

# ChangeMasters All: A Series on Librarians Who Steered a Clear Course toward the Twenty-First Century

## An Interview with Marianne Gaunt

Marta Mestrovic Deyrup

In her twenty-seven years at Rutgers University Libraries (RUL), Marianne Gaunt has successfully overseen the transformation of that organization from a relatively independent group of twenty-six campus libraries to a highly functioning systemwide operation. RUL today has a yearly budget of \$24.78 million and a workforce of eighty-nine librarians and 215 staff. Because Rutgers is the state university of New Jersey, Gaunt's effectiveness as university librarian depends on her political skills in advocating for the library both at the university and state level. That is no small task, since the libraries' operating budget is to a large part determined by New Jersey's year-to-year fiscal realities. In spite of the size and multiple locations of RUL, Gaunt has been successful in establishing a culture of innovation within her institution. One of the early adopters of a team approach to library management, she was someone who saw the importance of establishing the academic library as a center of digital scholarship for the educational community.

One of Gaunt's strongest traits—which became immediately apparent in a recent conversation in her offices at Alexander Library, New Brunswick—is her immense optimism and belief in the future of libraries. When asked to comment on the state-mandated reduction of Rutgers University's overall operating budget for the fiscal year 2006–2007 and its effect on RUL, she remarks, “The fiscal pressures on the university are great, so it is likely that we will always have to deal with not having the amount of resources we really want and need. It's just a question of how much. But the opportunities are always there. I am firmly convinced that there has never been a better time for libraries.”

Gaunt grew up in Clifton, a small, urban city in the northern part of the New Jersey. After graduating high school, she enrolled at Montclair State College (now Montclair State University), intending to teach French language and literature. Although she came to librarian-



Marianne Gaunt

ship early in her career, it was entirely by chance. Gaunt notes, “At the end of my freshman year at college I went for a summer job interview at a local public library. They were looking for a junior library assistant and I needed a job. While I was a good student and used libraries, I did have the stereotypical view of librarianship and librarians, and wasn't quite sure that I'd want the position if offered. Nonetheless I did need it, and the salary was better than most. Well, I got the job and worked there till I graduated. It was a wonderful experience and really changed my life. Thirty-eight years later I am still corresponding with Barbara Mearns, the former library director. I think she had determined that I was going to become a professional librarian, and she was going to expose me to the variety of work in libraries by assigning me to all departments.”

Based on her experience at the Clifton Public Library, Gaunt became convinced that she wanted to work in libraries as a career. She recalls, “Montclair at the time had a minor in library science and I thought that I might become a school librarian by combining the two things that I really liked (teaching and librarianship). After completing the library practicum in a high school library, I realized that this was not something I would want to do as a career. Looking back on that experience—that was thirty-eight years ago—I don't think that I had the maturity to know what I might have been able to do in the position. I also know now about myself that I am energized in a large environment, and a one- or two-person library is not for me.”

After Gaunt graduated college she received a New Jersey Library Association scholarship and chose to leave New Jersey and enroll in Drexel University's MLS program. “A classmate was planning to attend the University of Pennsylvania and major in computer science. When we talked about the plans for our careers, my friend was convinced that libraries could be so [much] more effective if they thought about using computing. Keep in mind

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that this was in 1969 and fairly early to be contemplating major adoptions of technology in libraries. I decided that I'd also go to Philadelphia and enroll at Drexel because the program placed an emphasis on science and corporate librarianship, possibly because there were so many special libraries in the Philadelphia area."

Upon graduation in 1969, Gaunt was hired as a reference librarian by the E. I. du Pont de Nemours Lavoisier Library in Wilmington, Delaware. "It was a heady time as Dupont invested heavily in research, and as a result, supported its libraries extremely well. The libraries were part of the Central Research Department on the company's main scientific campus, and the experience of working directly with researchers was exciting and rewarding. You truly felt that the information you provided was leading to some scientific breakthrough." However, Gaunt was soon to leave Dupont to move to Rhode Island. "The geographical trajectory of my career reflects the several transfers and relocations of my husband's business career," Gaunt says. "When my husband was relocated to New England we settled in northern Rhode Island. I was at Dupont for two years in a large corporate library, and thought that I'd like to continue to be in a large organization because of the flexibility and opportunities, and I enjoyed the corporate environment. I thought I'd look for something similar."

Soon discovering that, unfortunately, there were no large corporate libraries in Rhode Island, her next thought was to look for opportunities in the two large libraries in the area—the Providence Public Library or Brown University. She applied for, interviewed, and was offered a reference position at Brown, but things didn't work out that way. "A few weeks before I was to start they contacted me with the news that the individual I was to replace was not going to leave after all, but they had an opening in serials, and asked if I would be interested in discussing it with them. While I had only a cursory knowledge of serials I thought I had nothing to lose by finding out more of what was needed. To make a long story short, I was offered the position." While it wasn't an area in which she had lots of experience, she was determined to learn, and the library was willing to take a chance on her based on her enthusiasm and general knowledge. By the time she left Brown, she was head of serials and supervised serials cataloging, serials acquisitions, and the periodicals reading room. Gaunt comments, "Among the many things I learned at Brown two things stand out: if you can deal with serials you can deal with just about anything. And if you get to know the business end of the library it will prove enormously helpful for administrative positions."

When her husband moved again—this time to New Jersey—Gaunt applied for and got a position at Rutgers as a reference librarian. It was at Rutgers that Gaunt built a career that has been remarkable, both in terms of its tenure and because of her skillful ability to flourish within the New Jersey higher education system. Beginning first as reference and online reference service librarian

at Alexander Library on the New Brunswick campus (1979–1983), Gaunt became circulation librarian at that branch (1984–1985), then director of the Humanities and Social Science Research Libraries (1986–1988), associate university librarian for research and undergraduate service (1988–1996), acting university librarian from 1996–1997, and finally, university librarian, a position she has held since 1997.

Gaunt is one of the few administrators to have successfully built a career at a single institution. When asked how—and why—she had been able to accomplish this, she noted that the size of Rutgers as an institution made it possible for her to advance without having to move from one university to another. She commented, "I know that I like change. Change is upsetting to a lot of people but I find it energizing. I spent my career before Rutgers moving every few years or so to a new institution. At Rutgers I've had lots of positions. I started in reference, and then took on almost immediately the introduction of the online database-searching program in the humanities. I became circulation librarian when someone went on leave and we had to close ranks, but primarily because I thought it would be an interesting challenge to bring up our first online circulation system. It was a great opportunity. So, I was beginning to change positions on a several-year cycle and be part of something challenging and new. The university is huge, it's diverse, it's an active research organization, and there are always lots going on. I constantly felt I was being stimulated and growing—that was the real reason for staying."

The decision to remain at the same institution was not automatic, however. "The first time I had to face whether I would stay at Rutgers was just a few years after I became associate university librarian for research and undergraduate services, a top management position reporting to the university librarian. A new university librarian was named, and I realized that I would need to think about completing my career in my current position or going to another institution in a lateral move or as university librarian. A few years later, however, the university librarian position did become open because health reasons forced our director to retire. I decided to become a candidate after being named acting university librarian and enjoying the new challenges. I was appointed university librarian about eighteen months later."

The need to remain constantly challenged keeps Gaunt motivated. "Happily, Rutgers is such a dynamic place that there is always stimulation. Our president has only been here a short time and has set many changes in motion—one being a major reorganization of undergraduate education on the New Brunswick campus. The university will also embark fairly soon on a major capital campaign. Discussions continue in the state about the organization of higher education and potential mergers of some of the institutions. There have been several key administrative changes at the university, and there are many opportunities for campus leadership." She cites cochairing the university's copyright

review committee—where she was able to lead a successful revision of the university's copyright policy that includes a statement on open access to faculty publications—as a particularly rewarding experience.

Within RUL, she has directed change through strategic planning. “The libraries . . . are implementing a realignment of responsibilities at the library management level. One of the results of the realignment is the creation of a new associate university librarian position for planning and organizational research. Assessment is a big part of the position, and gathering and using data is essential for credibility and transparency in decision making. Now that we've set in motion these organizational changes and major plans, I really want to see them through.” She expresses satisfaction with the myriad opportunities for being fulfilled that her position at Rutgers continues to provide her, but adds, “I never close the door completely on other opportunities.”

One of the themes of the ChangeMasters series has been the value of mentoring—particularly for women—in developing a career in library administration. When asked about the individuals who helped shape her career, Gaunt responds, “I have had mentors at all the places I have worked. I don't know whether they selected me or I selected them. My mentors have always been individuals who really looked out for me, people I could easily talk to, and who were willing to give me a chance and steer me along.”

When asked whether she would advise other librarians set on a career in library administration to follow in her footsteps, she replies, “I think that my experience is not a common one but it worked for me. Generally I'd advise someone to seek opportunities to meet and work with a diverse range of individuals, and be exposed to organizational structures that stimulate different ways of thinking. That usually comes from moving to new places.”

Gaunt adds that diversity in organizations is essential. Several years ago, she created an internship/residency program in collaboration with the School of Communication, Information, and Library Services at Rutgers in order to increase the diversity of the library faculty. “It's a three-year program. The student completes the MLS requirements in the first two years while working in the libraries. The program covers the salary of the intern as well as the tuition. During the two years, the intern works in several departments in order to gain experience in a range of activities in an academic library. The last rotation is with me in administration, where the intern is exposed to management, development, and communications.” Upon completing the MLS degree, the intern is offered a one-year professional position within the libraries that may be extended if an appropriate permanent position is available. This program is important, Gaunt argues, because “You need the stimulus that diversity brings. Diversity is important both in the way we typically think about it, such as racially or ethnically, as well as diversity of ideas.

We are very lucky to be in a diverse state. Our Rutgers Newark campus is the most diverse campus in the country. Because of our location it's a bit easier to attract a racially and ethnically diverse pool of candidates for staff positions, because we normally draw from the local or regional area. It's more difficult to recruit library faculty because the national pool is not as diverse—both for our teaching faculty and our library faculty—although we have to try hard to increase it. Because our librarians have faculty status, they tend to stay at Rutgers once they have become tenured, so it is critically important that we use every vacancy to attract a diverse pool of candidates to ensure that our faculty remains as diverse as possible.”

Over the past several decades, Gaunt has been remarkably successful helping define a national and regional agenda for academic librarianship. Among many appointments, she has served as the founding chair of the executive committee of New Jersey's academic library consortium, VALE (Virtual Academic Library Environment), president of the board of trustees of PALCI, the Pennsylvania Academic Library Consortium, a member of the board of governors of the Association of Research Libraries (ARL), the chair of ARL's Scholarly Communications Committee, and a member of the board of governors of the Center for Research Libraries. At the state level she has been the driving force behind many of the joint initiatives that have developed among academic libraries over the past ten years. In acknowledgement for this she received the Distinguished Service Award from the New Jersey Library Association, College and University Section in 2000; an Outstanding Service Citation from the Council of New Jersey College and University Library Deans, University Librarians, and Directors in 2001; and in 2004 a Distinguished Service Citation from VALE.

In part because Rutgers is the state university of New Jersey, the position of university librarian requires a great deal of political skills on all levels. When Gaunt was asked about how she had honed these skills, her answer was somewhat surprising. She emphasized collaboration as the most important skill needed in any kind of relationship. “When you are a collaborator,” she says, “you tend to know how to compromise, how to look for win-win situations, how to work as partners, and how your work relates to someone else's. All are really important skills in building relations, which is what politics is all about. Knowing how to leverage is also critically important. You gain so much by building on and extending the work of others.” And, she adds, “Librarians are so collaborative—we are just the ultimate collaborators—which in academia is such an incredibly important skill. I always think of the faculty as independent contractors, because their recognition and advancement is based significantly upon their achievements as individuals. Our libraries' success—and certainly our success as leaders—is based upon collaboration. And we are beginning to see in academia that multidisciplinary research involving collaboration across units and institutions is fast becoming

a norm . . . Librarian skills in collaboration bringing such units as instructional technology, learning and writing centers, media centers, and computing together are helping to forge valuable partnerships in institutions.”

Another aspect of the position involves promoting libraries to achieve greater support. “Because we depend in large measure on state support, one of our major issues is in communicating our value and marketing our strengths. Generally, I think most people love libraries and at the very least think benignly about us. But the downside is that we might also be taken for granted or neglected. Libraries have changed significantly over the last decade, and as a result I believe academic libraries and librarians have never been more valuable to their institutions. But we constantly need to educate our administrators, users, and the public about how our very positive changes have given us more opportunities to be more integral to the instructional, research, and service missions of our institutions. Especially in the digital information environment, our skills in many areas add value to the institution’s programs on so many fronts.”

Along those lines, a related skill that Gaunt had to develop as she has risen within library administration is fund-raising; a skill that she feels is essential to the success of today’s university libraries. When asked how she prepared herself to take on this responsibility, she replied, “I read a lot about fund-raising, and I’ve attended a number of programs about fund-raising. The ALADN network has

been of great assistance to my development officer who has taught me a lot. Development to a large degree is building relationships with people and I think we do that in our profession all the time. I’ve also found that having written grants early on in my career has helped my fund-raising abilities. Writing a grant consists primarily of convincing a granting agency of the importance of what you propose to do, what its impact will be for the target population, and why you are the right person or institution to do it . . . That’s very much like convincing a donor to support your library.”

During her time in Rutgers, Gaunt has seen a profound change in the use of libraries and of library resources. When asked to comment on what has had the most impact, she immediately identified technology. “It’s had major financial ramifications,” she comments, “because we now have to purchase equipment and software we never had to buy before, and we constantly have to upgrade and replace it. We’ve added digital collections to the acquisitions budget that we license and pay for annually rather than purchase them outright. And we need to recruit a new level of staff that is proficient in technology and provide even higher levels of professional development support.” Beyond the costs of equipment and resources, Gaunt observes that technology also has caused all kinds of organizational changes. “The traditional collection development-technical services-public services organizational lines around which we structured our libraries do not hold up well in the

## **Marianne Gaunt**

### **Education**

BA, Montclair State University, Montclair, New Jersey  
MLS, Drexel University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania  
ACRL/Harvard Leadership Institute, Harvard Institutes for Higher Education, Cambridge, Massachusetts

### **Professional Experience**

|              |                                                                                                        |
|--------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1969–72      | Reference and Circulation Librarian, Lavoisier Library, E. I. du Pont de Nemours, Wilmington, Delaware |
| 1972–77      | Head, Serials Department, John D. Rockefeller Jr. Library, Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island  |
| 1979–83      | Reference and Online Reference Service Coordinator, Alexander Library                                  |
| 1984–85      | Circulation Librarian, Alexander Library                                                               |
| 1986–88      | Director, Humanities and Social Science Research Libraries                                             |
| 1988–96      | Associate University Librarian for Research and Undergraduate Services                                 |
| 1996–97      | Acting University Librarian                                                                            |
| 1997–present | University Librarian, Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, New Brunswick                       |

### **Selected Awards**

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|------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2000 | Distinguished Service Award from the New Jersey Library Association, College and University Section                                   |
| 2001 | Outstanding Service Citation from the Council of New Jersey College and University Library Deans, University Librarians, and Director |
| 2004 | Distinguished Service Citation from the Virtual Academic Library Environment (VALE)                                                   |

### **Selected Service to the Profession**

|              |                                                                                |
|--------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1997–present | Executive Committee, Virtual Academic Library Environment (VALE)               |
| 1999–2003    | Governing Board, Center for Research Libraries                                 |
| 2003–2006    | Board of Directors, Association of Research Libraries                          |
| 2006–2007    | President, Board of Trustees, Pennsylvania Academic Library Consortium (PALCI) |
| 2001–present | Executive Committee, New Jersey Center for the Book                            |

digital environment. New structures are needed and decision making often becomes more complicated. Technology has forced staff to operate in a team matrix, and the lines between our traditional units have become blurred. There is much more ambiguity in our organizations and some people have a hard time living with ambiguity. Continuous change will remain in our future because there is no end to technological innovation and its impact on our work and structures.”

Perhaps because of Gaunt’s familiarity with the New Jersey political and educational landscape, Rutgers has taken the lead in at least four digital initiatives that have had enormous implications for the state. In the late 1980s, Rutgers, in cooperation initially with Princeton University, established CETH, the Center for Electronic Texts in the Humanities, which was one of the very first electronic initiatives in academic libraries to focus on and support the humanities. As project director of CETH’s predecessor, the National Center for Machine-Readable Texts in the Humanities, Gaunt was responsible for the library receiving more than \$350,000 worth of grant funding from the National Endowment of the Humanities, the Mellon Foundation, the Booth Ferris Foundation, and the New Jersey Committee for the Humanities between 1989 and 1991. CETH’s major focus was to create an inventory of machine-readable texts that could be used internationally by scholars to locate other researchers working with digital texts. In addition, CETH held annual seminars for students and scholars on research methodologies in the humanities using digital texts and specialized software, and how to develop standards for text mark-up.

Other initiatives have benefited from her leadership. In 1998, Gaunt helped to establish and became the founding chair of VALE, New Jersey’s first academic library consortium for collaborative purchasing of electronic content and enhanced resource sharing. In 2003, Gaunt provided leadership in collaboration with the New Jersey State Library to establish the New Jersey Digital Highway, which serves as a state-wide portal for the digital collections of New Jersey libraries, museums, archives, and historical societies, and is supported through an IMLS grant to Rutgers. By 2005, the success of VALE led to further collaboration among the consortium, NJLA, and the New Jersey State Library. These institutions were awarded six million dollars by the New Jersey State Legislature to spur economic and business development in the state through access to sci-

ence and business databases by small businesses, academic libraries, and public libraries. The project, known as the New Jersey Knowledge Initiative (NJKI), is one of the first such statewide initiatives.

It is in the digital environment that Gaunt sees librarians playing an increasingly larger role in the future. She notes, “I think our value to our home institutions is increasing tremendously, but sometimes our faculty don’t know everything we can do, don’t know some of the skills we can use to support their research and teaching. I can give you an example of something that is being discussed here related to our support of faculty research. At every academic institution—and at research institutions in particular—there is a premium put on faculty attracting grant support. Granting agencies are now looking at the data that come out of all that funded research and how [they] could be preserved and used again. As a result, we see that the agencies plan to ask their researchers to write into their grant proposals a data preservation component. Well, libraries are in the preservation-of-information business, and at Rutgers we’ve been talking with our vice-president for research and our faculty about the feasibility of the libraries helping to write the grant’s data preservation component and using the institutional repository maintained by the library as the preservation archive.”

When asked for final thoughts about the profession, Gaunt says, “It has been a wonderful experience for me and I feel very lucky to have had this career. I’ll tell you quite frankly I never aspired to be a director. I’ve always been interested in the challenge of the work itself—I found it so interesting and rewarding. I never viewed becoming a library director as the ultimate goal. My goal was to be challenged and to do the best job possible, and I’d advise younger librarians to like and be challenged by what they are doing. I know myself—I like change. I knew I’d never want to do the very same thing for my entire career. It just so happened that my move to administrative positions came as the opportunities for change arose. Looking back at my career, things just seemed to fall into place. But I did take risks in moving into positions for which I knew I’d have to stretch. Happily, I was supported by those around me. Librarianship is a very supportive profession. And we support intelligent risk-taking, which is the only way to move ahead. That’s what you have to do. Even if things don’t work out, you always learn something; no matter what it is, you always learn.”