



Library Communications Through the Years

An interview with Barbara Hood,
Smathers Libraries Public Information Officer
and Director of Communications from 1999 to 2022

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Barbara Hood behind the camera lens in front of Library West in 2022.

Introduction

Prior to joining the Libraries in 1999, Barbara Hood owned and managed Creative Graphics for 20 years. Barbara graduated from Sebring High School and to this day, she produces the annual newsletter for the Class of 1970. She earned her B. A. in

"Librarians have become ambassadors of the library."

Visual Arts from the University of South Florida in 1973. She is a previous winner of the Superior Accomplishment Award from the University of Florida. Barbara is co-author of *Collaborating with Strangers: Facilitating Workshops in Libraries, Classes, and Non-profits*, published in 2017. Barbara retired after 23 years of service to the University of Florida George A. Smathers Libraries in December 2022. In this interview, we hear from Barbara as she reflects on developments in communication and cultural shifts within the Libraries.

What is a unique part of your job at UF?

I was originally hired to report to the first development officer for the Libraries. I took over and redesigned the three newsletters: *Howe Society*, *Library News*, and *Chapter One* (renamed *News from the SOURCE* in 2019). As Communications Director, I had a lot of fun and get to design, write, and edit all kinds of promotional materials, and plan for a variety of events, such as the annual Michael Gannon lecture and the [Bill] Nelson Initiative on Ethics and Leadership (Spring 2023). Most recently, I reported directly to the Dean of University Libraries. I enjoyed working with so many different people!

How has your work changed over the years?

The Libraries purchased their first digital copier right after I started and that opened up a completely new world for us. I could print almost everything in-house with much better quality than was available before. When the Facilities Planning Department purchased a plotter, we could print banners, oversized posters, and wall lettering.

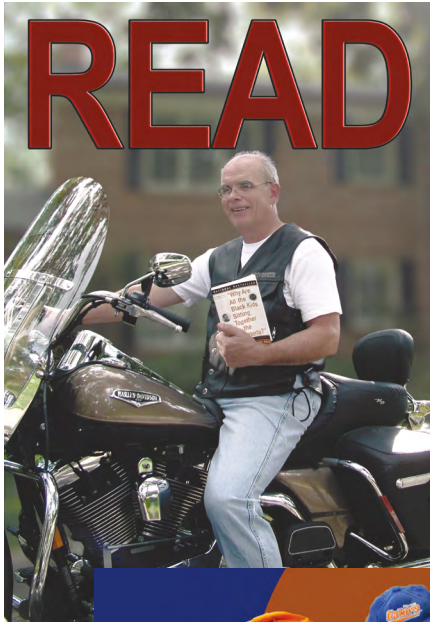


Melody Royster, Associate University Librarian, sharing information with students at Fall Festival 2019.

Before that, librarians promoted services in single-color flyers with poor quality. I met with Special and Area Studies Collections curators and the chairs of each of the libraries and told them I wanted to create brochures for each branch and the Special and Area Studies Collections. They all worked with me to design brochures. Some of the updated versions are still used today for instruction, outreach, and promotion.

There weren't nearly as many events back then and I began creating posters and flyers for them. A few librarians and branches had events, but they were small and focused on specific audiences. Since the early 2000s, librarians have become more active in promotion, outreach, and event planning. The former Public Relations Committee used to have to tell the librarians and staff, "everyone is the face of the Libraries. You have to do outreach too or nobody will know what the Libraries do." One person cannot do it all. I'm so impressed with the outreach everybody does now.

The internet exploded since I came here. I didn't even know how to make a webpage when I started. Rich Bennett was the webmaster and was so patient with me as I learned to do some basic layouts. The work is constantly changing and I've had to keep up. I've taken a lot of classes on software. You have to have the mindset that you will keep learning.



What are you most proud of during your time at UF?

In 1985 the American Library Association started making READ posters. We decided to create some too. I didn't have a good camera, so Bill Hanssen from Facilities was the photographer. I was the Art Director and Designer and I would contact anyone we wanted to feature. It was really so much fun! Former UF President Bernie Machen agreed to be our first one, and he was photographed on his motorcycle. Then we did former head football coach Urban Meyer, former basketball coach Billy Donovan and former athletic director Jerry Foley—plus all sorts of faculty members, athletes, and student groups. I eventually got a better quality camera and became the photographer too. People really loved them, especially the Albert and Alberta poster; that was the most requested poster. I sent those to so many to people! I think the last READ poster was of the Girls Technology Camp hosted by the Marston Science Library.



The Read-a-Thon (later renamed ReadFest) and Edible Book Contests were definitely highlights for me. I was chair of the Read-a-Thon Committee for 13 years. The Read-a-Thon was under a canopy on the lawn outside Library West. The UF and Gainesville communities signed up to read ten-minute segments of a favorite book. We had different themes each year and one day was always a Children's Day with Baby Gator or young elementary school guests. We always had pizza—the mother of one of the owners of Five Stars Pizza was a retired librarian and he remembered that libraries never had enough money, so he donated pizzas. We held the Edible Book Contest for about ten years. Eastside High School Culinary Arts school students entered the Edible Book Contest for the first several years. Winners of the contest were given a gift bag with an Edible Book Contest apron and other prizes donated by local merchants.

What are the Libraries' best assets?

I think the Libraries' best assets are the people. I've always thought that. Over the years, I've enjoyed getting to know so many people. It's been great. We also have some wonderful spaces and collections. The Grand Reading Room is one of our great assets that not many people know about. And the materials in our Special and Area Studies Collections are a great asset.



Edible Book Contest, Edgar Allan Poe cake submission.

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Do you have advice for the next Communications Director?

Stay flexible—every day. You might have your day planned out but something will be thrown at you that's more important or urgent and you've got to switch and get back to your other projects later. Set priorities. Set big picture and smaller, daily priorities. In addition, learn to say "no" when necessary, which is hard to do sometimes.

What are your plans for retirement?

I want to keep learning in retirement. I don't know what I'll do next, but I want to keep learning and exploring. My husband, Fred, and I are brainstorming ideas for a possible part-time business. We want to travel to see our daughters and grandchildren more, especially while they're young and still want to see us! We all met at the beach for the holidays—maybe that will become a new tradition. **S**



Left to Right: April Hines, Barbara J. Hood, and Bess G. de Farber promoting their book, *Collaborating with Strangers*.