

JENKS LIBRARY, GORDON COLLEGE

BACKGROUND

Gordon College is a small Christian College situated on 450 wooded acres north of Boston in the small town of Wenham. The Jenks Library serves the faculty, staff, and students of Gordon College. Jenks serves a total population of about 2400, faculty and staff make-up about 600 patrons and full-time equivalent (FTE) of both graduates and undergraduates students is about 1800. Jenks is also a member of the NOBLE network therefore it's collection is also open to public, providing services to the North Shore community. Gordon College is a residence-based institution serving a diverse student population both nationally and globally.

The Jenks Library has over 100,000 print books, over 50,000 journals (print and online), and provides access to 80+ databases. Additional materials are regularly gathered in support of the mission and curriculum of Gordon College.

The library offers reference services to students, integrated library instruction in course curriculum, and materials delivery through interlibrary loan both with MLS and beyond. The library also offers group study rooms available for reservation and provides an assortment of unconventional circulating material such as headphones, extension cords, and phone chargers.
Jenks has several distinct collection areas – scores, Curriculum Library material for Education students, and Career resources.

Although Jenks provides many popular and well-used resources, the diverse study space provided by open rooms, quiet areas, or group study rooms continues to be a huge draw to students who use the library. Another draw for students is Bistro 255, the coffee shop added in 2013.



ISSUES FACED

Librarians, by their nature, are often a group of individuals that are hungry to learn. In particular, academic librarians are often encouraged to seek out opportunities for professional development to continue to define and hone skills necessary for the job. Development like the kind offered by Project SET was an excellent opportunity for the staff at Jenks Library. Project SET was a unique chance to connect with the wider MA library community in a supportive environment. The program seemed particularly beneficial to new librarians as it provided the opportunity to help connect them to libraries of all types and the work MLS does to support them.

In 2014 the Jenks Library had a new staff member named Erica Street who had been working for just under a year. While attending a NOBLE meeting the library's director Myron Schirer-Suter saw a postcard announcement for the Project SET program and immediately thought that the libraries newest staff member would be a good fit for the program. Project SET's emphasis on emerging leadership and communication was the perfect fit for career interests Erica had already expressed to Myron over the course of her first year. Erica needed an outlet to hone some of her leadership desires and Myron needed a way to get her more familiar with the MA library community - Project SET was a perfect fit.

Erica had been the first hire for the library in ten years and Myron was the last hire before her. The library was about to lose a staff member who had been there for 24 years, who had much institutional knowledge and great ideas. Jenks was on the verge of a shift in staff dynamics that hadn't taken place for a very long time.

ACTIONS

As her direct supervisor, Myron was able to approve the time she spent at Project SET without reservation. He didn't have any concerns about the time commitment, even when it was a year-long program back in 2015, as he saw nothing but value-added for both the library and Erica. The Jenks library does not have the kind of library where their staff members need to be "on the desk" at all times. Most of their professional librarians operate off-desk so it is easier for them to shuffle responsibilities around as necessary. For the Jenks Library time spent on learning is time well spent.

During 2015 while she was participating in Project SET Erica would check in with her supervisor after meetings to let them know what she was doing. At the time her supervisor saw it as a way to be more involved with the process and to make sure she was getting something positive out of the experience.

POSITIVE OUTCOMES

For the Jenks Library having a staff member present at Annual Meeting was a thrill.
The experience of participating in Project SET enabled Erica to form a relationship with the state level. Now when Erica attends meetings with her Director, both MLS and other regional meetings, she is much more connected than she was before, and SET was a big contributor of that. Also being connected to the network of SET program participants has been an asset for Jenks. In general Erica grew more confident conversing with librarians of a different background than her and improved her communication both publicly and personally. The biggest outcome for the library as a whole has been the overall confidence Erica now brings to her position.

NEGATIVE OUTCOMES

In reflection both Myron and Erica agreed that it could have been beneficial to demonstrate the impact of her participation in SET to the rest of the staff at Jenks Library. During her participation in the program Erica didn't share with anyone besides her director what she was learning. As a result, some of their staff members have wondered what was the value of this program. In retrospect if this program had a clear "immediate" use impact in the library that was visible not just to a supervisor, but at the staff level would have helped deliver this message.

Through the program Erica struggled connecting with the rest of the cohort. She had concerns about being the only academic librarian and that made her feel like she didn't have much to contribute to the group. Also being one of the newest librarians to the profession in the group made her uncomfortable fully engaging in discussions. The staff at the Massachusetts Library System acknowledges imbalance of the cohort in the first year of the program. In subsequent years the program has strived to ensure that their is balanced representation from every area, type, and experience level in every cohort.

LESSONS LEARNED

As a result of this program the Jenks Library has learned that it was worth sending a staff member to this new program and that the relationships they forged with the the Massachusetts Library System will result in more opportunities and resources in the future.

The information from this case study was collected from interviews with staff members at the Jenks Library at Gordon College including Project SET participant Erica Street and Library Director Dr. Myron Schirer-Suter.