

I Love My Librarian!

2010 Award

Nominations for Stefanie Wittenbach

Texas A&M University-San Antonio
San Antonio, Texas

Nominator:

William Bush
San Antonio, Texas

1. Please tell us in 2-3 sentences why your nominee should win this award. What sets him/her apart?

She has led the establishment of a new university library from scratch for a Hispanic-serving university in South San Antonio. With few resources, she has built a respectable collection and provided crucial services to a non-traditional student population. Her work has been heroic and merits recognition.

2. Please discuss how the nominee has helped you and/or others and made your experience of the library a more positive one. For instance, did the nominee assist you in a research project or enhance your students' learning experience?

Our university could not be more fortunate to have Stefanie. She is incredibly responsive to the needs of students and faculty, and has contributed crucially to introducing an academic culture to an institution that previously has lacked such a culture.

In fact, the latter has almost certainly been her greatest contribution. Meticulous and unfailingly patient with students, Stefanie has been instrumental in standing up for core values of higher education: academic freedom, access to information, and the fundamental importance of the library to the quality of any university.

When Stefanie arrived at TAMU-SA in winter 2009/2010, there was no library here at all. The institution functioned as an extension program of the A&M system, operating out of a retrofitted elementary school, and prior to that, out of trailers located on the grounds of a local community college. For the previous 8 years, the institution had relied on interlibrary services from a sister A&M campus and the local community colleges. Stefanie brought some three decades of experience from the University of Texas and University of California state systems. But more importantly, she brought a tough-minded, can-do attitude that allowed her to overcome the major challenges that came with starting a library from nothing. She also brought the necessary experience to help foster a more academic culture as we transition to an independent, 4-year university that the Texas A&M System predicts will be its second-largest campus by 2025.

As we prepare to relocate to a brand-new campus with a more appropriate library facility, we all are extremely proud of Stefanie's superb work. She has positioned our library services not only to accommodate our rapid growth but also to stand as a model for university libraries in the region.

3. How does the nominee make the college, community college, or university a better place?

Stefanie established the library from scratch, transforming a storage room into the library in a day and a half, and it's been operational since, with over 14,000 library patrons to date (10 ½ months). Over the last year, she has added staff and increased library hours to 7 days a week. Under her direction, the library has extended personal, one-on-one assistance to everyone, including online, with live, online chat service for troubleshooting during off-hours. Since Spring 2010, the library's first full semester of operation, Stefanie has provided library instruction to over 900 students. She works tirelessly with faculty throughout the university to provide instruction and purchase materials. It is not uncommon for a faculty request, whether for a book, film, or other item, to be filled in less than two days.

Thanks to Stefanie, the library's collection has grown 300% in less than a year through gifts and active purchasing to support the university's programs. She has been very forward-looking to the trend away from physical stacks, establishing an electronic-preferred collection development policy as the first step in a larger plan for a cutting edge library system that will maximize our limited space as we move into a new campus facility in the 2011/12 academic year.

In addition to running and developing the library, Stefanie participates in campus activities (new student orientation and the Student Media board), and maintains numerous committee assignments (administrative and faculty searches, Provost's advisory board).

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

Please see above statements.

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

Stefanie serves on practically every important committee on campus. She has played a pivotal role in shaping our academic, information technology, and financial policies. Her expertise on academic regulations and policies has been indispensable to our development as a university.

Nominator:

Name withheld

San Antonio, Texas

1. Please tell us in 2-3 sentences why your nominee should win this award. What sets him/her apart?

There are three reasons why I feel that Ms. Wittenbach is meritorious of this award: 1. Exceptional student service 2. intergration of technology and 3. incredible faculty relations

2. Please discuss how the nominee has helped you and/or others and made your experience of the library a more positive one. For instance, did the nominee assist you in a research project or enhance your students' learning experience?

As a professor, my dependency on the library staff is immense. Many of my students are non-traditional (over 35, with families) and some have not touched a computer for anything other than e-mailing. Using electronic data bases, stacks and research web-based resources is much like traveling to a foreign country for my students. This is where Mr. Whittenbach has made her most significant differences. Her patience and knowledge of resources and data bases truly has no bounds. I consider myself very electronically literate but she does put me to shame. Currently, she is working with e-books and I have no doubt that someday she will help to establish the first e-books library in this area.

I want to share with you a specific situation in which even she is not aware. I was having difficulty working with a student related to a research project. I could not seem to get through to the student related to topic and how to find resources related to her interests. I was not making any progress with my one-on-one meetings with this student. I am ashamed to admit this, but I was ready to “punt” to someone else. I heard great things about this new librarian, Ms. Wittenbach so I decided to refer her. Two weeks later, the student turned in what looked to be an incredible draft of a research paper. I asked the student what shifted things for her. She reported it was Ms. Stefanie (that is what she called her) who made the difference. At this point my ego made an appearance and I asked, “what did she do that I did not.” Her answer was simple yet very profound, “she listened,” the student explained. It turns out that the student had some special needs that Ms. Wittenbach was able to observe and “pick-up” on that I was not.

3. How does the nominee make the college, community college, or university a better place?

I have worked in several university settings and oftentimes the librarians get stuck in silos with very little interaction with faculty and staff. Ms. Wittenbach is completely different. She makes it a point to get involved in faculty relations. She understands that when she connects with faculty, she connects with students and that is her number one goal. So how does she do this? First off, she wants faculty to feel a sense of ownership of the library. She makes it a point to involve us in the decision making regarding various aspects—not just books and journals, but library layout, input on hours of operation, and staffing decisions. She is instrumental in our dealings with various vendors and donors and has secured outside funding for our facilities. She has made our university a better place by getting us all excited about the library and its multifunction design. Her vision of creating a comfortable learning environment is contagious and has permeated throughout the University. In essence, Ms. Whittenbach has impacted the academic culture and has change the way we all view this new learning resource center.

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

Ms. Wittenbach has impacted learning at the University in so many ways: 1. Students access, 2. Faculty involvement, and 3. integration of technology. In these tough economic times, administrators are always exploring opportunities to cut costs. This means limit library hours, cut support staff and turn off the air conditioner whenever possible. Well not so fast—when it comes to students and the learning environment Ms. Wittenbach has been an incredible advocate. She has been very successful when it comes to advocating for students. She understands that administrators respect numbers

so her tracking of library traffic and usage has been instrumental in ensuring student access to resources.

Librarian and positive faculty relations are two concepts that usually do not mix (at least in my experience). Usually librarians get lost in their own silo and hardly ever interact with faculty. Not the case with Ms. Wittenbach. She makes it a point to ask if she can speak at department meetings. Best of all, she listens and implements reasonable suggestions. This does not happen often, in my experience. I feel very comfortable sending my students to her.

In terms of technology, no one comes close to Ms. Wittenbach. She puts some of our IT guys to shame. She understands servers, security, encryptions, data bases, e-files, e-books, research search engines—the list is infinite. Her comfort with innovation is perhaps one of her greatest assets.

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

Ms. Whittenbach has demonstrated leadership by participating in a very important committee--Academic Affairs. I have observed her passion and desire to bring a true learning resource center to our campus. Let me explain. We are a new University going on our second year of independence. We are working out of an old elementary school while our main buildings are being constructed on a 700 acre site. Space is limited, quarters are cramped and emotions run high. Regardless of the hardships, Ms. Whittenbach has shown leadership through diplomacy. As you know, stacks take up room and room is at a premium. Twenty-year professors are working out of small cubical and provosts and presidents are sharing offices. We are talking "tight" space and stressful working conditions. So how in the world can we commit so much square footage to books? Well through Ms. Whittenbach's advocacy and leadership, she made it happen. Her flexibility and allowance for faculty to participate in partake in the library areas have helped immensely. It also has forced faculty to interact with students and lend a helping hand when it comes to searching for resources. All I can say is that her approach to integrate faculty and students into the library "fold" was brilliant and exhibited true culture building and leadership.