

Pennsylvania Libraries: *Research & Practice*

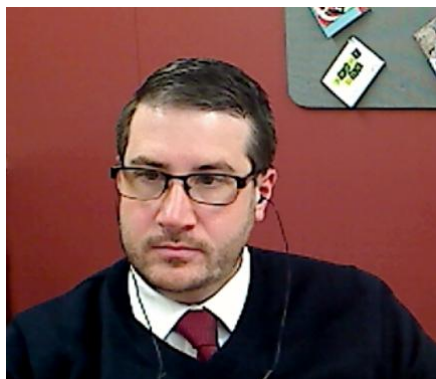
Interview

In the PaLRaP Spotlight: Alexander Kirby, Information Literacy and eLearning Librarian

Pennsylvania Highlands Community College, Johnstown, PA

Denise Wetzel

Tell us about your career journey to librarianship



My journey began in childhood when I would watch my father go to work at the IUP Library, where he was a librarian for over 30 years. He'd come home with books that my parents would read to me and my siblings. The *Hardy Boys*, *Nancy Drew* (I had three sisters), and *The Chronicles of Narnia* were all favorites. Sometimes he'd take me to work with him. I had the run of the place to do what I wanted while my father

worked. Luckily, the staff were always happy to play with me. I think it was a fun way for them to pass the day. I remember the media librarian letting me watch the original *Alien* film on a big projector screen in a classroom. That was pretty cool stuff for a kid in the early '90s. As I grew up, the idea of being a librarian was always something I thought about. The longer I was in college, the more I enjoyed being there. Colleges have a special energy about them that you can't get elsewhere. I entered the library science program at Clarion, and after I graduated, I got my job at Pennsylvania Highlands Community College, where I'm still working today.

Describe your role at Pennsylvania Highlands Community College

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I'm something of a jack-of-all-trades. My responsibilities include teaching information literacy, collection development, maintaining our electronic collections, InterLibrary Loan (ILL), designing and updating the library website, digitizing historical records, creating programming for students, creating instructional guides, and anything else you might imagine a librarian would do. We are a small college. I am also tasked with training our faculty to use our Learning Management System and advising them about online instruction. It is a difficult job, but I have adjusted to it over the years.

Having worked at Pennsylvania Highlands Community College for almost 17 years, I'm sure a lot has changed since you began. How have your goals evolved as the Information Literacy and eLearning Librarian?

As a young librarian, I focused largely on the technical aspects of using library resources. Things like using the catalog, requesting books via ILL, or locating peer-reviewed articles. Basically, bibliographic instruction. Over time, I evolved my teaching to focus more on concepts and less on the technical details. I think most librarians go through that process. The existence of AI will prompt me to change my teaching goals even more. I also gained an interest in open educational resources (OER). Cambria County, where I work and where I grew up, is one of the poorest counties in the state. So, I see how textbook costs affect people. I have grown our OER program to now include 18 different classes with no textbook costs, which is a good number for a college this small.

As the PaLA College and Research Division Chair, do you have any suggestions that might benefit early-career professionals thinking about joining PaLA?

When you are a new librarian, it can be easy to be focused so much on your specific job and your specific college that you never fully understand the bigger picture of what libraries are. Joining PaLA and CRD can really broaden your perspective about libraries. You'll meet people from libraries large and small, public and private, new and old. There's something to be learned from everyone. The things you learn will help you understand how you might grow as a librarian. Joining CRD as a member-at-large or even just posting on the CRD blog can be a good way to get started.