

Faculty Research Highlights

An interview with Catherine Minter, Herman B Wells Library, Indiana University, Bloomington

Catherine Minter, Librarian for French & Italian, Germanic Studies, Classical Studies, Philosophy, and Linguistics, Herman B Wells Library E960 IUB, was interviewed about her research interests and methods on Oct. 27, 2010 by Andrea Morrison. Catherine's summary vita is available at <http://www.libraries.iub.edu/index.php?pageId=8586>.

Q. We know you are a successful researcher. What would you like to share with InULA members about your research?

A. I began in my position in January 2009 and I discovered that my background in Ph.D. research in Germanic Studies supports my position as faculty liaison. Once the faculty recognized my status as a serious researcher, they took me more seriously, just as in my previous position in England.

Q. What are your primary and secondary research interests?

A. My primary research interest flows from my dissertation topic, late 18th to early 19th century German literature and medicine. Spending four years reflecting and studying on my research topic was a key factor in identifying future research topics. Librarians don't always have years to reflect on their research, but many researchers move away from their dissertation topic and use time-management to address the lack of time. The habit of gathering and reflecting on information I learned then is critical as a foundation for my future research. My program in England was immersive – thrown in at the beginning – and I discovered questions needing to be answered that developed into current research. My first book in 2002 was based on my dissertation and my current book project focuses on the same field. I also edited a book in 2004 and published a number of articles. This work helped me realize that time for thinking about the materials gathered is just as important as active research. There is pressure to publish and that is not very conducive to uncovering new ideas compared to taking time to think about the material. Blaise Cronin was correct in stating that faculty have unstructured time in the day in which to write and do research, and librarians' days are structured, which makes research more difficult to accomplish. One tension that may arise is the balance between professional development and service. My personal goal is to achieve tenure with a primary focus on professional development and secondary on service, so I select service opportunities strategically.

My secondary research interest is Western European library history in the 18th and 19th centuries. My last article on the classification of libraries and the image of the librarian in Germany published in *Library and Information History* in 2009 appeared to have the greatest impact of all my writing at the present based on contact from researchers around the world. This was published in a UK journal--U.S. librarians are not limited to publishing in the U.S. and should look abroad for opportunities.

Q. How do you accomplish the research and organize your writing?

A. I use two separate processes for writing articles and books. For articles, I often begin with a clear argument, a line to follow that is known even during the gathering of research materials. However, for books, the process of research is organic and complex. First, I start by

gathering research materials. The next important step is to think about the materials, letting them speak for themselves. I pay particular attention to *not* manipulating my findings into a concept or a plan in the beginning. While an article may take around 6 months to submission, a book may take about 3 years. Taking time to think is critical to the generation of creative and original ideas.

Q. What is your process and methodology for writing books?

A. I have a specific technique for completing research that I learned from a fellow student's professor at my alma mater. When I first started researching for a book, I would gather materials, all of them, and then proceed to study them. Now I gather extensive materials and begin the process of thinking about them at the same time. I write notes on the materials which are mostly primary sources. On any specific topic, I may have around forty pages of related notes or snippets in a working document referring back to a theme in my primary source material. This allows for space for the idea to emerge. Also as a writer, I avoid shoehorning the material into a premature plan of writing or thesis. Each working document relates to the theoretical text and provides a summary of notes.

My overall methodology is historical, an approach I prefer because of working with primary documents. In all, the most challenging part of writing is to plan the idea-- the overarching concept or thesis. In my working document, I highlight specific notes that need additional research. I continually review the working documents and after careful deliberation a narrative emerges. Rather than crafting continuous prose, I craft my narrative with the working document approach. I avoid writer's block using this method – I'm never in front of a blank computer screen under pressure to write! Nothing is worse to a writer than that scenario.

I pick the best part of day, preferably the morning, and dedicate a certain amount of time each week, a little bit every day, to progressing on my working documents. Eventually, the first draft of a book is completed in working document sections. At that point, I write the complete second draft of my book from these sections. I write carefully and thoughtfully and do not edit my prose beyond these two drafts; nor do I ask colleagues to edit my material. For an article, for example, the peer review committee would review it and decide on publishing.

Q. Have you ever applied for an InULA Research Incentive Fund?

A. I was granted a RIF in 2009 in conjunction with another IU grant to support travel to write an article. IUB is very supportive of faculty with grants, which was not my experience in England. I encourage librarians to apply for multiple grants for a project, especially to travel; for example, to finish my article, I needed to consult books in German libraries.

Q. Are you active in InULA?

A. I would like to serve on the Scholarship Committee, because it is so interesting to find out what librarians are researching. It is ironic that certain InULA members may not apply for grants—that may not be a good idea because it is non-supportive of members who are most active.

Q. How do you feel when you are *not* writing?

A. Unwell, guilty, panicky. My training developed this attitude. While working on my PhD, one of the most valuable skills I learned was the importance of *habit!* I try to write every morning a little bit in one of my working documents. The working document writing process has another benefit – it contributes to economy of style. It's not as expansive as fluently writing lots of

prose, but now I prefer a more organized, concise style. From 40 pages of a working document, I may complete twenty pages of concise text.

Q. Any final thoughts about research in general?

A. I display a quote at my workstation that I believe offers good advice:

Most successful men are full of tact – it is the fitting time they seek, the fitting influences they ply, the fitting goals they aim at.

Justin Winsor, in *The Library Journal* 1 (1877): 64.

To me this means that we move forward most effectively when we choose opportunities that are right for us —an important point!

It is absolutely certain that Catherine has carefully chosen her research process and opportunities and has enriched us by sharing them! You may contact Catherine at cjminter@indiana.edu.

---by Andrea Morrison, InULA Communications Committee member.