

InfoLink

A Community Newsletter of the Graduate School of Library and Information Science

Volume 11, Issue 5

September 2007



Up Front

Making a Difference —

At the Perkins Braille & Talking Book Library

If you're unable to read a traditional print book, how do you get a recommendation for a talking book or a braille book? Where do you find answers to your reference questions? Whom can you call to find out what services are available to you? The Perkins Braille & Talking Book Library handles questions like these (and more) every day. They do a lot of work that most people — including people who are eligible for their services — don't know about. Here's a look at a small library making a big difference to an underserved population.

You'd never guess from the modest, unassuming building that houses it, but the Perkins Braille and Talking Book Library thinks big. For one thing, it serves the entire state of Massachusetts. It currently has about 20,000 patrons (including 1,700 kids) — and it's always reaching out to more. Staff estimate they only serve about 12% of the people who are eligible for the Library's services; many people don't know that they qualify to use the library. The Perkins Library is not just for people who are blind or those with low vision. It serves anyone who cannot read a traditional book — a broader population than you'd think. In addition to people with visual disabilities, this includes people with physical disabilities who cannot hold a book, people who have reading disabilities, and even people who are allergic to ink.

The Perkins Library also thinks big in terms of the services it offers. Each day it mails about 2,000 talking books to patrons. It also handles many phone calls — approximately 59 calls per hour, last time they checked. That adds up to more than 470 calls per day fielded by 7 reader advisors and a total staff of 28 people. People call in to request books, get book recommendations, ask reference questions, and request services for themselves or others. Ongoing projects at the library include the recording of talking books and converting print books into braille.

Library Director Kim Charlson says she is “incredibly amazed at the staff and everything they do every day.” Five of the seven librarians at Perkins are Simmons grads, and three graduated recently: Lana Thelen '06, Deputy Director and Outreach Librarian; Rachel Gould '05, Children's and Young Adult Librarian; and James Gleason '05, Foreign Language Librarian.

A unique setup... and unusual challenges

The Perkins Library doesn't have a big browsing collection. It doesn't need it; most people call the library instead of coming in, and most requests are sent through the mail. Patrons can set

preferences for how they'd like to receive books — for example, they can get new books every few weeks, or they can compile a list on file and get a new book from their list sent to them when they return one (think Netflix).

Librarians at Perkins don't make collection development decisions; the Library of Congress does it for them, because the LoC produces the books. Only about 2,000 titles each year are produced in the talking-book format (four-sided cassettes, which must be played on special machines). This is a special exemption to copyright restrictions — any book can be recorded, because only registered patrons have the machines to play them. Library Director Kim Charlson said, “The librarians in D.C. do an amazing job of selecting the books — Perkins staff can fill about 90% of the requests they get. Only about 10% of books requested by patrons aren't available in accessible formats.” Charlson said that Perkins librarians do try to make sure that they have enough copies of books so that their patrons won't have to wait too long — they acquire at least 14 copies of everything the Library of Congress produces.

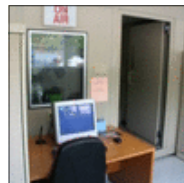
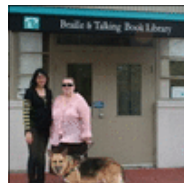
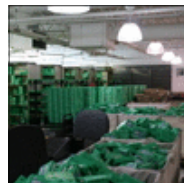
The Library of Congress also takes care of cataloguing the books and tapes by assigning accession numbers. Items get the next available number; they aren't classified by subject or author. The Perkins librarians depend on their database to help them find items. (The same database keeps track of patrons' preferences for receiving materials.)

In comparison with the number of print books available, the number of books in an accessible format is small. To help increase the collection and make books of local interest available, Perkins has a recording studio. Volunteers record about 80 books per year. The books must be by New England authors or about New England. For example, Carl Bean, “the Voice of Fenway Park,” volunteers to record books on the Red Sox. Other books recently recorded include *My Senator and Me* by Senator Ted Kennedy (a children's book about life on Capitol Hill told by Sen. Kennedy's dog), and several books about the Irish Mafia. Perkins circulates books recorded in its studio to other talking book libraries. They also participate in an accessible downloadable audio book project called Unabridged, which is specific to braille and talking book libraries.

Foreign language books and services

The collection of books in foreign languages is even more limited. James Gleason, the Foreign Language Librarian, said it's hard to get books in other languages.

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Robert Wolfe

“I am passionate that libraries still matter in the age of the Internet, but we have to make them matter.”

GSLIS is excited to welcome Robert Wolfe as an adjunct professor for the fall semester. Wolfe, a metadata consultant, is teaching LIS 415, Information Organization. Here, he talks about his work on innovative MIT projects, his passion for technology, and his many extracurricular activities.

Q: Tell us a little about your current job.
I run a consulting outfit in the MIT Libraries. The Metadata Services Unit offers metadata systems design, analysis, and development support, in addition to metadata production services to the MIT community. MIT departments, labs, centers, and other organizations hire my unit to work on their digital projects.

What do you like best about your work?
Working with the MIT community, participating in exciting initiatives like MIT OpenCourseWare, DSpace, and iTunesU. It's exciting to see that the libraries aren't the only ones producing and aggregating information resources. It's gratifying to see that the MIT community recognizes it needs to apply standards and best practices to organize its electronic information and come to the libraries for expert advice.

What's the most fulfilling project you've worked on?
The most fulfilling project is MIT OpenCourseWare. Just the idea of taking lecture notes, problem sets, handouts, student work, lecture audio, and video from every course at MIT and publishing it online for the entire world is enough to get me out of bed in the morning and into work. That it has required the innovative application of metadata makes it my dream job.

Tell us more about the OpenCourseWare initiative and your role in it.
My job is about helping libraries be leaders in organizing information and sharing best practices. These days everyone is generating content, but not everyone has the training and the background to organize and use it effectively. Librarians aren't the only folks who collect and aggregate information — they also help other people to do so.

Through the OpenCourseWare project, anyone can access information on many MIT courses from the Web. It's all available on the MIT website for anyone who is interested. To start the project, an MIT committee commissioned a subgroup to examine whether there was any profit to be made in putting information resources online. The group reported that there wasn't any profit to be made, but they suggested that MIT put the resources online for free. To implement the plan, the committee came to the library. They created my position, an information architect and metadata systems consultant, to help them get going and to handle aggregating and publishing the metadata.

A similar project reinforces the Libraries' role as knowledge organization experts. The MIT Libraries do not have a digital library. Instead, they've build an institutional repository for MIT

— we call it DSpace. Instead of building our own collections, we have focused our efforts on helping our community manage their collections information resources. We encourage all departments, labs, and centers to put all their data, research materials, and files in DSpace. The individual departments are responsible for adding content to the repository. The Libraries provide expert assistance, which is where my unit comes in. Our goal is to be able to assure the community that its information legacy will be available and usable for a long time.

What about iTunesU?
The iTunesU project represents some of the cool, innovative things that MIT is doing with information. MIT Information Services & Technology asked me to help them share audio and video files through iTunes. I created a list of best practices for adding ID3 tags to audio files and RSS feeds. Using standard tags and semantics makes it easier for users to find and organize MIT's educational resources.



What are you passionate about professionally?
I am passionate that libraries still matter in the age of the Internet, but that we have to make them matter. This means we have to come to understand the Internet, both the social and technological phenomena. This means we have to expand our vision of what we do to find our role in the Internet age. This means we have to become faster at implementing change and better at seeing market opportunities, all the while never forgetting our crucial mission to protect the public's right to information.

Outside of work?
My wife says I have too many extracurricular activities. I can't help getting caught up in new things. I study Wah Lum Tam Tui Northern Praying Mantis Kung Fu in Chinatown, I golf, I cook, I play softball, I make Omaha dance regalia and I dance Men's Northern Traditional. I do more, but I've already listed too many.

What was your very first job?
My very first library job was as a stacks page in Houghton Library, the rare books library at Harvard University. I retrieved and reshelfed early and rare printed books and manuscripts. I fell in love with the books and soon wanted to be the Keeper of the Printed Book at the Houghton Library.

How did you get interested in LIS (and in metadata in particular)?
My colleagues at Houghton pushed me to go to Simmons to get the MSLIS. There I met [GSLIS Professor] Candy Schwartz, who told me the future was in electronic resources, information architecture, and digital libraries. I took her word for it, and abandoned rare book bibliography for metadata.

What advice do you have for people just entering the profession?
There are three things you need for the library job of tomorrow: project management experience, computer programming training, and exceptional writing skills.

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Up Front: Perkins Library

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Not only are there international copyright issues, but there are also diplomacy issues. Many books in foreign languages are recorded in other countries, some of which are extremely protective of their intellectual property. Another issue is that other countries don't have braille contractions (instead of using a group of dots that represents a common contraction, they spell out every letter.) This makes the braille books even larger, and therefore harder to print and ship. In response to patrons' requests, Perkins has an extensive Spanish collection on site (about 1,500 titles). The second most-requested language is Russian.

"It's a *yes* or *no* answer as to whether that book exists in the requested format. The harder questions are the ones about how to provide services." For example, Gleason was asked how someone's mother in rural South America could get services. "Most South American countries do have libraries for the blind — it's just a question of getting in touch with them," he said.

"Some libraries don't have websites, so finding their contact information can be a big challenge."

Keeping current on the news

Magazines are a popular way to stay current because they are published more frequently than books. They also can be more specialized in content. For example, the Perkins Library collection includes a talking book magazine in Cantonese, which is flown in twice a month from Hong Kong. About 12 people in Chinatown wait eagerly for it — it's their way to stay abreast of news and to get new material in Cantonese.

The Perkins Library also offers a service called *Newsline*, which provides telephone access to newspapers and TV listings. Users can navigate through different sections, skim the headlines, and set the voice, speed, and tone of what they hear, along with other preferences, like which paper to start with. More than 225 national and local newspapers are available 24/7. People who use the system apparently love it — they used more than one million phone minutes last year. **Article by Elisabeth Zimmer**

What future librarians should know about Perkins

- It's there! There are many valuable resources for people who cannot read a traditional book. Get in touch with Perkins to find more info for your patrons.
- Everything is free: borrowing privileges, the cassette machines, even postage.
- You can set up deposit collections — a small collection at your library, supplied by Perkins, for public browsing. Perkins also can lend machines so people can listen to books on tape. You can be creative. For example, an optometrist has a deposit collection of magazines at his office for people to browse through while they wait for their appointment.
- As a librarian, you can sign people up for Perkins Library services. Check with the library to find out how.

Snapshot: Robert Wolfe

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What's your greatest challenge?

Almost every project I take on involves doing something I have never done before. I have to accept that I will make mistakes and forge ahead. This is hard for me, but I very much like to figure out new metadata systems, languages, and technologies.

Where did you grow up?

I was born and bred in Lincoln, Nebraska. I am definitely a son of the prairie. My parents both came from long lines of farmers, and I'm just as stubborn, pragmatic, and plain talking as my ancestors. My mom was Scotch-Irish, my dad was Omaha. I grew up in both worlds; my Omaha relatives still call me Henry, which is my middle name, but the one my Dad preferred.

What do you collect?

I collect stories about secret societies. I like to buy and read all the texts from traditions like the Hermetica, the Cathars and the Merkabah Mystics. I especially like the textual exegesis for these traditions, tracing the lineage of the written texts and placing them in their correct historical context.

What books are you reading right now?

I am reading a new translation of the *Tao Te Ching* based on the recently discovered Ma-wang-tui texts.

Interview by Elisabeth Zimmer

For more information...

Check out *InfoLink's* online supplement (<http://web.simmons.edu/~lislive/infolink>) for more information on:

- cool technology at the Perkins Library
- the Perkins Library staff and outreach efforts
- Rob Wolfe's projects at MIT

Interesting Perkins Library facts:

- The last two *Harry Potter* books came out at the same time in print, talking book, and in braille. *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* is ten volumes of braille.
- Helen Keller and Anne Sullivan are both Perkins grads.
- Charles Dickens visited Perkins and was so impressed, he wrote about it in *American Notes*.
- The most popular book requested in a foreign language is the Bible.
- Perkins was founded in 1835, before braille was invented. It originally used a system called Boston line type, which consisted of raised text.
- Braille must be printed on 90-100 lb. paper so the dots will hold. Regular computer paper is about 20 lb.
- A high-quality braille embosser can print one page every 20 seconds.
- Prisoners at the Norfolk County Correctional Center (Norfolk, MA) work with Perkins to convert books into braille. Select prisoners scan book files into Word and clean up and double-check the scan. It's the highest-paid job at the prison.
- GSLIS's classes in Public Libraries (LIS 450) and Underserved Populations (LIS 422) take field trips to the Perkins Library.

Upcoming GSLISCE Workshops

Using Comics and Graphic Novels in Libraries and Classrooms by Stephen Weiner. Saturday, October 20, 2007, at Simmons College.

Library Service to Patrons with Disabilities: Disability Awareness & Etiquette. Saturday, October 27, 2007, at Millis Public Library.

For the full list of upcoming workshops, see <http://www.simmons.edu/gslis/continuinged/workshops/>

September–October Events

October 6, Saturday, Columbus Day Holiday (half day, MHC Library)

October 8, Monday, Columbus Day Holiday (Boston)

October 17, Wednesday, GSLIS Job Search Resources Session with Kelly Jo Woodside, ROOM, 1–2 p.m.

October 18, Thursday, A Career in Library & Information Science: Strategies, Choices and Insights, a networking event featuring GSLIS Alumni Panelists. Linda K. Paresky Conference Center, MCB, 6–8 p.m. Register by October 12 at the GSLIS Front Desk (P-111).

October 24, Professional Networking Session with Kelly Jo Woodside, ROOM, 5:30–6 p.m.

More information about these and other events can be found at <http://my.simmons.edu/gslis/resources/calendars/events.shtml>.

WORD FROM OUT WEST

GSLIS West Takes it on the Road

At GSLIS West (located on the Mount Holyoke College campus in South Hadley, MA), the staff has been focusing on recruiting new students by taking information sessions on the road. The staff is always looking for more students to make classes more diverse and to support the programs that are offered.

Just like the Boston GSLIS campus, GSLIS West holds monthly on-campus information sessions. Prospective students come to learn more about our program and what's going on in the field of library and information science today. They also get a tour of the office space, computer lab, and the library at Mount Holyoke, including a walk by Rao's Coffee and a peek at the Information Commons, which has great seating areas and large screens for students to gather around when working on group projects.

Because it is a part-time program with Saturday and evening classes, many GSLIS West students travel from some distance. Many students find it quite manageable to travel just on Saturdays and fit in two classes. Currently, the student who travels the furthest comes each week from Burlington, Vermont — more than a three-hour commute. Let's hope that next winter is mild!

To help find even more students for whom the Saturday class schedule is convenient, GSLIS West information sessions took to the road this past spring. Members of the GSLIS West staff visited public libraries in New Haven, CT; Springfield, MA; Hartford, CT; and Great Barrington, MA. They also participated in a career fair at the Sterling Library at Yale University. Some of these sessions had just a handful of attendees, while others were very well attended. The staff was invited to come back annually at several of these locations and plans to hit more regions this fall. If you know of anyone interested in the GSLIS West program, please refer them to the web page listing all of the fall information sessions—in Boston, at Mount Holyoke, and on the road: <http://www.simmons.edu/gslis/admission/events.shtml>.

Even if you don't need the Saturday and evening schedule, you're welcome to visit the Mount Holyoke campus any time. Consider taking a course, walking around the lovely campus, exploring the beautiful Pioneer Valley, or just stopping by the GSLIS West Office for a cup of coffee and some conversation. Keep an eye out for a longer article on GSLIS West in the October issue of *InfoLink* — you'll read about the history of the program, current happenings, and the mysterious Professor Plum.

Folks on the Move

Congratulations to Assistant Dean Em Claire Knowles, who received the 2007 Black Caucus of the American Library Association "Distinguished Service to the Library Profession Award" at the 6th National Conference of African American Librarians on August 3, 2007 in Ft. Worth, Texas.

The 2007 NEASIS&T Student Travel Award for "Best Papers in Information Science" was awarded to David Dwiggins, for his paper entitled "Putting the 'Where' in the Archives: Internet Mapping and Archival Records," and Benjamin Florin, for his paper entitled "Searching Simple Narratives Using Topic Maps." Each winner will receive up to \$750 to help defray the costs of attendance at the 2007 ASIS&T Annual Meeting, "Joining Research and Practice: Social Computing and Information Science," which takes place October 18–25, 2007 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Congratulations to Laura Saunders, whose article "Regional Accreditation Organizations' Treatment of Information Literacy: Definitions, Collaboration, and Assessment," was published as the lead article in *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 33, no. 3 (May 2007): 317–326.

Congratulations to Stephanie Willen Brown for her article "The Adjunct Life," published in the June 15, 2007 issue of *Library Journal*.

Congratulations to Pat Kreitz, editor of *Recruiting, Training, and Retention of Science and Technology Librarians* which has been published by Haworth Press, Inc.

Congratulations to Wendy Brown for winning ALA's Mary V. Gaver Scholarship.

New GSLIS Students' favorite books

At Fall Advising Day, new GSLIS students were given the opportunity to share the title of their favorite book, or the book that initially "hooked" them onto reading. At the top of the list were:

Harry Potter (series) by J.K. Rowling
Anne of Green Gables by L.M. Montgomery
The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle by Haruki Murakami

To see the full list, visit: <http://web.simmons.edu/~lislive/infolink>

InfoLink

InfoLink is the monthly newsletter of the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at Simmons College. Its purpose is to provide school- and career-related information and to foster community among the many diverse people who make up the school.

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Copy deadline for the November/December issue is Monday, October 1, 2007.