

Defining Embedded Librarianship

Try this experiment. Stand on a street corner and ask passersby what they think a librarian is or does. Chances are you'll hear a lot of answers that come down to this: A librarian is someone who works in a library. For centuries, librarians were identified with the buildings in which they worked. Most people don't differentiate between library workers with master's degrees and those without, or between librarians doing public services and those doing technical services work. For all of recorded history, librarians have worked in libraries. Long after we unchained our books, opened up our stacks, and encouraged people to take materials out of our libraries, we have continued to confine ourselves inside our libraries.

Today, that's changing. Digital information is ubiquitous. People don't have to come into libraries to get it or to use it. They obtain and use information at home, in the office, in dorm rooms, and in restaurants. They gather information sitting down and standing up. They use desktops and laptops, smartphones and tablets. Moreover, they access every type of information this way—whether it's for business, personal interest, scholarship, or science. Thus, when people *do* come to a library, they don't come for the traditional reasons. They come for programs, a quiet place to work, group study spaces, or to use the computers. They don't come to ask for help from the reference librarians, and as a result, traditional reference activity is declining. Smart librarians have recognized this trend. In fact, they've realized that the new environment of abundant, ubiquitous information offers them the opportunity to rethink traditional library services and do work that is new, more challenging, more rewarding, and more valuable for their communities.

Initiatives to let the librarians out of the libraries and create new modes of librarianship are taking various forms. Roving librarians wander the stacks to look for people who might like some help with their research, or they set up shop in student centers and dormitories to offer assistance with term papers and other assignments. Their motto is "Have laptop, will