our work my respect and esteem for Oceana has grown exponentially.

One of the first things Oceana did when she assumed the directorship of the library was to contact me about the holdings in languages, which had not been updated in a number of years. The request was timely because it coincided with a shift in direction of the language center; we were moving away from using textbooks toward a curriculum that was based on concepts from the culture studied with the accompanying texts (books, movies, and a wide variety of print media). In our discussions it became clear that the library had an important role in this shift so that students would have access to those texts used in their classes as well as secondary texts (recommended by the language faculty) that supported the content areas studied. For example, the library purchased texts to support a Spanish course on the works of Federico García Lorca, students were then required to do research in the library about the author.

Students in the MATSL program are on campus for three weeks during the summer and then they take two online courses during the academic year, of which one is a research course. Oceana and I worked together to design the research tutorial for the Master's students while they were on campus so that they would be able to access materials and services when they were off-site. As she worked with students she made it clear that the library would do anything to support their work. She ensured they had remote access to the databases, offered to mail articles that could not be delivered electronically and even offered phone support for anyone who might need it. In her understated, calm manner she assured students that they would have the support they would need to do their work. As the Director of the program, this assurance is key because it eliminates a layer of unnecessary stress for students; they are able to focus on their work rather than having to worry about how they are going to get it done.

It seems as though every year Oceana initiates a new service or program. In the fall of 2005 she sent faculty members an email offering to create an online research guide designed specifically for their courses. These guides include reference sources, access to electronic books and articles, as well as, web resources (for an example of the research guide to the introductory French class please go to:

http://library.bennington.edu/screens/resguide_FL_introfrench.html). In 2007, she asked faculty for a list of some of their favorite books in order to create a collection of recommended reading for students to take with them during their Field Work Term (a seven-week non-residential term during which students are working in internships associated with their academic work). These efforts invite community members to use the library in a myriad of ways.

In our five years as colleagues Oceana's thoughtful and targeted support; unassuming but effective manner of delivering services; and never-ending originality in creating new initiatives that put the library at the center of our lives continues to impress me. She has made a marked difference in how I think about and experience the library, and libraries in general, by expanding the role for libraries in my classes. In the end, my students' progress has become the best measurement of Oceana's work as a librarian.

2. Please list a few ways in which the nominee has helped you and others and made your experience of the library a positive one.

Oceana has worked with numerous faculty members to support our teaching in many different ways, which speaks to her intellectual versatility.

Oceana's support for my teaching has been creative, thoughtful, and inspiring. This past summer I decided to teach a module (a one-credit course, primarily for first-year students, that targets a specific skill and/or capacity) focusing on research skills. Students in the course, Artifact and Context, are required to choose an artifact from this culture and conduct research about its design, use, and cultural meaning while also doing related readings. Oceana was integral to the design of the course. We brainstormed about overall goals of the course, including the final assessments, she suggested books from which I chose several readings, and we worked together to determine how to integrate the teaching of research skills. A reference librarian comes to part of each class to teach an aspect of conducting research such as searching in historical databases so that students could determine when their object was first introduced and discussed in this culture or evaluating sources.

For the course, students have to keep a research journal, which asks them to reflect on their process of conducting research. Oceana helped design the questions that guide their journal writing in an attempt to help students pay attention to and learn from their experiences conducting research. Both Oceana and I will read the journals in order to understand, from the students' perspective, what about the process was easy and difficult for them. Students will also create a poster or PowerPoint presentation of their artifact using images they have found and text generated from their research. These presentations will be exhibited in the library or on the library webpage.

What impressed me most about working with Oceana was the ease and expertise with which she navigated both the content and research aspects of the course. We were casually talking about the readings for the course and she immediately took me to the stacks and pointed to a couple of books that suggested that I consider for the course. Her suggestions were excellent, on target, and formed part of the required readings. Such content-area expertise from a librarian cannot be assumed and yet she offers it in such an off-hand manner that it would be easy to take for granted. When discussing the questions to guide the students in the writing of the research journal, she offered equally helpful suggestions about the nature of the questions we ask students to consider. While Oceana herself is not teaching, it is as much her course as mine.

Luckily for Bennington, my experience is not unique. She worked directly with the faculty member teaching the course, Bennington Past and Present,

conceiving of and overseeing a unique collaborative project among the students. Oceana had come across many hours of silent film footage taken over the decades since the school's founding in the early 1930's. She had the film digitalized and then worked intensively with the class to write a well-researched narrative including period music to accompany the footage. The students, in period costumes, performed at the College's 75th anniversary celebration. The performance was such an extraordinary success that a sound-track of the performance was made resulting in the production of a DVD that has been shown in the local museum, at numerous events, and at orientation for new students. Faculty and students involved in the project agree that without Oceana the project would never have come to fruition. In this way, she brings the library to the center of the intellectual life of the community.

Oceana also works with individual classes supporting students' work. Liz Deschenes, who teaches photography, was struck that, when working with one of her classes going over research skills, Oceana knew each student by name and took into consideration their unique perspectives on any given topic, giving specific suggestions/skills based on their particular topic. Liz said, "She custom tailors each research topic specifically to the individual students' focus, while making room for connections, that they had not imagined from the beginning of their quests." Here again, Oceana's ability to support content development on a wide variety of topics and inquiry simultaneously is impressive.

Students' experiences parallel those of the faculty. Oceana went to the Small Books and Zines course, taught by Mary Lum, a visual arts faculty member, and offered her voice as the guest critic for the presentation of students' final projects. One student in the course said, "She reviewed all of our work carefully, added useful feedback and ideas to the discussion, and asked useful questions." She also made herself available throughout the term and helped to organize an opening and exhibition of the students' selected works from the course, which were displayed on a prominent table in the library for several weeks, enabling patrons to look through them. Students experience Oceana, and the library she directs, as central to their intellectual and artistic endeavors. She pushes them in their own work, while also providing a venue for making it public.

Students also comment on the ways Oceana supports their learning more generally. "She caters to a range of learning styles creating nooks to satisfy eclectic study requirements. She put an end to Shush for who could Shush the euphoria one feels in the first moment of recognition of one's own truth in print, image, or reason?"

Libraries are the intellectual center of any college or university. It is the ways in which they take center stage that distinguishes one library from another. What Oceana does, in her collaboration with faculty members, is help students access

the world of ideas beyond their classroom experiences, help students to think about those ideas in new ways, as well as help them contribute to the world of ideas; it is these last two dimensions of her work that sets her apart.

3. How has the library, and the nominee in particular, had an impact on students and faculty and the teaching and learning process? Please be specific.

Crossett library was originally built for 300 students and now serves 800 along with approximately 80 faculty members. The building's smallness does not limit faculty and students' experience of the library; the library goes far beyond the physical boundaries of the building. As Eileen Scully, a history faculty member, says, "Oceana has infused the entire library and its staff with an attitude of service and deep commitment to teaching and learning." It is these intangible qualities – the attitude of service and commitment to teaching of learning – that enable the small building to have a large impact on our lives.

Oceana goes above and beyond the call of duty in her work. As faculty member Mary says, "Oceana has always made me feel that my book buying requests are high priority, and always buys everything on the many lists I give her each term. She is interested in everything that I bring into her office, whether it is a booklist, a particular book, or a new idea. She always makes time to talk to me, although I know she is extremely busy. She makes me feel like an important part of the workings of the library." Mary's experience is not unique; numerous faculty members describe their experiences of Oceana supporting their work, both in and out of the classroom. On one occasion, Oceana accompanied a faculty member to New York City on a book-buying trip, going from bookstore to bookstore and writing lists and lists of titles and ISBN's for the library to order. Upon returning the faculty member commented, "I don't know of any other library director that would make time for this."

Students have a similar experience. They comment on Oceana's Facebook page "where patrons of the library can make requests for materials not yet in the library's possession, or ask questions, which she answers with humor, knowledge, and grace." For example one student asks, "I was wondering if you could recommend any basic books on Metaphysics?" To which she replies: "You might want to start with Riddles of Existence: A Guided Tour of Metaphysics by Earl Conee and Theodore Sider. (BD111 .C6263 2005). The back cover claims the book 'makes metaphysics genuinely accessible, even fun'—wahoo! If this book doesn't end up being what you are looking for, stop by my office and we can look through other books we have and discuss purchasing some more." On a more playful note, a student asks, "Will you marry me? Yes/No," to which she responds:

Dear Distant Love (PL984.E8 W39 1997),

I Confess (VHS Drama 488) that I Cried For You (Jennings CD4046) When We Were Very Young (PZ7.M64 P6 1961) but You Don't Love Me Yet (PS3562.E8544 Y68 2007) so now I Am My Own Wife (PS3573.R53252 I3 2004) and I Don't Need You Any More (PS 3525 .I5156 I17 1967)
With Love And Disregard, (ND237.O47 W5 2002)
Oceana

By using Facebook as a means for communicating with students, Oceana chooses a means of communication with which they feel comfortable rather than opting for a means that might be more convenient to her. She also takes their communication seriously while infusing her responses with a sense of playfulness, inviting them into the world of texts and ideas.

Oceana used this past FWT (when most students were off campus for seven weeks) to reorganize the library collection integrating the reference and bound periodical collection into the book collection so that users have all the materials on a particular subject physically together. The idea behind this reorganization was that it would be more convenient for users in general and, in particular, to enable students to discover a wider variety of materials on their topics of interest. She also worked to make it a more comfortable place for students. After receiving feedback that students wanted more private spaces for working, she rearranged the furniture making it “a more comfortable, cozy place to work and read, adding blankets and good lighting to all of the seating areas.”

Perhaps most important is the perception expressed by one student who said she is, “fearless when it comes to opening up the library to new and exciting events.” It is this spirit of intellectual adventure accompanied by a broad conception of what a library is that puts the library at the center of our lives here at Bennington. For example, every year the library sponsors World Book Day, where the librarians stand on the steps of the library and students come by to write the name of their favorite book on a slip of paper that is then attached to a flower to be exchanged for another flower with someone else’s favorite book. The idea is for students to explore books that they might not otherwise have heard about. For a list of last’s year’s favorite books please go to:
http://library.bennington.edu/screens/Read_WBD2009.pdf.

Oceana’s commitment to service parallels her commitment to teaching and learning. This is due, in large part, to how she conceives of herself as a librarian. As one faculty member notes, “What I value most about Oceana is that she takes on the role of educator directly herself, rather than treating the library as a resource that stands apart from the immediate teaching-learning chain of activity.” In that role of librarian/educator, she takes an active role in the development of curriculum as well as special projects.

She spearheaded the library's Mellon Fellows program, which offered Bennington faculty members the opportunity to embed topics related to libraries into a course of their design by providing logistical support for projects; workspace in the library; and budgetary assistance. The purpose of this program has been to create dialogues and projects that expand the role of the library within the College community and to highlight the importance of libraries in contemporary society.

In one project, that took place 2007-08, Robert Ransick, visual arts faculty member, and Joe Holt, computing faculty member, team-taught a class entitled The Augmented Library: A Site-Specific Installation. The class examined how technology can enhance, augment, or change the dynamics of interacting with the architecture, information, and occupants of a space. The course culminated in the creation of an installation called Bennington Bookmarks, which encourages visitors to explore areas of the library they may have previously overlooked and to share their ideas about the books and films housed in the collections. The Bookmarks are translucent objects with glowing colored lights inside of them. The objects' forms—the Apollo Lunar Lander, Jocasta's Brooch, a drum, Ockham's razor, Martha Graham, a yeast cell, Duchamp's Fountain, Minerva's owl, and objects from To Kill a Mockingbird—were chosen to represent subjects taught at Bennington College. These gently glowing beacons were attached to books and DVDs, and contain messages left by members of the community. The messages can be accessed at one of three Bookmark Stations, located on each floor of the library. The touch-enabled screen provides access to the entirety of messages left over time—a dynamic and evolving portrait of students, faculty, staff, and the greater Bennington community. The website <http://bookmarks.bennington.edu/index.html> was created to document the project.

Oceana has had a tremendous impact on the intellectual life of the College. Her personalized approach to supporting the specific needs of both faculty and students has fostered a culture of creativity, adventure, and dynamism that debunks the stereotype of the library as a quiet monolith where people go only to study.

4. How does the nominee make the college, community college, or university a better place? Please be specific.

Oceana contributes to the College in so many ways. Most importantly, given her role as the director of the library, she has raised the profile of the library so it is thought of as an intellectual center. She has done this in concrete ways by increasing the library holdings (books and databases) and by creating space for solitary reflection as well as group work. As one administrator commented, "She has taken an extraordinarily small space and maximized it for a diversity of uses without people feeling cramped or overwhelmed."

She has also made the library the intellectual center by creating an inviting and supportive environment. One student sums it up when she says: "I transferred to Bennington from a university in Michigan. The library there was a sight to behold: five stories tall, automatic moving stacks to accommodate a large volume of books, pressurized preservation rooms, etc. It was also dull and the least likely place I would go to work on a paper since the anxious, incoherent whispering all around tended to drown out all development of reason. Needless to say, I certainly never met the director of that library." This student's experience is not unique. Based on responses to the 2008-2009 National Survey of Student Engagement it was found that 50% of students at Bennington enjoyed research very much compared to only 24.6% of students at the 650 participating other colleges. Both at an individual and community level, Oceana fosters the development of reason, curiosity, and intellectual creativity.

Capturing what many on campus feel, a student points to the expansiveness of the role of the library in campus life. She states, "Oceana in particular has shaped the library into a place that is not only an informative, productive sanctuary, but also an interesting and exciting place to be. The events held there celebrate the pleasures of scholarship, and I think this kind of approach impacts the rest of campus in a big way, making people want to use the resources there to do their best work."

The library website invites users to engage in scholarly pursuits while also perusing links such as, Books to Love (<http://library.bennington.edu/screens/readingLists.html>) which asks "amazing people to recommend terrific books" or Streams of Crossettness (<http://www.flickr.com/photos/11303774@N08/sets/72157605796879699/>) which highlights special events and everyday scenes from the library. I have come to expect the unexpected from the library. It is a source of academic support while also inviting me, the user, on a journey through a wide range of ideas and experiences.

My initial image of a library director was one solely tied to the academic endeavors of the institution. Oceana's thoughtfulness and care inspired people to comment on her insight as a trusted colleague. More than one faculty member described her as "strong, sage, and compassionate" when it comes to matters of mentoring and sexual harassment.

Oceana has led in the creation of a library that brings out the best in all of those who use it. She invites members of the community to avail ourselves of the many academic services offered while also, as one of the six guiding principles describe, experiencing "the joy of serendipitous discovery."

5. How has the individual demonstrated leadership in the campus community or the profession?

Oceana has done much in the last five years from introducing electronic research guides that support specific courses or World Book Day to more tightly integrating the library into the curricular offerings of the College to making the library a destination on campus for both faculty and students. Underlying all of these initiatives is her ability to identify and provide those services that are congruent with the mission of the library and academic mission of the college. This ability is the hallmark of great leadership.

Oceana worked with her staff to develop principles for the library that would guide all that they do. The six principles are:

- Teaching the knowledge needed to create intentional inquiries
- Promoting opportunities to experience the joy of serendipitous discovery
- Building collections and services in collaboration with the community
- Creating environments for solitary contemplation and gregarious collaboration
- Facilitating the appreciate and celebration of the book
- Engaging technologies that enhance services and the collection

The principles serve to determine the nature of the services provided by the library and their delivery.

As part of increasing the services the library provided, she worked to build on employees' strengths by expanding professional development opportunities for library staff while also identifying and bringing in new areas of expertise. Her coherent and comprehensive approach to the staffing of the library results in a seamless experience for the library user who is able to order a text on interlibrary loan as easily as access the expanded electronic database.

As a result of experience after experience in which texts are easily obtained and courses are enthusiastically supported, Oceana has successfully expanded faculty's perception of what is possible with the library in addition to having spotlighted specific services. In the past year alone, faculty book borrowing has increased by 17%. The re-designed website, which was launched this past summer, plays an important role in the delivery of library services; it enables users to get acquainted with and access these services more easily (on campus as well as off campus).

Oceana's commitment to assessment and evaluation ensures that she is meeting the needs of students as well as faculty. She regularly uses surveys to inquire what students' interests are. By not making assumptions about what students need or want, and by responding to their needs and wants, she ensures that she is effectively meeting their needs. In so doing, she creates a culture of

responsiveness in which students feel as though they have a voice in shaping an important component of their education.

Through her numerous presentations, Oceana has raised the level of awareness of the Senior Staff of the College as well as the Board of Trustees as to the role and services the library provides. She is able to organize information clearly and effectively so that listeners understand the larger purpose of the role of the library within the institution. Her abilities as an effective communicator with all types of audiences expand beyond presentations. Each month, she publishes a library newsletter, which is sent to all community members, highlighting staff, services, and different aspects of the collection.

The insights of her supervisor, the Provost and Dean of the College, provide the best window into Oceana's leadership abilities. She says, "I continue to be astonished by her freshness, her energy, and her enthusiasm. She is relentless in her commitment and dedication to her work and the College." She describes Oceana as having an inviting intelligence. It is this intelligence that has been the basis of her leadership and the creation of what Crossett library has become – a destination, both physical and virtual, for the Bennington College community.