

A Sabbatical: Time away to Make New Connections

Beth Bloom

Some say that a sabbatical is a right; others, a privilege, but in reality it is a gift—an opportunity, given by the academy, to fulfill one's desire to have the time and space to do quality research, to travel, and to enjoy time away from the demands of the workplace. A legitimate response to this gift, one would hope, is productivity. At universities in the United States, tenured faculty members have the opportunity to take a sabbatical every seventh year of service (the word „sabbatical“ is based on the term „Sabbath“ which in turn is based on translations of the number seven). Seton Hall University offers either six- or twelve-month sabbaticals, the former with full and the latter with $\frac{3}{4}$ salary. Many American faculty members use the time afforded them to travel abroad in order to attend professional meetings, further or complete research projects and/or to share their work with those in other countries.

Sabbaticals do not happen automatically. Faculty members must apply to the university for such leave. Applications must include information about a research project with specific goals, a research timeline, grant information, if applicable, proof of dedicated service to the university, and a track record of previous research. Applicants must appear before a committee of peers, as well as the dean of the academic unit. The provost's office is the final arbiter of the sabbatical application.

I was delighted to receive word that my six-month sabbatical application for July 1 to December 31, 2012 was approved. Indeed, it was an extreme-

ly prolific time for me. In sum, I co-edited a book published one article and a book chapter, gave five presentations, and completed research on a second article, which was the culmination of a grant from Google.

In 2010, Google had awarded a colleague (Dr. Marta Deyrup) and me \$ 15,000 to study how undergraduates do electronic research. In order to implement this project we subscribed to an on-line tracking program and used it to record the research behaviors of 43 volunteer students during the 2011–2012 academic year. Each student submitted one-hour recordings of his or her research behaviors. During the summer of 2012 I reviewed and took comprehensive notes as I watched all the audio/video recordings. My colleague and I also hired a graduate student to code our findings. We met numerous times to coordinate my notes with her coding. In addition, I used that time to prepare a comprehensive literature review, in preparation for the research article that would be a product of our Google grant findings. To dovetail on that, in anticipation of upcoming visits to Europe and an annual conference in Charleston, South Carolina, I also prepared a presentation, „The Truth Is out: How They REALLY Search“, which included clips of students

doing research and also reported on some of the data collected from our Google project.

In October 2012, Dr. Erdmute Lapp, friend, colleague, and director of the University library at the Ruhr University in Bochum (Universitätsbibliothek Bochum), Germany, hosted me for two weeks. We agreed that I would give three presentations and meet colleagues and vendors at the Frankfurt Book Fair.

We initially visited the Universiteit Utrecht University Library (<http://www.uu.nl/library>) Uithof, an extra-



ordinary building that was completed in 2004. Its collection focuses on science, theology, philosophy, geosciences, mathematics, medicine, veterinary medicine, and numerous special collections. There, we met with our hosts who gave us a tour of their remarkable library facility. I presented our initial findings on how students do research, including representative recordings of students doing and commenting on their research, all of which was followed by a lively discussion that revealed commonalities in our efforts to help students do research on-line. We then traveled across town and toured the Utrecht University Library City Centre, (<http://www.uu.nl/university/library/EN/contact/UniversityLibraryCityCentre/Pages/default.aspx>) whose collections focus on humanities, law, economics and governance. The library, completed

in 2009, is comprised of a chain of six nationally listed buildings, formerly in various stages of disrepair and whose original characteristics were hidden by numerous alterations. They were refurbished, connected, and modernized into a state-of-the-art library building (Grosfeld Van der Velde, architect). In addition to its beauty and many unique rooms and spaces, most impressive are the library's automatic check-in/check-out systems and the ability to locate specific books in touch-screen maps placed at strategic locations.

Utrecht is a beautiful city, with elegant buildings, parks, lovely restaurants, and a fine transportation system. However, I was struck by the ubiquity of bicycles. I have never before encountered a bicycle parking lot that had a multiple level storage system designed to accommodate the demand for parking space.

Moreover, I was brought back to the reality of driving in New Jersey as I dodged cyclists who seemed determined to get to their destinations in record time. It would appear that speed has universal appeal.

Back in Germany, Dr. Lapp and I visited the Universitätsbibliothek Duisburg-Essen, where we were greeted and introduced to the library staff. I then shared my Google presentation and also „Getting Back to Basics: An Online Information Fluency Workshop for Teaching Faculty at Seton Hall”, which documented the history of librarians' participation in creating and facilitating information fluency (literacy) as part of Seton Hall's new core curriculum. Later, I shared similar information with librarians at the University Library at Bochum.

Our visit to the Frankfurt Book Fair was most exciting. It was by far the largest professional exhibition that I had ever attended. According to Publishers Weekly.com¹ at least „150,000 visitors representing 7500 companies and 110 countries [were] expected to gather to trade rights, network, and participate in an energetic, forward-looking professional program”. Those who have never had the privilege of attending this gargantuan event might not imagine its enormity. The entire fair, attended by tens of thousands of people over a five-day period, occupies several entire buildings and a courtyard square. In 2012 the special guest of the Frankfurt Book Fair was New Zealand, which shared its history and culture in an exhibit consisting of a glorious display of enormous screens surrounded by pools of water of various sizes and shapes. In all of the above venues, I felt a great kinship with and overwhelming support from my European colleagues. We have so many similar is-



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¹ <http://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/international/Frankfurt-Book-Fair/article/54086-bigger-and-better-frankfurt-book-fair-2012-preview.html> (accessed August 13, 2013).

sues and frustrations with our students. In a way I found it comforting (perhaps distressing) that students' on-line research behaviors appear to be universally problematic in their tendency to favor Google and Wikipedia over proprietary, reliable library resources. These issues might be deemed generational, indeed not cultural, so this affects all of us. Librarians are beginning to respond to this. At the Uithof library, for example, they have developed a Wikipedia libguide, so that it can be incorporated into their comprehensive on-line reference collection. I agree with their solution and feel confidence in and interpret this as a signal that we must all work together to help our students rediscover the gift that quality research brings.

I returned to the United States feeling supported and confident in the research path I've taken. This resulted in successful presentations at Rutgers University and at the Charleston conference. Dr. Deyrup and I supplemented our presentation with an article describing our research and some of the student behaviors in the Google tapes. The article, titled „The Truth Is out How Students REALLY Search“, will be published in the 2012 Charleston Conference Proceedings.

As my sabbatical drew to a close in December 2012, I refocused my energies on

a book *Successful Strategies for Teaching Undergraduate Student Research* that I edited with Dr. Deyrup. During this process, I also contributed one chapter, titled „Training the Trainer: Librarians as Faculty Coaches and Workshop Designers“, which charted our experiences in establishing information literacy as an essential competency in our new core curriculum and librarians as the arbiters for the infusion of that competency into new courses. We submitted final edits and articles at the end of January 2013. The book has been advertised in the 2013 Rowman & Littlefield Library and Information Science catalog and will be available soon.

I am greatly indebted to Seton Hall University for affording me this opportunity to travel, learn, and write. Most important, however, is the support and friendship of Dr. Lapp, who arranged my very special journey and who introduced me to wonderful new friends. (August 13, 2013)



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