

Featuring: Linda Slater

*Public Services Manager, John W. Scott Health Sciences Library, University of Alberta
Degrees and professional designations held: BEd, BA(Hon), MLIS*



1. Tell us about your current position.

As Public Services Manager at the John W. Scott Health Sciences Library, University of Alberta (U of A), I am responsible for ensuring that the circulation and reference services provided at our integrated Service Desk and the reference service provided at our satellite location in the Edmonton Clinic Health Academy meet the needs of our users and are in line with system-wide policies and procedures. In this role, I supervise five Public Service Assistants and coordinate the public service activities of nine librarians and two other nonprofessional staff. I participate in the U of A Libraries' Public Service Council, which is comprised of the Public Services Managers from each unit library as well as other key personnel with duties essential to Public Service. We meet bi-weekly to discuss public service policies and issues and to coordinate upcoming changes to public service policies and procedures.

In addition to my duties as Public Services Manager, I have liaison responsibility for the Faculty of Nursing and interim responsibility for the Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation. As liaison, I am responsible for collection management as well as coordinating information literacy sessions for these faculties. I also consult with students and

faculty on a regular basis when they need assistance with literature searches or other library-related matters.

As is the case with many health sciences libraries, I am frequently called upon to work with systematic review teams. In some cases, this involves one or two consultations to assist in developing a search strategy, but in other cases, it involves full membership on the systematic review team. In these cases, I am responsible for developing and executing the search, advising on citation management, and providing the details of the search methodology for the final publication.

2. What do you find most interesting about your work?

The thing I find most interesting is helping students and faculty with challenging literature searches. Selecting the right array of databases and the right subject headings and keywords is very much like solving a puzzle, and it is satisfying when the student or faculty member and I can work together to develop the perfect strategy (or as perfect as a search strategy can ever be).

I am fascinated by the wide range of research and instructional interests of my liaison faculties, and I enjoy the challenge of ensuring that collections decisions I make will support those in my liaison areas.

3. What has been your greatest professional challenge?

Taking on the role as our Public Services Manager has probably been my greatest challenge as my tendency to want to say "yes" to everyone (library users or staff) doesn't always jibe with system policies and (or) operational necessity. Fortunately, our library system provides support through on-going training and mentorship to new supervisors and managers to deal with issues such as that.

4. How did you become interested in medical librarianship?

During library school, I had thoughts of going into public librarianship. However, that changed when I applied for a position as part of what was then known as the "Prairie Internship" program. Through this program I secured a summer position at the John W. Scott Health Sciences Library at the U of A and my interest in health sciences librarianship grew from there.

I undertook a six-month job exchange at the main branch of the Edmonton Public Library (EPL) in 2001. It was an interesting experience, but it didn't lead me to contemplate a switch to public librarianship. I realized I preferred being a specialist rather than a generalist, and while I certainly learned a lot from my time at EPL and I enjoyed working with the EPL staff (whose collective knowledge of where to

find information about everything from aardvarks to Zoroastrianism was truly astounding), I was happy to get back to my regular position at the Scott Library.

5. What was your background before you became a medical librarian?

My educational background was in the humanities. I majored in English during my Education degree and in Germanic languages and literature in my Arts degree. After finishing my Arts degree, I worked in the U of A's Extension Library as a library clerk. Before the Alberta Regional Library System was developed, the Extension Library provided a mail-order library service to those in rural and remote areas not served by a local library. My job entailed retrieving books from customer lists, packing them up for delivery, and unpacking and shelving them when they were returned. It was during my time at the Extension Library that I decided to go to library school. I received my MLIS degree from the U of A in 1988. I worked briefly in the library at the Cross Cancer Institute in Edmonton, and in May, 1989, I started working at the John W. Scott Health Sciences Library, where I have been ever since (except for my six-month exchange at Edmonton Public Library).

6. What would you be doing if you weren't a librarian?

It's hard to say. At the time I decided to go to library school, I really didn't have a lot of other things I contemplated doing. The only other thing I had considered was to go into graduate study in Germanic languages, but I didn't think I could sustain the interest required to do that. With the interests I have since developed, if I were sent back in time and librarianship wasn't an option, I might have pursued a career in either physical education or ethnomusicology.

7. What do you think is the most interesting issue in the library field (medical libraries or more general) today?

The economics of providing library services is an important issue. The closing and under-funding of libraries is, of course, an unfortunate outcome of decisions politicians and bureaucrats justify by economics and, therefore, identifying means to increase our influence on those who make funding decisions is essential.

While I am not a techie, I think another interesting endeavour in the library field is the design of database interfaces that are intuitive and allow users to find the information they need with as little mediation as possible.

8. What accomplishment are you most proud of?

I am extremely proud of the success of the 2003 CHLA Conference held here in Edmonton. As Chair of the Organizing Committee, a lot of the "glory" for the success came my way, but the conference would not have been successful without the hard work, creativity, and flexibility of all the Organizing Committee members (including our Goodwill Ambassador, Ed Montosaurus).

9. Whom do you admire, and why?

I admire anyone who has made it their life's calling to work with those with special needs or with the marginalized. They have the kind of patience and compassion I

wish I had, and they don't get paid nearly as much as they should.

10. Is there anything about you that your colleagues might be surprised to know?

I was almost involved in a traffic accident with the Queen Mother's motorcade when the Queen Mother was in Edmonton in 1985 to open the 5th World Angus Forum (that's Angus cattle – not men named Angus). I was a passenger in my friend Jennifer's car, and we were sitting in an intersection waiting to make a left-hand turn. The car was halfway into the intersection when coming from the other direction was a limousine following a couple of police motorcycles with their lights flashing. Jennifer panicked and hit the gas, turning in front of the limousine. As we cut in front (too close for comfort, but fortunately no collision), I recognized the Queen Mother sitting in the back seat of the limo. The big hat and the pastel dress gave it away!

11. Tell us about some of your hobbies.

I enjoy fitness activities. I play the guitar in a French Canadian folk group and sing in a choir (both strictly amateur!). And, of course, like any librarian, I enjoy reading.

12. What is your favourite place in Canada, and why?

The river valley in Edmonton. It provides the opportunity to escape the city and go for a walk (run, bike, or ski) in the woods without actually leaving the city.

A close second is Hot Springs Cove in Maquinna Marine Park close to Tofino. You get spectacular views of the Pacific Ocean while relaxing in nice hot water. For those who don't know it, the hot springs are right on the rocks of the cove, and just when you think the water is getting too hot to bear, a wave of cold water washes in from the ocean and cools everything down again.

13. What advice would you give to a new member of CHLA or someone new to the field?

Get involved in something that brings you into contact with librarians outside your own library and outside your own local area. There's so much to learn from your colleagues – locally and nationally, and internationally, if you have the opportunity. And, of course, they can learn from you as well.

14. What are your plans for the future?

In trying to answer this question, I realize I'm not much of a long-term planner, and I really take things as they come. Career-wise, I plan to stay at the U of A for the foreseeable future. Given that change is a fact of life in all libraries and post-secondary institutions, even though I've been working at the same place for 23 years, what I do and how I do it has certainly evolved, and I've never felt my job getting stale or lacking in challenge.

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