

Academic BRASS

Published by the
BRASS Business Reference in Academic Libraries Committee

Vol 4(1), Spring 2009

ACADEMIC BRASS Interview: Jeanie Welch

Jeanie Welch retired earlier this year after over 40 years in academic business librarianship. Soon after, she was a winning contestant on the show Jeopardy! which aired on February 19, 2009. Her long and successful career in a “fascinating field” she “never tired of” offers insights and advice for nascent academic business librarians.

Full name: Jeanie Maxine Welch

Degree(s): B.A., MA. Librarianship, University of Denver; Master of International Management, Thunderbird School of Global Management

Years of membership with ALA/RUSA/BRASS: Member of ALA since 1979, member of RUSA and BRASS since the 1980s.

Duration of career as business librarian: 40.5 years

Title you retired from: Professor and Reference Librarian, University of North Carolina, Charlotte.

Publications: *The Spice Trade: A bibliographic guide to sources of historical and economic information* (1994), *The Tokyo Trial: A bibliographic guide to English-language sources* (2002), and several articles in professional journals (1).

Q: What was it like to be on Jeopardy?

JW: Jeopardy was very intense. I have a much greater respect for anyone who has ever been on Jeopardy—win or lose. I love seeing librarians on Jeopardy. It is a great advertisement for our profession.

Q: As a business librarian, where did you look to for inspiration or mentorship? What was the best lesson you learned from any that you found?

JW: My first mentor was my first boss—Ms. Lora Jeanne Wheeler—at the Thunderbird School of Global Management. She was the best international business librarian of her day. She wrote one of the first resource guides on this topic in the 1960s. She tirelessly mentored the new librarians that she hired right out of library school, teaching them everything that she knew. She spent time to go over all the specialized sources of information, what they covered and how to use them. I will always be grateful to her. That foundation in print sources continued to prove useful as things went online because I had a good grasp of the content I was looking for, and that guided where I could look for it.

Q: Putting aside any professional or institutional guidelines of competencies of business librarians, based on your years of experience, how would you describe a 'proficient' (academic) business librarian?

JW: To me a proficient business librarian understands business and economics terminology and concepts as well as basic reference librarianship.

Q: How many years of experience would you say it took you to match that description above?

JW: It takes at least two really busy years to get started.

Q: How has the nature of providing business reference changed in your personal experience? For instance, was there a pattern of declining ready-reference questions?

JW: I don't think that ready-reference questions have necessarily decreased, but the interface for answering them has changed with online guides. For this reason tracking statistics on visits to library guides and spending time on updating and maintaining them are important aspects of business reference work. In terms of the nature of questions, some of the standard questions remain, like how to research a company or sources of industry analysis. But some of the questions, for example in the area of finance, have become more complex, where people now seek data on things like foreign stocks and derivatives.

Q: It seems to me that knowing your customers or users is increasingly important - in this case it would be students and faculty - what are some ways you go to know your users over the years?

JW: At our institution any new course planning involved a mandatory consultation with a librarian to see if and what sources of information is available to support that course. Other methods have included things like citation analysis of student work, working with faculty instructors.

Q: Do you see any areas where collaboration among business librarians might make sense to reduce redundant work?

JW: One area is sharing information about electronic resources like databases. Subscriptions to these resources are a significant commitment so sharing information about whether it was worth purchasing or not, and why, etc. is very helpful.

Q: If you were to write a textbook on academic business librarianship, what would be the title of the first chapter, and what would it be about?

JW: The first chapter would be “What’s New—Business Periodicals and Indexes.”

Q: What kind of research do you think would be useful for informing the practice of business librarians?

JW: Sources of information for private companies. Often we have to be the bearer of bad news that there really is no easy way to get substantial information on private companies. More work in this area would be very useful.

Q: What compelled you to continue your career in business librarianship day after day, year after year?

JW: I decided when I was twelve years old that I wanted to be a librarian. Although I fell into this particular area by accident, business librarianship turned out to be a fascinating field, and I never tired of it.

Q: Can you share any memorable exchange you've had with a fellow librarian, student or faculty related to your role as a business librarian?

JW: I can't think of one incident, but I am very grateful for the librarians who founded BLINC (Business Librarianship in North Carolina), which is now a section of the North Carolina Library Association. This is an informal group of business librarians who create opportunities to network in our state. We have a state library convention only every two years, and BLINC was an opportunity to meet and network more frequently.

Q: Any words of wisdom for those entering into business librarianship now?

JW: I encourage people to become a business librarian. There is always a demand for this position. At our library we had a young business librarian who decided to move on after 2 years with us, and at that time she had no problems getting job offers. I would also urge them to get an MBA or at least take or audit classes to learn terminology and concepts and increase credibility with patrons and faculty. If they don't have a business degree, I recommend taking at least one accounting class. Accounting gives you the basics to understand companies and how business works. I earned my second masters over 4 years, taking one course per semester. I waited about 10 years into my career to get this degree but I would recommend doing it sooner if possible. I also urge the use of the Web as much as possible. Business is an ideal subject for the Web, including international business. Even countries that do not have English as an official language have created English-language Web sites of business and economic information.

Q: What book(s) are you currently reading?

JW: I have just finished John Grisham's latest book *The Associate* and *The 19th Wife* (a book selected for a book club that I have joined).

Written by Hyun-Duck Chung, NCSU Libraries Fellow and Librarian for Management and Entrepreneurship. hyun_duck_chung@ncsu.edu

(1) Select citations of works authored by Jeanie Welch:

Welch, J. M. (2009). Business.gov. Journal of Business & Finance Librarianship, 14(1), 70-75.

Welch, J. M. (2007). Click and be counted: A new standard for reference statistics. Reference Librarian, 47(1), 95-104.

Welch, J. M., & Mozenter, F. L. (2006). Loosening the ties that bind: Academic librarians and tenure. College & Research Libraries, 67(2), 164-176.

Welch, J. M. (2005). The electronic welcome mat: The academic library web site as a marketing and public relations tool. Journal of Academic Librarianship, 31(3), 225-228.

Welch, J. M. (2005). Who says we're not busy? library web page usage as a measure of public service activity. Reference Services Review, 33(4), 371-379.

Cipkowski, P., Holmberg, M., & Welch, J. M. (2003). Electronic journals and aggregated databases: New roles for public service librarians. Serials Librarian, 44(3/4), 317-323.

Mozenter, F., Sanders, B. T., & Welch, J. M. (2000). Restructuring a liaison program in an academic library. College and Research Libraries, 61(5), 432-440.

Welch, J. M. (1996). Is there life after serials cancellation? The Bottom Line: Managing Library Finances, 9(2), 18-20.

Welch, J. M. (1990). Free bank letters as sources of economic and financial information. Journal of Business and Finance Librarianship, 1(2), 5-17.

Welch, J. M., & Dugger, L. (1989). Suggested guidelines for salary determination in an academic library. Journal of Academic Librarianship, 14(6), 366-371.

Welch, J. M. (1988). Are all reference jobs created equal? A comparison of public and academic libraries. RQ, 27(3), 396-403.