

handful of years, and then launched them into advanced library positions, often in South Florida.

Nicole Covone supported her library staff in continuing their education, which for some was the pursuit of an MLIS while employed at the library. She encouraged employees to gain experience in library organizations and build their resume by serving on SEFLIN committees or trying new initiatives within JWU. Nicole saw the value in allowing flexibility for staff to attend conferences or fellowships, at local and national level. This foresight overshadowed deficiencies some smaller institutions may suffer from, such as lack of travel funding or fewer opportunities for advancement within the institution. But JWU library employees were advancing in their career development through experience and trusted guidance from a mentor. Librarians and library staff who gained experience at JWU have gone on to work at institutions including Florida International University, Nova Southeastern University, and Johns Hopkins University.

Because of JWU's size, librarians had the opportunity to wear many hats, sharing in the responsibilities of circulation, event planning, collection development, student-worker development, instruction, and reference. Key principles that made the JWU work environment successful were shared responsibilities, an organized system, and the opportunity and support to experience and contribute to a wide range of duties.

the profession is difficult. It's hard to assign numbers, but the engagement and involvement of JWU library workers in library organizations, conferences, and their continued success in the library field correlates with the library mentorship Nicole Covone developed over her 19 years at JWU.

## Mentorship in Libraries

At the 2019 North American Serials Interest Group, Inc. (NASIG) 2019 conference, Kirstin Steele and Courtney McAllister presented on mentorship. "McAllister likened mentorship to the concept of interlibrary loan: just as it is not possible for one library to have a copy of every book or article in their local collection, it is not feasible for one librarian to know everything they need to thrive and grow. In both cases, we strategically share what we have to expand the scope of our opportunities."<sup>1</sup> This mentor-mentee relationship is the legacy of the North Miami JWU Library by furthering the profession and encouraging former mentees to develop their own library interests and become mentors themselves. Mentorship and experience are the MLIS 2.0. To be a librarian, you need the MLIS degree. But to grow and find your niche—to take your career to the next level, that development relies on experience and guidance in the field.

Many MLIS students have the benefit of being employed in libraries as they pursue their graduate degree. In *Making the Leap*, Michelle Guittar echoed the benefits of a library assistant role. "My position provided me the opportunity to grow professionally: to cultivate broad expertise in different areas, collaborate on a range of projects across the library, and become familiar with the particulars of the organizational culture of academic and research libraries."<sup>2</sup> A fieldwork course, internship, or assistantship in an MLIS program provides practical application of the theories, practices, and protocols taught in Masters courses, but those of us fortunate to find employment in the field can attest to

the added benefits our employment experience provided our skillset and our resume.

Guittar added thoughts on the vital role library leadership plays in the professional pipeline. "Supervisors



Jade Kastel, Lindsey Corey, and Jordan Workman presenting at the 2019 SEFLIN Conference/  
Photo credit: Nicole Covone

What is telling is the continued relationship former employees share with JWU's former library director, Nicole Covone. This mentorship benefits the Florida library system, but to quantify the role these relationships play in

<sup>1</sup>Courtney McAllister & Kirstin Steele (2020) Mentorship in Collections and Resource Management: An Implied Competency, *The Serials Librarian*, 78:1-4, 93-97, DOI: 10.1080/0361526X.2020.1731884

<sup>2</sup>Ryan, Marianne, and Guittar, Michelle. "Making the Leap" *Reference & User Services Quarterly* [Online], Volume 52 Number 3 (22 March 2013)

and administrators have a great opportunity to encourage pre-librarian semi-paraprofessionals to be engaged with the field by encouraging them to seek out connections to broaden their experience and skills and treat them as resources to be cultivated. I found mentorship from such colleagues to be invaluable, as a young proto-librarian, to help me find my way at one institution as well as in the profession as a whole.<sup>73</sup> I echo this statement. I entered into librarianship while working in the library at Broward College, where librarian colleagues planted the seed and supported my pursuit of an MLIS degree. Johnson & Wales University was my first librarian position and the catalyst for launching my dream career in music librarianship.

## What can Florida libraries take from this experience?

A eulogy for the JWU Library in North Miami is touching, but the void in service and loss to the Florida library field will not be filled by sentiment. A lesson from the pandemic comes in the form of introspection. There's an opportunity to reflect on the value of looking into a void and seeing "a consoling or hopeful prospect," as stated by the trusted library friend, Merriam-Webster.

Look into the void in librarianship caused by JWU's departure and you'll see that a small library team had a large impact, even if that impact is difficult to quantify. Quality is something that every library employee can offer, and this often appears like enthusiastic engagement, trying new experiences, learning on the fly, playing an active role in your environment, and looking for the silver lining in situations. These steps create positive ripples in the library profession.

What each library employee accomplishes day-to-day may not seem like much, but each contribution compounds, and meaningful impact can be the result of repeatedly showing up and contributing. When we do what we can, where we are, with what we have, change happens in increments. A book is read page by page. It's the same in our professional growth. A moral of this story is to foster an environment that inspires professional development and implements strategies that encourage employees to grow within their daily work. Incorporating Impact into Library Systems

"Well begun is half done." It's an old adage that teaches putting something in motion is the bulk of getting it done, and initiating an impactful atmosphere can be achieved through many avenues. Identify avenues that interest you and see how they can be included in your current position. Brainstorm with your team and determine easily-accessible options for your professional development and identify where opportunities for service exist. For example, the Southeast Florida Library Information Network, a multitype library cooperative, offers webinars, including international presentations, that you can participate in from the comfort of your computer. Institutions offer workshops for employees and many professional organizations offer mentorship programs. Could your library be closed for the day of the regional library conference? Can you take turns and share coverage or duties to allow employees to travel to a national conference? What ways can you gain experience or add to your resume within your institution?

<sup>73</sup>Ibid.

Once you've determined manageable goals for your department, implement the steps towards these goals into your workflow, benefiting your work and your growth. When we create impactful progress that's part of our daily process, growth and duties work together. New library staff benefit from concrete experiences and publications. For example, at JWU, we hosted a yearly Literary Cake Contest. This event demanded our time and energy for a portion of the year and we took the opportunity to turn this experience into a poster for a SEFLIN conference. In the larger picture, the addition of the poster was not really all that time consuming, and we had the support of our director to all attend the conference.



Literary Cake Contest 2018-"Chew and Swallow" inspired by the book "Cloudy With a Chance of Meatballs." Created by Johnson & Wales University students Cashe Clark and Jasmine Lowe, a JWU library student employee. Photo credit: JWU Library, ScholarsArchive@JWU <https://scholarsarchive.jwu.edu/cake/24/>

Presenting your experiences and networking with colleagues are helpful events for early career professionals, but this extracurricular professional development can easily fall by the wayside when juggling the learning curve in a new job and negotiating with an institution that perhaps does not see the value in conferences or outside committees. In a service-oriented position like librarianship, there can be a tendency to prioritize service of patrons, students, or faculty before oneself. This is an opportunity for library leadership to integrate professional development into the workplace and give employees agency to focus on their own growth in conjunction with their service duties.



Jordan Workman, Nicole Covone, Lindsey Corey, and Jade Kastel. Photo credit: Lindsey Corey

## Where are they now?

If you're curious what happened to the team of four JWU library workers facing job loss in the pandemic, here's the synopsis 15 months after the Miami Herald article hit the newsstands. Lindsey Corey found employment working for the West Florida Public Libraries as a computer technician; she recently graduated with an MLIS from the University of South Florida. Nicole Covone is the new medical librarian at Memorial Healthcare, and Jordan Workman is a Librarian 1 working with the bookmobiles at the North Dade Regional Library in the Miami-Dade County Public Library System. Jade Kastel worked as a visiting assistant librarian at Purdue University Fort Wayne for one year and is now the music librarian at Western Illinois University.

If you found the legacy of the North Miami JWU Library inspiring, you're likely already fostering aspects of mentorship and day-to-day growth that propel the library profession forward. A branch, a unit, a small library can each impact the development of early career library professionals and contribute to the larger library community. Yes, it's sad and a loss that the North Miami JWU Library is no longer here, but the legacy of the professionals who graduated with their MLIS 2.0 from the JWU library is alive and well.

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