

Pennsylvania Libraries: Research & Practice

Interview

In the PaLRaP Spotlight: Greta Braungard

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Tell us a little about yourself, specifically, your career trajectory and what led you to special librarianship?

I knew from a very young age that I wanted to be a librarian. When I was a child, my mother volunteered at our local library, so we spent a lot of time there. I loved stamping the date due cards, putting books in order, and reading the encyclopedias. I was amazed by the organization of information and finding answers to questions. Ultimately, I decided I wanted to help others use libraries and have worked in academic, public, and special libraries. When I started in the Army library system at Fort Knox Barr Memorial Library in Fort Knox, KY, I found my professional niche in providing services to our soldiers, their families, and Army civilians. I have been with the U.S. Army War College Library since 2008. When it merged into the U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center (USAHEC) back in 2014, I found a broader audience to support - the American people.

Your mission is to “engage, inspire, and inform the Army, the American people, and global partners with a unique and enduring source of knowledge and thought.” In addition to the Army War College Library, the USAHEC includes the Army Heritage Museum, and the Visitor and Education Services division. How do these areas all work together to support the War College?

One great example is the Indian Wars elective. U.S. Army War College students are brought to the Army Heritage Museum where Molly Bompane, Curator of Arms and Ordnance, presents a lecture on technology, tactics, and culture as it relates to this period. Firearms and archaeological information regarding the types of weaponry are discussed, using materials from all three of our collections to provide context to the course. We are also currently undergoing a massive project to digitize more than 24,000 linear feet of archival material. As part of this project, we implemented a new search interface, which will provide more seamless access to the library resources and archival museum resources.

The U.S. Army War College offers graduate-level instruction to senior military officers and civilians through both resident and distance learning options. Can you provide a few generalizations of the types of students enrolled?

The student body of the U.S. Army War College is composed of Army officers, officers from the Joint Services (Air Force, Navy, Marines, Coast Guard), plus Department of Defense and other Federal civilians. There is also a cadre of about 80 international fellows from our multinational partners.

Can you tell us more about your public programs and perhaps cite some particularly well attended events?

The USAHEC has many different types of events open to the public throughout the year. We sponsor two military history lecture series, which feature topics and speakers whose historical perspectives offer insights and understanding to the U.S. Army and the American Public. In September, Pulitzer Prize winning author, Rick Atkinson, spoke on his new trilogy, “The British are Coming, Part I,” to 359 attendees. We also sponsor lectures and events for Women’s History Month, Women’s Equality Day, Veterans Day, and host the Native Pride Dancers for Native American Heritage Month. Our most popular event is a timeline living history event, Army Heritage Days, which brings the Army Heritage Trail to life with period re-enactors, equipment, and special programming for a two-day event that attracts 10,000 visitors.

Can you provide a few general statistics to illustrate the library’s usage?

The library team handles between 600-800 research questions per month, both virtually and in-person. Circulation at its peak is approximately 10,000 items per month, and the low end is about 2,500 per month. Our Cataloging and Metadata Services Team completes about 5,000 actions per month, including making materials available, authority work, processing, database maintenance, and quality control.

The U.S. Army War College Library is located in Root Hall and is an open stack library, while Ridgway Hall is a closed stack library. Together and combined with the museum, there are more than 400,000 books, plus unit histories, personal papers, diaries and oral histories, photos and artifacts, and archival materials. Give us an example of some particularly interesting items.

Our collection includes materials spanning pre-colonial times to current military operations. We also have some gems in our rare book collection, including the *Journal of the United States in Congress Assembled* (1783), the year of the Pennsylvania Mutiny, when 400 Continental Army soldiers mobbed the state house in Philadelphia demanding back pay, and Congress had to flee and reconvene the next day in Princeton.

Describe a day-in-the-life at your research facility.

In our academic building location, Root Hall, our students attend their seminars at the same time each day, so the library has peaks of attendance between 7:30 a.m. and 8:15 a.m. and 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., while students are on breakfast or lunch breaks. The library staff often come in to find students already working on computers or reading in our seating areas. Many times, the students request support with locating a course reading or when they are starting research for a course paper. While the students are in class, the library staff work on research questions, LibGuides, collection development, and administrative tasks like course reserves and shelving.

In our USAHEC location, Ridgway Hall, the staff works on research inquiries from the Army, Congress, and the general public prior to the building opening at 10:00 a.m. The team handles a myriad of inquiries ranging from genealogy questions to the origin of the current Army uniform.

Finally, can you tell us why you do what you do?

As a leader, I am working to develop my team and give back to the profession - in memory of the many librarians who have helped me, from my very early days as an alphabetizing 4-year-old, to my time as a student reference assistant in my undergraduate years, and into the future.