

You're the dean?

An inside view of an early-career librarian turned administrator

Pearl Ly

*Interim Assistant Dean of Library/LRC
at Pasadena City College*

“Having a student-centered lens, trusting your team, and being trustworthy are more important leadership characteristics than age or years of experience.”

At my former dean and mentor's retirement party, she said to me encouragingly, “I know you'll be a dean someday.” She was right. Two months later, I was selected to be the interim dean of the library and will serve in this role for two academic years. I was not a typical dean candidate for many reasons. I am from an underrepresented background as an Asian-American and first-generation college student. I am in my early 30's with a youthful appearance. I was an untenured, second-year librarian with less than five years of professional library experience. Although I may not look like a library dean, I have developed strong working relationships inside and outside of the library and have gained a reputation for being a competent and innovative manager. I am grateful for the opportunities to learn, grow, and serve my team and college to support student learning.

With rapid changes in information technology, on-demand expectations of library users, and decreasing resources across higher education, it is commonly agreed that academic libraries are in need of strong leadership. The Baby Boomer generation is retiring and a quick job ad search will yield many open library dean and director positions across the nation. College and university libraries are no longer afforded the intrinsic value they once had; they now compete with campus entities for funding, space, and personnel. Some college administrators are hiring creative and non-traditional librarians and managers from outside the library to transform academic libraries.

For any new manager, there is a steep learning curve for their new set of duties while taking on a role with formal authority. Becoming a dean while relatively new to the organization and an early career librarian has given me a unique perspective. This paper describes my experiences as a non-traditional library administrator to help shed light on what a library dean does and what a new and young manager may face. I also present strategies for librarians to be intentional leaders, whether or not they are seeking a formal leadership position.

Three Years at Pasadena City College

Pasadena City College (PCC) is one of the largest community colleges in California with over 37,000 students. The Shatford Library is heavily used with 5,000-8,000 patrons per day. The library dean is responsible for the hiring, evaluation, and supervision of 7 full-time librarians, 10 classified staff members, and 25+ adjunct librarians. I develop and manage a \$2.4 million budget for library operations and regularly resolve conflicts with personnel, students, and patrons. I am an active participant in the management team and Academic Affairs leadership meetings. I see the main role of the dean to be the library advocate, communicating the library's needs to the campus community and letting students, faculty, and staff know how we can support them.

Reflecting back on the transition from librarian to administrator, there were many experiences as a librarian that helped prepare me for administration. In the chart on the following page, I documented my experiences in each of my very different years at PCC. As a faculty librarian, I asked a lot of questions and spent time learning the organizational culture and building relationships with faculty and staff. I worked closely with the previous dean on personnel issues and writing reports. I volunteered to take leadership roles, such as leading the review, adoption, and implementation of a new integrated library system (ILS), OCLC Worldshare Management Systems (WMS). Migrating to a new ILS is a

difficult and time-consuming process and as the project lead, it requires communication and coordination with all areas of the library (Technical Services, Access Services, Public Services, and Systems), other areas of our college using our catalog (Music Lab, ESL Lab, Teaching and Learning Center), as well as working with the vendor. I demonstrated strong leadership and project management skills in my first year as a PCC librarian.

I was appointed as the Interim Dean in my second year at PCC. Moving into an administrative role, I stopped my tenure-track for the opportunity to try out my intended career and to help during the library leadership transition. In this year, I picked up the basics of administration and library operations, developed relationships across the campus, and still maintained some of my librarian duties. My contract was extended for an additional year through June 2014, and I have taken leadership roles in campus-wide activities such as accreditation and the implementation of a new academic information system, Banner. In my second year as dean, I have had reduced administrative support and because I am taking care of additional functions such as payroll, budget tracking, and working with Facilities, I have not been able to keep my reference and instruction duties. Although I miss the direct student contact, I have gained a thorough understanding of library internal operations and how we interact with other areas on campus.

YEAR

1

Librarian
(2011-2012)

YEAR

2

Library Management
(2012-2013)

YEAR

3

Library Management w/
reduced support
(2013-2014)

Main duties

- Coordinating circulation and media services as a lead librarian for classified staff and student/college assistants
- Reference
- Information Literacy Instruction
- Collection Development
- Collaborative decision-making with library faculty and staff

Other duties

- Information literacy outreach to First Year Experience, Cal Works
- Project lead for new integrated library system (ILS) adoption

Service

- Hiring Committees
- Learning Technology Advisory Committee
- California Community College Consortium CCL-EAR Committee
- CARL Conference Virtual Conference Committee

Main duties

- Budget planning and monitoring
- Library operations, including resolution of patron issues
- Personnel: hiring, supervision, and evaluation of 20 full-time library faculty and staff and 25+ adjuncts
- Library certificate program: scheduling, student evaluations, staffing
- Advocate for library needs to upper administration
- Promoting library resources to students, faculty, and staff
- Collaborative decision-making with library faculty and staff

Other duties

- Reference
- Information Literacy Instruction
- Continued project lead for new ILS

Service

- Hiring committees (as chair or participant)
- Pasadena Digital History Collaborative

Main duties

Everything in Year 2 plus

- Payroll
- Budget tracking
- Facilities liaison for maintenance and remodeling

Other duties

- Accreditation Self-Study writing team lead for Standard II: Library and Learning Resources
- Instructional Dean liaison for Banner implementation

Service

- Hiring committees (as chair or participant)
- Academy of Professional Learning

A Day in the Life of a Library Dean

After becoming a dean, I have had many librarian friends tell me that they do not have a good idea of what their manager does. My work day changed dramatically when I changed roles from faculty librarian to interim dean. I spend much more time outside of the library and collaborating with college staff across the campus. My work schedule varies widely from arriving before dawn for a facilities emergency or attending a Board of Trustees meeting past 9pm. To provide an inside look at what a dean does, I tracked a typical day during Week 3 of a semester.

7:30am

Read/write email from home while having breakfast and caffeinating.

8:15am

Arrive at work. Check in with team members and assistant. Take care of time-sensitive things: sign paperwork, budget approvals, adjust timecards, student permissions, etc.

9:15am

Prep for meeting with supervisor, Senior Vice President of Academic and Student Affairs. Prepare Facilities Modification Request for main floor remodel and write up notes on progress from a library flood in December.

10:10am

Meet about new Artist-in-Residence piece that is going up in the library and other possible art additions.

10:30am

Attend weekly Manager's Update (every Monday) with the College President. College news is shared and all managers connect before and after the meeting.

11:00am

Conversation with Associate Vice President of Student Services regarding program review, draft priority enrollment policy, accreditation self-study team

11:30am

Meeting with Senior VP on flood repairs, outstanding needs, and getting paperwork signed for facilities estimate for library remodel. Discuss budget and staffing for remainder of year. Asked to develop estimate for flood staffing costs and put together staffing plan for AY 14/15.

12:15pm

Eat lunch with colleagues in Technical Services area. More caffeine

1pm

Write emails

- Request support from IT - iPads for faculty/staff check out and to set up wireless kiosk printing stations
- Answer questions about adjunct hiring
- Compile Facilities Modification Request with sketches, furniture estimates, etc.

2:00pm

Meet with a librarian about library marketing materials. Discuss staffing needs for acquisitions.

2:45pm

Approve absence reports/timesheets

3:15pm

Perform various tasks left for late afternoon when less calls and emails come through...

- Make travel plans for upcoming California Community College Council of Chief Librarians Deans and Directors Meeting in Sacramento
- Request staff input for instructional equipment request
- Draft flood staffing estimates for budget augmentation increase
- Build course schedule for Summer 2014 for Library Technology and Digitization Skills Certificate programs

5pm

Head home. Monitoring email and remain on-call for emergencies until closing at 9:30pm.

Other duties and responsibilities that stand out as library dean include working on professional development and learning initiatives, serving on and chairing hiring committees, being an active part of technology planning and implementation, leading the Library and Learning Resources section of the WASC accreditation self-study, planning a 20th Anniversary celebration for the library building, participating in facilities master planning to advocate for a remodel of the library building, and facilitating collaborative decision-making in the library. The dynamic nature of the job keeps me engaged, and it is imperative that we have a dedicated administrator to represent the library and student needs.

Perceptions: Age and Experience

When I was appointed as the library dean, I was the youngest full-time library staff member and was replacing a dean that had over 30 years of experience at PCC, 17 of those years as library dean. It has been a tough transition, but we are a resilient organization with a strong commitment to students. It is not always comfortable for me to supervise, evaluate, and mentor faculty and staff that have decades more library experience than I do. I continue to work on my interpersonal skills and emotional intelligence to improve my working relationships and effectiveness. It may be unusual to have a younger and early-career librarian dean. However, I argue that being a strong advocate for the library, having a student-centered lens, trusting your team, and being trustworthy are more important leadership characteristics than age or years of experience.

When campus faculty and staff find out that I am the dean of the library, they typically ask me how long I have been with the college. Some exclaim, "You're the dean? You look like a student!" Others ask "no one else wanted to be the dean?" I am confident that someone older than me with more years of experience at our institution would not generate this reaction. I wonder if there is doubt in my ability to fulfill

the job duties. It would be easy to respond with frustration. Instead, this pushes me to work hard and continue in administration. Librarians from other institutions often respond similarly, asking many questions about my former librarian positions. I understand the curiosity but I don't think they would ask an older-looking librarian to show their credentials.

On the flip side, I have been surprised by the instant acceptance by my new manager colleagues and the statewide library deans and directors. I have excellent mentors among my peers and I highly value their guidance. There is occasional teasing when I don't get the references from 70's and 80's Saturday Night Live skits, but I have not been asked to demonstrate that I am qualified for my role nor it has been suggested that I may be inadequate. In fact, many of my dean colleagues have expressed great surprise at my age because they assumed I was older because I am their peer. I have also received much support from the California Community College Council of Chief Librarians that has representatives from each of the 112 colleges. I was very nervous about how I would be perceived at my first annual deans and directors meeting. These library leaders extended a warm welcome and encouraged

me to take an active role in the statewide leadership group.

Intentional Leadership

Academic librarians often tell me that they never want to go into management. I often hear library managers say that they never planned to go into management. Deiss (2012) argues that “leadership by drift” occurs when leadership roles are assumed without much self-reflection or actual choice. Intentional leadership is choosing a path purposefully with a focus on learning and development.

For those of you interested in administration, I applaud you for recognizing and accepting your desire to step up. You are probably already a recognized leader in your library, volunteering to take on tasks and projects, working well with others, and delivering quality work. You like autonomy in your work and being able to creatively solve problems and innovate. If this sounds like you but you don't want to go into management, I bet others keep telling you to consider a formal leadership role and perhaps you'll find yourself there in the future. Getting into library management happens in different ways. I have found that being a better librarian, colleague, and active learner helped me get my first administrative position. Even if you do not become a formal leader, you will need leadership/administrative skills to grow and improve your library and your work.

Here are some of my recommendations to be an intentional leader:

Library leadership: Look for leadership opportunities in your library. Volunteer to lead projects such as writing annual reports, strategic planning, migrating to a new integrated library system.

Get supervisory experience: Find a position that will give you the progressively responsible experience you need. If you can't get this in your current position, there are many leadership opportunities available elsewhere.

Shadow your manager: Let your manager know you are interested in administration and ask them if they can teach you about the budget, supervisory, and leadership experience.

Engage in your campus: Be active in senate or your union as an officer. Chair an academic senate committee, task force, or initiative.

Mentor/Sponsor: Seek a mentor that has the job you want. Set learning outcomes and regularly meet. You will get out what you put into it. Look for a regional program, library professional organization program, or find your own.

Professional organizations: There are many library leadership opportunities through regional, state, and national committees. Choose your commitments based on your interests and ability to participate - virtual, face-to-face, travel, etc.

Library leadership programs: The ALA Emerging Leaders program is for newer librarians and the ALA Leading to the Future Institute for Leadership is for librarians with five years or more experience. They both offer a practical curriculum and the opportunity develop connections with other library leaders. Many colleagues recommend the Harvard's Leadership Institute for Academic Librarians.

Recommended reading: There is a variety of formal and informal literature on library leadership that I regularly read. See the recommended resources list at the end. I think it is helpful to read more generally in higher education and business as well.

Additional education: If you are passionate about further learning, you may want to consider an additional graduate degree. It may be a desired qualification as a dean to have a second Master's or a doctorate.

Whether or not you want to or intend to be a library leader, you should be. Even if you are not the person formally "in charge" of the library, you may be coordinating an area of the library and directing work of library technicians and/or student workers. You contribute to decision-making, assessment/evaluation of services, and strategic planning. You should be striving to improve library support of student learning and you are a representative of the library anywhere you go on campus or in the community. The library dean, director, or department chair has authority but everyone has the ability to influence others. Libraries are complex organizations and it takes more than one person to lead and guide us during this dynamic time. No matter what your role is, I hope you join me in affecting change by being an intentional library leader.

Recommended Resources

Readings

- Attempting Elegance blog by Jenica Rogers, Director of Libraries at SUNY Potsdam - <http://www.attemptingelegance.com/>
- Deiss, K. (2008). Intentional leadership and intentional effectiveness. In Thinking outside the borders: Library leadership in a world community. Mortenson Center for International Library Programs at the University of Illinois - http://www.library.illinois.edu/mortenson/book/12_deiss.pdf
- Chronicle of Higher Education Vitae <https://chroniclevitae.com/news>
- Harvard Business Review - <http://hbr.org/>
- Leading from the Library column by Steven Bell, Associate University Librarian at Temple University in Library Journal - <http://lj.libraryjournal.com/category/opinion/leading-from-the-library/>
- Librarian in Black blog by Sarah Houghton, Director for the San Rafael Public Library - <http://librarianinblack.net/librarianinblack/>
- Library Leadership & Management Journal - <http://journals.tdl.org/llm/index.php/llm/index>

Library Leadership Institutes/Training

- ALA Emerging Leaders - <http://www.ala.org/educationcareers/leadership/emergingleaders>
- ALA Leading to the Future Institute for Leadership – <http://www.ala.org/cfapps/leadershipinstitute/index.cfm>

•Harvard's Leadership Institute for Academic Librarians -

<http://www.gse.harvard.edu/ppe/programs/higher-education/portfolio/leadership-academic-librarians.html>

Layout and Design by Alejandro Parra.