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the dean's corner

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The Staff of (Dacus)Life

The library's staff has remained the constant in this ocean of relentless change

For weeks now readers have endured all sorts of reports in this column. From the beginning, where-in we examined the present state of things, to the loud, long trumpet of progress, for which we are all duly proud, and should be.

Amid all these words, however, has been the recurring theme of change and technological advancement. We have on our website now a button called "New." It looks like an explosion, a fireball firebrand of new attractions

The theme remains the same, however: the library is changing, and electronic gadgetry, innovation and, yes, even its distractions, are leading the way. Such changes have given rise to a plethora of myths, not the least of which is that we're witnessing not merely the end of the book, but the end of libraries. If only it could mean the end of people saying such nonsense!

Quick now, what has *not* changed in the sea of change? As one tsunami of neologies rolls over us (or rolls us over!) with all its electronic remora, what remains the same? Staff, of course. I don't mean that our folks never change. **Hardly!** Rather, the library's staff has remained the constant in this ocean of relentless change. So herewith, a small paean to those who make all of this happen.

Take the folks in Circulation—Brittany, Doug, and Nancy.

Everyday they are "out there." If it isn't some book that's not where it ought to be, it's a fine that someone "never" incurred. This crowd has heard *every* the dog-ate-my-overdue-book story there is! When you have half a million volumes, give or take a few, and 150,000+ folks annually coming in and moving things about, it's not as easy as it may seem at first blush to keep everything straight.

Or consider the unsung heroes in Technical Services. Many jobs in this area have very little glamour about them (of course not many anywhere in the building are all that glamorous!), and virtual anonymity for all who do them.

Most of our folks have seen a million changes during their stint with the library.

There are those who make sure every one of those billions of pieces of mail get to where they're supposed to go. Charlene, for example, not only makes sure the mail gets to the right place, but every issue of every journal, newspaper, and item gets where it must. Further, she receives all journals and claims any missing issues. The trouble is, you never know what a good job is being done until you begin looking for one of a million issues we move back and forth over here. **Then** you know.

Or take Sandra in Preservation & Binding. If she didn't take the time each month

to collate, pull together, assign slips, and have ready and waiting for the binder, all fifty-eleven of those issues for all 800 periodical titles, they would be everywhere, which is to say nowhere.

Or what about Brenda who makes sure all those scores of issues are in their rightful places and accounted for, so we can get to them when we need them, for whatever reason? Additionally, she keeps a watchful eye on those dozens and dozens of serial invoices that come through daily. We surely seem too orderly over here, but without our ordermania we would be like Johnson's definition of our minds: 'a vast un-catalogued library.' Or we'd be like the web *without* a search engine, good or bad.

Then there are those folks in Cataloging, like Ellen, Pam, Tesfa and Carol. Cataloging is a thankless task; so thankless, in fact, that many wonder why we do it all ... that is, until they come in and say, 'Do you remember that red book (or magazine) with the gold lettering that was sitting right here a month ago? Where'd it go?' We all have our shorthand for finding things, and those of us who do research often forget where the devil lurks when the details do not matter to us. Right then. But catalogers always know, and well: that's why the details of cataloging are so important. That red

book with the gold lettering moved, of course, because new books (or issues) arrived and had to be shelved. Cataloging, however, makes all those green and red and big and small books appear once again.

And speaking of orders, there are Jannifer and Sandra (another one). When we did that record number of books last year, it was largely owing to these two women who made certain the orders were not only *placed* but also *tracked*. If we didn't do both, all those orders we get from everywhere would be lost in cyberspace, or the mail, or somewhere other than here. And of course it isn't just books and tracking dozens of book publishers. They also keep up with nonprint items, too.

There are so many invisible men and women who make libraries work. There's Ann in interlibrary loan who helps make sure that the literally *thousands* of borrowing orders placed by students, faculty, staff and even library faculty, get here in a timely manner. Of course, the only ones we remember are those that are delayed for whatever reason, forgetting all those that not only arrive on time, *but early*. And this is only half the fun. There are those *thousands* of orders from other libraries wanting to borrow from our collection.

Gina in Archives does yeoman, er, yeo-person, work by keeping track of everything down there in addition to speaking publicly, publishing a bit, fulfilling patrons' requests, and organizing what can easily become a needle in a haystack; in fact, it often *looks* like a needle in a haystack before she begins. (Then there is that added bonus of keeping the library personnel on an eternal diet with delicious delicacies from her fabulous family-owned restaurant in Chester.)

Patti in Government Documents makes a federal case out of her job. Also state and county cases. Surely I needn't say much more when I say that Patti must work closely with the government and all its red (and white and blue) tape. Perhaps this helps explain why this particular position has been so difficult to keep filled over the past 20 months?

Last but certainly not least there are Dot and Peggy. Not only do these two women do everything in the office from answering the phone (you'd think this is easy but somehow the library's number is one often given out by information for the university. So, instead of a couple of dozen calls a day, we get hundreds for all over campus), to paying invoices, to keeping track of all sixty student workers hours and more. On top of all that, they must work with me *every single day*, and that alone is worth combat pay.

In addition to being 'invisible' they also do whatever is needed to make sure they keep up. This often means taking classes, sometimes at their own expense, going to workshops, reading, reading, reading, and learning in-house, as they go along, in the midst of the change.

The point is, of course, that there are so many, many people needed to make the library run well. Sure, we mess up at times. But when I think hard about it, it strikes me, with as many things that can go wrong yet do not, it's a miracle it runs at all. Except, except. Except for these many "invisible" folks who make sure this train called Dacus runs, and runs on time.

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stint with the library. In addition to being 'invisible' they also do whatever is needed to make sure they keep up. This often means taking classes, sometimes at their own expense, going to workshops, reading, reading, reading, and learning in-house, as they go along, in the midst of the change. This is the tip of the proverbial iceberg. They do all this and more, much more. Theirs is a never-ending story if ever there was one.

Of course nearly every organization has such folks, and Winthrop is blessed to have them everywhere, and in every office, as far as I can tell. I sing this small hymn to Dacus staff to point to the obvious: Things get done but often by folks who are rarely recognized, either for their value, their work, or their dedication, and never as much as they should be.

In the end, Dacus and her success is owing to these men and women who work behind the scenes making sure that Dacus gets from one station to the next, whatever it takes. Over the course of our long haul, they've made sure we were on time while they remade, or simply made new, the locomotive that pulled it all—often *while it ran*.

Many, many thanks to you folks. And thanks to all of you in every campus office who make sure things work as well as they do. Many of us take the bows by virtue of our roles. But we know when we bow, we do so for all of you.

In Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* (17th Century), "current history" is likened to "midgets sitting on the shoulders of giants." In some ways that's true about any organization. I *know* it's unswervingly true of Dacus, and doubtless true of all of Winthrop.

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the dean's corner

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