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Today's Libraries (and Librarians) Have Shaken Off Stereotypical Images

By Yolanda Hood
UCF Forum columnist
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Ten years, eight months. That's how long I've been an academic librarian. And, still, I love what I do.

I wake up every morning, eager to go to work. And, contrary to the pop culture image of librarians, I don't sit around reading all day, prim and proper, in a pencil skirt, cardigan and cat-eye glasses, taking a break just to point finger to lips and shush students who are too loud.

There's nothing prim and proper about me. I have fiercely red (sometimes purple), wild, kinky hair, love wearing cowboy boots, and have been known to laugh quite boisterously during my workday. I speak my mind, even if it's not proper. I rarely get to read at work, not pleasure reading anyway.

I manage a branch library of the UCF Libraries called the Curriculum Materials Center. It is a library that houses approximately 40,000 print and non-print resources that are typically found in pre-K-12 schools. It is located in the Education Building and is heavily used by education majors, but anyone can use the resources with a UCF ID or special borrower's card.

It is small but bright and totally student-centered. That's different, too. Pop culture depictions of libraries are these dark but awesomely beautiful gothic tombs of rotting paper cloistered from sunlight and technology. But that's not really the case.

University of Central Florida's libraries and librarians are vibrant, energy-filled macrocosms of collaboration, learning and innovation. Not only do we dig technology, but we *make* technology.

There are students reading and checking out books. But there are also students printing items on the 3-D printer that they will use in their internships. There are students who practice presentations and learn software on our interactive whiteboards. Our students check out iPads and learn apps that are used in the local schools so they will be prepared when they enter the classroom.

And, therein lies the biggest reason for the love of what I do: the students.

At the Curriculum Materials Center, the staff and student assistants work together as a team to bring the very best resources and services to our students. We do this because we want to help produce the very best teachers that we can. Our team knows the names of the students who walk in the door. We are happy to see them. We greet them with joy every time they walk in to the library. And, that's the strength in what I do.

I don't have time to read or shush them. I'm helping them to form solutions, to create, to grow. When we do a library-instruction session that involves live-action gaming, we aren't just playing games. We are modeling for students indirect teaching methods that they themselves can use in their classrooms. We put the hours in, creating games like this because studies have shown that students learn better when playing. They pay more attention, retain more information, and have better recall. We keep our students informed. Librarians create information, manage it, make it accessible.

The Curriculum Materials Center team works hard for our students, and I believe that they know we do. If they didn't, would they trust us with their questions and their tears?

For instance, "Sandy" came to our service desk with tears in her eyes. "I flunked my FTCE [Florida Teacher Certification Examinations] area test. I have to take it again," she said. We offer sympathy, of course. But, we also pull out the big guns. We know Sandy. She's a great student and will be a great teacher one day. We hand her the books and study guides that we know will help her brush up on her skills. We direct her to the faculty, staff, and workshops that will get her to the place she needs to be. And, when she comes back two months later, smiling and appreciative because she passed this time around, we nod because we knew she would.

We get all kinds of questions, questions that can't be answered by Google. Google doesn't offer eye-to-eye contact, precision in drilling down information or reassurance. "What is a Caldecott? I need a Caldecott. Do you have any?" "Miss Yolanda, I can't afford this textbook. Is there a copy here?" "I need a book that is a chapter book,

historical, *and* multicultural.” “I need help planning a math lesson, but I don’t know what I want to do.” “I did this assignment wrong. My professor said to come see you because this place would help me.”

It’s that energy that students generate, their desire to be the best that they can be. I think that the students who come to the Curriculum Materials Center are some of the best students I have ever worked with.

Ten years, eight months. And, still, I love what I do.

Yolanda Hood is the head of the UCF Curriculum Materials Center. She can be reached at yolanda.hood@ucf.edu.