



Up Front

Tales from GSLIS graduates:

Unconventional LIS Jobs

As the information world becomes increasingly digital, the options for LIS graduates have expanded exponentially. With so many people conducting their reading, listening, viewing, and day-to-day communications through the web, jobs for LIS grads are becoming more flexible, with some even moving fully online. Following are stories of three recent GSLIS graduates who live professionally in the e-world, using their GSLIS skills in unconventional ways: in digital jobs that require and reward creativity and flexibility.

Abby Blachly '05LS, Librarything.com

While pursuing a dual degree in archives management and American history at Simmons, Abby Blachly imagined her future job in a “dusty basement” of a university archive. But Blachly, who worked at both the Wheelock College and Simmons Archives while in GSLIS, couldn't find her ideal post-graduation job in the saturated Boston market. So she took a position as a corporate archivist at Genzyme, a pharmaceutical company in Cambridge, cataloging correspondence between the company and the FDA. She was well paid, she says, but “I wanted to work with old, pretty documents, not something from 2005.” The best part of the job: her cubicle sat beneath a skylight.

About a year after graduating from GSLIS, she got a call from Tim Spalding, a colleague from her former job in publishing. Spalding, a programmer and Ph.D. student in Classics, had recently launched a website cataloging his and his friends' extensive home libraries. Input a book's ISBN, title, or author, and the site, which he called LibraryThing, pulled relevant data from the Library of Congress. He wanted to expand LibraryThing with the help of a librarian, and Blachly started working on the site on nights and weekends in early 2006. She quit Genzyme to work there full time later that year.

As LibraryThing's number-two employee, Blachly's job description has been “everything but the coding,” she says. That includes overseeing customer service and the financial aspects of the site, which Blachly compares to a party where you can freely peruse a stranger's bookshelves. But with 475,000 members who have cataloged more than 30 million books using data from hundreds of libraries and Amazon, LibraryThing is now much more than that. It's a social networking site — Facebook for

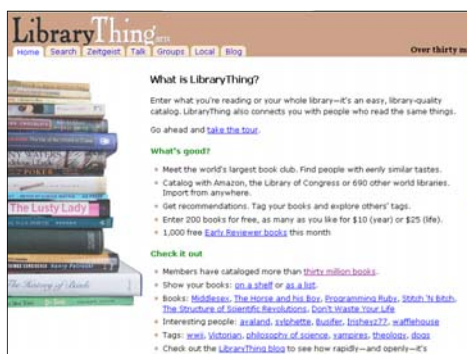
books — where bibliophiles can share interests and swap (real) books, authors can find new fans, publishers can send out advance copies for review, and bookstores can set up readings.

Blachly (whose LibraryThing collection has 949 books) is in charge of creating partnerships with publishers and bookstores, but because the company is still a small start-up, she also writes a newsletter, answers general site questions, and coordinates payroll for the now nine employees, who all work from home. “Tim says that I should have an honorary business degree, and he should have an honorary library science degree,” she says. The Simmons class she most directly uses for her job is cataloging. “Our whole site is based on MARC records,” she says.



This summer, LibraryThing launched an ambitious project to develop a crowd-source replacement for the Dewey Decimal System, which is expensive and antiquated, says Blachly. “Most people don't think in terms of subject headings.” Open shelves classification “is a big undertaking,” she says, so LibraryThing hired two volunteer librarians to shepherd online discussions. This is a common strategy for the site (and for Web 2.0); Blachly and colleagues come up with a new feature and then unleash it on members for feedback.

If she were to take an archives job in the future, Blachly says she'd forgo the dust and work in digital archives. But given the flexibility of LibraryThing, “I'm ruined for 9 to 5 jobs. At Genzyme, to order a pen, you needed three different requisition forms,” she says. “We can invent what we want to do. There's no red tape. This is not what I pictured doing, but I love it.”



Top: Abby Blachly; Bottom: LibraryThing.com

Jenni Matz '06LS, emmytvlegends.org

When Jenni Matz started at GSLIS in 2003, she knew she wanted to be near “book people” and that she liked research. Otherwise, she had no idea what she'd do with an archives degree. As for the jobs she's held since then, she says, “I've been lucky.” But Matz has always created her own luck.

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“In this information age, the need for information organizers and providers will continue to be relevant and in demand.”

Cheryl Kohen, a 2008 GSLIS graduate, runs the Career Resource Library (CRL), a specialized branch of the Simmons Library located inside the Career Education Center.

Q: **What did you want to be as a kid?**
 • A lawyer for women’s rights! This was especially true in 4th grade, when the girls vs. boys dynamic seemed to be particularly heightened. While I still am an advocate for women’s rights, I’m happy with my choice of not becoming a lawyer.

Have you had a career outside the field of LIS?

I worked at Priscilla of Boston, the chic bridal shop over on Boylston Street. Providing customer service to brides and their extended families was an “interesting” experience, to say the least. I much prefer working with patrons who didn’t just purchase an item for thousands of dollars.



How did you get interested in LIS?

Honestly, writing my undergraduate senior thesis is when I started thinking seriously about the GSLIS program at Simmons. I realized while doing all of the research for my thesis that I really liked resources and researching.

How have you been involved at GSLIS?

I was elected to be LISSA (Library and Information Science Student Association) president from summer 2007 through spring 2008. This was actually a great opportunity that kept me in the loop on many of the happenings around campus. Also, through this role I was able to meet and network with a wide range of students, alums, faculty, and staff members.

Tell us a little about your job and the Career Resource Library.

Aside from being a beautiful space with many large windows, print resources, and computer stations, the Career Resource Library also has a large web presence. Our extensive eLibrary is really what sets us apart from the other libraries at Simmons College, containing over 100 pages of information on careers, graduate school, internships, resources for diverse populations (LGBT, ALANA, women, and persons with disabilities), grants and scholarship funding, and test preparation. A valuable and heavily used section of our eLibrary is the “Career Information by Major or Field,” which provides career and graduate school resources that are discipline-specific. Also, the CRL has a close relationship with Simmons’s Career Education Center, which provides career coaching, online job search tools and resources, professional skill-building, resume and cover letter writing help, job fairs, and much more to prepare students for today’s workforce.

What do you like best about your work?

Being the manager of my own service point can be a lot of responsibility, but also a lot of fun. As part of a branch library at Simmons, I’m able to be creative, yet still feel supported by the

main library. Also, I’m happy to still be able to provide reference to patrons who come into the library. The CRL has some really cool resources, so it’s enjoyable to browse through them to find the answers to reference questions.

What kinds of jobs do you help GSLIS students find? Have you seen anyone using their MLS in creative or unexpected ways?

The CRL contains a great book, titled “Opening New Doors: Alternative Careers for Librarians”, by Ellis Mount, which describes unusual and creative fields that fall outside of traditional librarianship. For example, some librarians go into entrepreneurial work as freelance indexers or bibliographic data managers. Other nontraditional positions for MLS graduates include advancement research, which is the researching of people and organizations for fundraising purposes. Also, professionals are needed for knowledge management and competitive intelligence work. There are even positions available for information science consultants, who actually have the luxury of working from the comfort of their house!

Closer to our home and outside of conventional librarianship, current MLS candidate Joyce Myeza has been working with the Boston Health Care for the Homeless program setting up an electronic library for their research center. While generally the jobs we help students find tend to be in archival positions, reference, instructional work, and technical services, a broader, more innovative range of career opportunities are opening up to MLS holders. Current graduate students should expect to be challenged and stimulated by future professional prospects. In this information age, the need for information organizers and providers will continue to be relevant and in demand.

What advice do you have for people just entering the profession?

Network! At every opportunity, start widening the group of people you know and places you go to meet new professionals. I cannot stress enough how important it is to create a wide professional network for future careers. And once you get the job, keep up the communication, even if it feels like communication overload. Better to send more emails and have people delete them, than to only provide your colleagues with limited information.

If you could have a totally different career, what would it be?

Is there such a thing as professional chocolate taster?

What are you passionate about professionally?

I think that most of our peers go into the library field because they believe in the freedom of information. I am interested in the open access movement, and take pride in the fact that though Simmons College is a private college, the libraries are open to the public.

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A Tribute to Allen Smith

On Saturday, August 2, 2008, GSLIS lost one of its greats when Professor Allen Smith passed away. In his thirty years at Simmons, Allen touched thousands of lives; Dean Cloonan estimates that the number could be as high as 4,500. *Four thousand and five hundred* students — nearly half of the Simmons GSLIS body of 10,000 alumni — took Allen's teachings about reference, humanities, oral history, and yes, back in the day, computer programming, with them into the library world. To merely say that his influence was far-reaching doesn't begin to describe the impact he had on our personal and professional lives.

Is there anyone who sat in his class who can't recall his presence as he stood in the front of the room as we tried to absorb every nuance of his 70-page list of reference sources? How we hoped to impress him — or at least not disappoint him — and what joy it was when he smiled and nodded when the answer we gave was one that unexpectedly pleased him. (If only *I'd* been the one to think of bringing the reference librarian as my one thing to bring into his exam. To whoever you are — kudos. "That was a good one," he said in his characteristic understated way. With a smile on his face, though, and a twinkle in his eye that indicated exactly how monumentally perfect your choice was.)

Though he could sometimes seem, well, curmudgeonly — yes, those were his sighs that could be heard buildings away from where the faculty meetings were being held — he lived for his students. They were the ones who made him smile when laughter was otherwise hard to come by. They were the ones who especially pleased him with their energy and excitement. When students in one of his classes came to the last day of Reference wearing t-shirts with the words "Deliberate Searchers" emblazoned across them, that was a day you'd be hard-pressed to find a happier guy. "They get it," he said. And they got it with unmistakable humor, respect, and love.

In the week after Allen died, the tributes came from all quarters — there was the "Remembering Allen Smith" group on Facebook started by former students, the posting from his fellow farriers, the wiki page with favorite Allen-isms, the shared e-mails and conversations and blog posts and notes from far and wide. His legacy is continued by the legion of former students and colleagues searching deliberately, seeking bibliographic control, and explaining to the IRS why it is that everything we librarians do is legitimately deductible. And although some of us will use more exclamation points than he would have allowed, every single one of them will make us think of our teacher, our colleague, our friend, Allen Smith.

Allen, the third floor of Palace Road will always feel a little empty. May you and Merrill rest together in eternal peace. You are deeply missed.

Article by Jennifer Doyle '98LS and Linda Carroll '06LS

In honor of Allen's request, there will not be a memorial service. However, in addition to establishing the scholarship fund noted above, GSLIS will hold a program in Allen's honor in spring 2009. We are also in the process of developing an online area where students, alumni, colleagues and friends can share their memories. Details will be posted at <http://www.simmons.edu/gslis/about/news/index.shtml>.

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To help pay her way through school, Matz called on a library connection she'd made in her previous career as a film and television producer and editor.

Matz's last job before entering graduate school was researching for a documentary about Vietnam-era reporters, which took her to the war archive collections at the Healey Library at UMass Boston. It turned out that the library had received a new collection that needed processing, and Matz took on what she thought would be a six-month job writing a finding aid for papers from U.S. Federal District Judge David Mazzone.

Mazzone ordered and oversaw the Boston Harbor cleanup, one of New England's largest public works projects and a roaring success in terms of time and money spent, especially compared with the Big Dig. "While doing [the work], I thought, this is an amazing story," says Matz. She convinced the Urban Harbors Institute at UMass to help her produce a documentary about Mazzone's legacy, featuring interviews with Senator Ted Kennedy, former governor Michael

Dukakis, and others. "It wound up being a two-year job," she says, one that gave both her LIS resume and her fledgling production company, MatzOrific, a boost.

When Matz graduated in 2006, she found an ad on the New England Archivists listserv that seemed almost too well-matched to her background: Emerson College was looking for someone to process the archive of a television personality. During her job interview, she was asked more about her experience booking video shoots than her library skills. She of course had both. When she got the job, she, comedian Bill Dana (an Emerson graduate who Matz says "is like a grandfather to me"), and Emerson Library Director Bob Fleming founded the American Comedy Archives, a repository of 64 interviews with comedy legends like Phyllis Diller, Don Knotts, Bob Newhart, and "Weird Al" Yankovic.

At the start, Matz turned to her former professors and to the Oral History Association for advice about how best to conduct the interviews — over three years, she and Dana shot several hundred hours of footage — and create finding aids for the archive. In now-typical Matz fashion, during her time at Emerson she began work on a documentary about Dana, who was head writer for the Steve Allen Show in the late 50s, performed at JFK's inaugural gala, and had his own NBC show.

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The American Comedy Archives got press coverage from newspapers including The New York Times and The Boston Globe, and soon afterward Matz got a call from the director of the Archive of American Television, Karen Herman. “She was on my list of people to cold call to ask how she got her job,” says Matz.

The AAT (run by the Academy of Television Arts & Sciences, creator of the Emmys) was putting video archives online, and Herman was interested in Matz’s work. They conducted a couple of interviews together, and when Herman decided to digitize the entire collection, she hired Matz, whose job at Emerson had lost its funding. Matz moved to L.A. in March to work as the manager of digital projects and business development at the AAT. “I just say I’m an archivist,” she says.

There are two parts to her job: she oversees the growing archives of more than 575 video interviews with TV personalities and behind-the-scenes players, and she finds revenue sources for the site. “It was probably the only natural progression from [the comedy archives at Emerson],” she says. “I’m glad I’ve stumbled on a job that requires a nice mixture of my skill set.”

Since taking the job, Matz has conducted some of the archives’ interviews, including one of comedian George Carlin’s last in-depth interviews before he died in June. She’s now working on finding aids for the collection as well as digitizing all the interviews. About 300 of them are now available online at emmytvlegends.org. Meanwhile, she has yet another documentary in production — this time about her grandparents, who owned an antiquarian bookshop that sold books about book arts. It was her grandparents who first introduced her to the “book people” who drew her to a career in LIS in the first place.

Brian Talbot ’06LS, National Geographic Society Brian Talbot knew exactly what he wanted to do when he finished classes at GSLIS in 2006 — in fact, he was already doing it. A full-time web designer for the Simmons College site, Talbot says he went to graduate school to better understand how to find and use information online. “I’d learn from a textbook and then go right back to work and have an outlet to apply things in real time,” he says. When he graduated, he was promoted and became a senior web designer, helping to build the My.Simmons intranet portal.

In spring 2007, after four years of working and studying at Simmons, he decided to look for something new. On his resume, he called his Simmons degree a master’s in information science, omitting the word “library.” “I’m not ashamed at all of ‘library,’” he says, “but I wouldn’t call myself a librarian.”

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Snapshot: Cheryl Kohen

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Outside of work?

As you may have noticed from my response to the question regarding what I wanted to be as a child, I am an advocate for equality. I continue to feel passionately about creating change and moving toward an egalitarian world.

What is something you do for fun or excitement?

My husband and I are big moviegoers. Our favorite genre tends to be dark comedies and usually, the darker the better. Some of our favorites include “Gross Pointe Blank,” “Better off Dead,” and “The Ice Harvest.” The John Cusack theme is intentional.

Something you do to relax?

Vegging out with a good book (how stereotypical librarian of me) or walking my completely adorable dog, Caramel.

A sanctuary or favorite spot?

We live close to Brookline, which fortunately has many beautiful parks. Give me a sunny day, a good book, and some iced coffee, and I’m set for an afternoon of park-going.

Your favorite vacation spot?

I would say resorting near the Baldi Hot Spring of the Arenal Volcano in Costa Rica. Nothing like blithely swimming on an active volcano to truly make you relaxed.

Something you collect?

Use to be “Archie” comic books and Audrey Hepburn memorabilia, but I think those days are over. However, if you stop by my office (P304E), you will find a Hepburn calendar.

A fictional character you most identify with?

Maybe a cheerier version of Daria Morgendorffer. [Daria is a teenaged animated character originally from the MTV series “Beavis and Butthead.” She later had her own show.] I even think I look like her a bit, though I would probably change my outfit every so often.

Interview by Elisabeth Zimmer



Photo credits, page 4:

Jenni Matz prepares Eddie Brill for his interview for the American Comedy Archives at Emerson College

Current Archive of American Television website for online interviews at www.youtube.com/TVLEGENDS

Homepage: <http://www.emmytvlegends.org/>

South African Children’s Literature Seminar

The South African Children’s Literature Seminar, hosted by Simmons College and co-sponsored by South Africa Partners, Simmons College Graduate School of Library and Information Science, and Simmons College Center for the Study of Children’s Literature, succeeded in bringing together teachers, librarians, and activists to discuss the state of children’s literature in South Africa. I was surprised at the diversity among the attendees: while many of those who attended were familiar to me from my work with local children’s librarians, I also met people who had come from as far away as New York City and Chicago to attend this program. The seminar began with a panel discussion led by Cathie Mercier, chair of the Center for the Study of Children’s Literature, and featured the responses of South African authors Sindiwe Magona and Elinor Sisulu. Attendees had the option of participating in two of three possible breakout sessions led by Nombulelo Baba, of the South African National Library’s Center for the Book, Professor Maggie Bush, of the Simmons College Graduate School of Library and Information Science, and Elinor Sisulu.

Nombulelo Baba’s breakout session, during which she addressed the importance of South African children’s literature, addressed issues familiar to teachers and children’s librarians in the United States. The challenges many in South Africa face when attempting to find and support writing for children in Afrikaans and other indigenous languages are similar to those American professionals face as they search for authentic multicultural literature for young people. As in the United States, black authors and illustrators of children’s books have not been historically as well supported as authors and illustrators of the dominant culture and—again, as in the U.S.—literary works in languages other than English have been difficult to find. Baba’s session evolved into a discussion among the participants, during which titles were recommended and resources for selection were named. Many shared their successes with the introduction of minority literature in the classroom and offered their techniques as best practices to other interested parties.

Maggie Bush provided the attendees of her breakout session with a helpful bibliography of resources related to South African children’s literature including articles discussing the publication of South African children’s literature (in South Africa, and its availability in the U.S.), guides for the selection of multicultural children’s literature (including South African children’s literature), and a short list of recommended children’s titles. In Bush’s session, as in Baba’s, the attendees were interested in sharing information and resources, and many mentioned local resources that make curriculum kits available to schools and libraries.

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Beyond Simmons’s core library courses, he took all computer-related ones: information architecture, user studies, web development, database design, xhtml, etc. “There’s a debate about how to balance a traditional library curriculum with information science. Library science helps in understanding problems and bringing them to light, but I needed information classes for practice. Simmons offers both sides of the coin,” he says.



Last summer he took a job as senior web developer and designer in the digital media division of the National Geographic Society in Washington, D.C. Talbot manages a group responsible for the front-end development of nationalgeographic.com and its sub-sites. He comes up with best practices, enforces web accessibility, leads trainings, and asks strategic questions about how users should best navigate the NGS sites. (The latter sometimes means asking these questions of the users themselves in focus groups.) Part of his job has been to modernize web standards for the NGS websites, which hasn’t always been easy. “There has been a lot of educating and having to explain what information architecture is and then trying to make a pitch for why it’s a valued field,” he says.

A recent project was to build a site where users can upload their videos of, say, safari animals they’ve seen on vacation or tips for green living. He oversaw the project, from describing the videos’ metadata and deciding what the site should look like, to determining what users may want to post beyond videos and analyzing the competition to figure out which features — like a play button and the ability to slide forward in time — users now expect with online videos. “Then we marry that with what we want,” says Talbot.

Talbot, who as a psych major in college studied how humans understand information, says at NGS he always keeps in mind the “golden rules” he learned in a human-computer interaction class at Simmons: “Don’t overburden the user with choices, and make sure things are labeled clearly.” And he believes his skills put him in a unique position. “I’m one of the few [at NGS] with my foot in both design and development. I’ve always been interested in understanding things from start to finish,” he says. “Are generalists more rare to find? The answer is yes.”

Article by Katharine Dunn

Photo credits, page 5:

Top: Brian Talbot

Bottom: National Geographic Everyday Explorers website:
<http://everydayexplorers.nationalgeographic.com/>

September — October Events

Wednesday, September 17, SLA Fall Social. Come network with your colleagues and enjoy an evening of good food and good company. Tia's by the Waterfront, Boston, MA.

Friday, September 19, Petition to Graduate due (coursework completed Fall '08 and Spring '09).

Wednesday, September 24, Lazerow Lecture Featuring Brewster Kahle. Join us for the 2008 ISI Samuel Lazerow Memorial Lecture. This year's lecturer is Brewster Kahle, founder and director of the Internet Archive. Kotzen Center, 4:00 p.m. RSVP to gslis@simmons.edu by September 17, 2008.

Tuesday, October 21, GSLIS Alumni Board Career Panel. Paresky Conference Center, 6 p.m. Hear a panel of experts on how they successfully manage and navigate their careers. RSVP to <http://gslis.simmons.edu/signup>.

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

GSLIS CE Workshops

GSLIS CE Fall/Winter Workshops — Special Pricing for Simmons GSLIS Alumni.

GSLIS CE offers new pricing for its alumni! Starting in the Fall semester of 2008, all Simmons GSLIS alumni attending GSLIS CE workshops will receive a discount of 20% off the price of the workshop.

Fall/Winter semester will feature CE workshops on web indexing, open access publications, Javascript, virtual worlds, copyright, bookmaking, primary sources, and EAD, and many other topics. See the full schedule and new pricing on the GSLIS CE website: <http://www.simmons.edu/gslis/workshops>.

Another must-see library

Were you one of the InfoLink readers who toured the Boston and South Hadley areas with the summer issue as a guide to the regions' wonderful libraries and archives? Well, get out those walking shoes and take a walk downtown to the Congregational Library, located next door to the Athenaeum and open to the public. The reading room is a historic preservation site and they offer tours of the Library. For more information, visit: <http://www.congregationallibrary.org>.

Throughout the year, we'll continue to spotlight some of the many libraries and archives that we think you should visit. If you've got one that we should include, please send a note to infolink@simmons.edu.

Online Resume site

Over the summer, GSLIS debuted a beta version of a repository for students to post their resumes online. We're in the midst of addressing all the comments that came in, but if you'd like to try it out, please go to <http://gslis.simmons.edu/resumedb/> and let us know your thoughts by October 1. Feedback can be sent to gslisweb@simmons.edu.

Prof. Allen Smith Scholarship Fund

The Graduate School of Library and Information Science is establishing a scholarship fund in memory of Professor Allen Smith, who passed away on Saturday, August 2, 2008. Donations are currently being accepted for the scholarship fund. If you would like to contribute, please make a check payable to:

Simmons College
Memo: Professor Smith Scholarship Fund

Checks can be mailed to:
Simmons College Office of Advancement
Attn: Professor Allen Smith Scholarship Fund
300 The Fenway
Boston, MA 02115

In honor of Allen's request, there will not be a memorial service. However, GSLIS will hold a program in Allen's honor in spring 2009. Details will be posted as plans develop.

South African Children's Literature Seminar

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Our discussion of the situation in South Africa as the country adjusts to democratic rule following nearly a half-century of separatist politics and apartheid illuminates some of the racial issues that have plagued the United States. Like South Africans, we in the U.S. are still working to come to terms with our colonial past and our history of domination, slavery, and racism. Our discussion of the importance and relevance of South African children's literature and our support of historically marginalized South African voices can be applied to our domestic project to encourage historically marginalized Americans to come to literary voice.

The South African Children's Literature Seminar held on Saturday, July 12, 2008 celebrated the launch of the dual degree in Children's literature/LIS and the tenth anniversary of South African Partners. Gratitude is extended to GSLIS supporters, Margaret Bush, Em Claire Knowles, Meaghan O'Connor, Amy Pattee, and Linda Watkins for their contributions in the planning and participation in this event. *Article by Amy Pattee*

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 October issue is Monday, September 22, 2008.