

# LIBRARIES AT THE HEART OF CONVENT & STUART HALL

**ALYSON BARRETT**

Academic Department Chair for Libraries

Alyson Barrett looking for a document in the school's archives, which were relocated to Mother Williams Library in March 2018.

As I write during the COVID-19 school closure, libraries have proven essential in providing communities across the U.S. with access to resources. Besides athletic fields, parks and the occasional Grange hall, libraries are some of the last non-denominational civic spaces where people form relationships across divides of background or opinion. Like large public libraries, our Convent & Stuart Hall libraries serve an important civic role at the heart of our community. As such, our libraries circulate everything the vibrant life of our school depends upon: resources, ideas and lasting friendships.

Our work is centered entirely on our patrons. This orientation begins early in librarians' training, inspired by our delicate position resisting censorship, preserving privacy and ultimately protecting the independence of our readers. One of my first memories of library school was learning that librarians never, ever divulge patron records without a verified warrant. This compulsion toward protection cultivates an environment where young readers exercise independence and choice.

Without judgment, we know our patrons through their requests, through the sensitive areas of the collection they visit and leave in welcome disarray, through their research and collaborative projects, and through their selections, which refine throughout their journey into young adulthood. While their intellectual growth is astonishing, it is also true that our avid readers retain lasting memories of the stories that shape their childhoods. Encouraging minds and inspiring hearts, we stand by our students during their moments of discovery while preserving their freedom to select sources that inform and inspire.

Our patron-centered collections require vigilant curation that goes beyond simply buying new books. Revitalization, reorganization and deselection of resources are critical for well-stewarded collections. This invisible and immensely time-consuming work is based on the following truths:

Print readership has remained steady in recent years despite the digital revolution; librarians build active, relevant print collections to work with online resources for a more comprehensive library.

Online resources exist within a complex network of publisher platforms holding proprietary, costly information that is unavailable on the open internet. Librarians navigate this landscape for evaluation, purchase and delivery — something patrons could not do on their own.

Not all scholarly information exists online. Print and digital sources are distinct cornerstones of a complete research process.

Navigating the physical and virtual spaces where information resides is even challenging for most adults. Librarians, aware of the resources at hand, guide patrons to items uniquely relevant to them.

Our curated collections also support creative faculty who teach beyond the confines of textbooks. Working through subject area call numbers, we have deselected and hand selected thousands of resources to keep our collections both anticipatory and historically robust. Centering on Sacred Heart Goal 3, *a social awareness that impels to action*, librarians recognize that action must be anchored in both learning and love. Consequently, our resources

## INFORMATION PHILOSOPHY PROGRAM

The expansion beyond information literacy to information philosophy is an intentional and essential reimagining of the library curriculum, in which traditional information literacy skills are taught within the active and participatory context of metaliteracy. While information literacy prepares individuals to access, evaluate and analyze information, metaliteracy prepares individuals to actively produce and share both original and repurposed information in participatory environments.\* In stand-alone library courses, as well as collaboration with classroom teachers, we deliver instruction and experiences that offer meaningful connections to and competence with information – with visual, digital and news literacy; with emerging technologies; and with the critical thinking and reflection that is required of ethical participation in research and its conversation.

\*Thomas P. Mackey and Trudi E. Jacobson. "Reframing Information Literacy as a Metaliteracy." *College and Research Libraries* 72, no. 1 (2011): 62–78 within "ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education." *Association of College and Research Libraries*, 2015, [ala.org/http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework](http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework).

# Ellen Hoffman, RSCJ Learning Commons



Elementary students often use the Hoffman Learning Commons to study and do homework.

educate toward the building of a fair, accountable, empathetic and diverse society, supporting students as they learn to denounce social structures and confront individual biases that prevent justice.

In a world where information seems to grow exponentially, our **Information Philosophy Program** offers a curriculum of discernment. Analysis of primary sources, from scientific data to historical accounts, pushes students to seek their own answers. Access to scholarly sources inspires students to synthesize complex academic writing with their own discoveries. Explicit teaching about the coexistence of online and print helps students learn that information is a commodity that shapes bias, has value and impacts credibility of sources. Ultimately building toward the Association of College and Research Libraries information literacy framework with signature research projects, we help students claim their rightful place in the scholarly conversation. Supported by visiting scholars such as Brookings Institute fellow, Trustee and parent John Villasenor, information philosophy goes beyond traditional information literacy to equip students to navigate the swiftly changing information landscape with knowledge and confidence.

By preserving the past and anticipating the future, our students are producers. Since 2018, a team of dedicated high school interns have volunteered their time to digitize more than 400 archival documents under the direction of our librarians. Due to the work of these interns, the archives established by former Director of Schools Mary Mardel, RSCJ, and stewarded by Virginia Murillo '48'44 and Mary Ashe '48, are now online. From building library shelf spacers (Grade 4) to creative writing workshops (Grade 5) to the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP) Extended Essay (Grades 11 and 12), our students are learning to collaborate and to create and publish their own work.

Our library faculty expand the boundaries of our work through professional development and personal curiosity:

*Kathleen Esling enriched her critical work building equitable collections and classroom spaces through her participation in the first Institute for Racial Equity in Literacy at the University of New Hampshire (2019) and the Pollyanna Conference hosted at Town School for Boys (2020).*

*Kathleen also received a National Endowment for the Humanities grant to study "Remaking Monsters and Heroines: Adapting Classic Literature for Contemporary Audiences," at the University of Arkansas (2018). The experience brings continued inspiration to her role as*

*an English teacher and librarian.*

*Reba Sell received the Sister Ann Conroy Award for professional development, supporting her attendance at a philosophy seminar held at the University of Oxford (2019). In the seminar, Reba explored the nature of the "common good" and its application to the IBDP core requirements of the Extended Essay and Theory of Knowledge.*

*Alyson Barrett received a National Endowment for the Humanities grant to study The Battle of Little Bighorn and the Great Sioux War in Montana (2019). This experience falls in line with Alyson's trajectory studying marginalized events in America's history, giving her fresh material for both the classroom and collection.*

*In January 2020, a group of faculty and administrators attended the Key West Literary Seminar. Last year's theme, "Reading Between the Lines: Sports and Literature," inspired deep reading, lively conversation and debate as the group explored the unique literature of sport.*

The calling of our profession requires that we transcend library walls to engage the world with a sense of wonder. From intellectual pursuits to coaching, knitting and painting, we enthusiastically wear infinite hats and seek to model lifelong curiosity for our students.

This unprecedented time in history and our absence from school has made the value of our community all the more apparent. While I remain astonished at the speed and professionalism demonstrated by colleagues, the administration and parents in offering our students a meaningful online experience, it is clear that being together in our distinct physical spaces is a priceless aspect of the Sacred Heart education.

Some continue to define libraries as simply places where resources are exchanged. Those who have spent time gazing at the San Francisco Bay from Mother Williams Library or watched first grade students eagerly consume a bookshelf or caught the afternoon slant of light in the Carroll Learning Commons know that libraries transcend their perceived role as mere book repositories. They are places where students make independent choices, develop lasting world views and spark lifelong relationships. Most critically, they are the places where ideas are liberated and exchanged. While our books, people and programs certainly hold intrinsic value, the work of the library is knowing that these things are most valuable when, as a community, we come together to share them. ☺