

# READERS' ADVISORY IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

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## HISTORY OF RA IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

- Part of the academic library mission in the 1930s-1940s
- Disappeared from academia in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 20th century
- Resurgence of interest in RA in academic libraries in the last decade



Case Study

**Course: "Gender, Sexuality, and the Law"**  
**Ryerson University**  
**Department: Criminal Justice and Criminology**  
**Leisure guide by Jordan Patterson**

### Course goals:

- Critical analysis of issues related to diverse ethnic backgrounds, sexual orientations, immigration statuses, socio-economic levels, and disabilities in the context of the law

### Audience:

- Second-year undergraduate course – mostly young readers
- May not have diverse life experiences
- Strong sense of social justice; care about societal issues
- Careers in law enforcement, social work, or the legal system

### Leisure guide goals:

- Introduce students to a variety of human experiences (e.g., poverty; disability; immigration)
- Supplement academic readings by vivid and engaging narratives
- Allow students to live the stories of others vicariously
- Develop empathy and compassion for people who are in scrapes with the law, or failed by the system, or disadvantaged by their familial or socio-economic background, etc.



## PRACTICAL TIPS – WHY?

- Professors interested in enriching their syllabi with works of fiction and narrative nonfiction
- Professor aware of some topics that cannot be sufficiently addressed (e.g., historical overviews) - leisure reading expands the learning experience
- Professors concerned about challenging and dry topics that cause students to lose motivation - leisure reading reignites interest



## WHAT IS RA IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES?

- **NOT** the development of course subject guides
- Does **NOT** build on librarians' subject expertise
- Builds on the analysis of courses through the medium of stories
- Relies on the contribution of literary creations to an understanding of scientific disciplines
- Does **NOT** look for a direct subject match between courses and fiction
- Looks for the potential connection of a fictional work to the learning process and the future professional image of students



## WHY OFFER RA IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES?

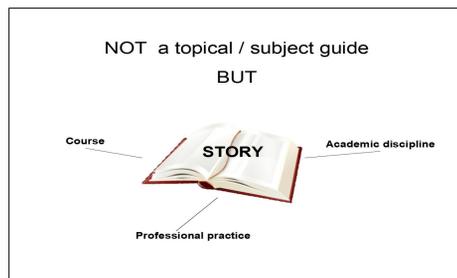
"In a complex world, the ability to participate fully in societal decisions on global warming, genetic engineering, foreign policy, and other issues may be contingent on being able to stay with and focus on ideas in a way fostered by reading, and more specifically by avid reading, reading for pleasure."

(Smith & Young, "Giving Pleasure Its Due..." 2008, p. 521)



## HOW DOES READING FICTION HELP IN EDUCATING NEW PROFESSIONALS?

- Imagination, creativity, originality
- Intuition, reflexivity, empathy
- Holistic vision of the human condition
- Improved academic performance
- Well-rounded, socially responsible future leaders



### PASSIVE RA

- Leisure guide (not only books but also movies, games, music, travel & hobby suggestions)
- Displays

### ACTIVE RA

- RA talks
- Book- and film-talking
- Websites
- Feedback forms
- Social media
- Book clubs

## PRACTICAL TIPS - HOW?

- Librarians study course syllabi and talk to professors
- Reading about the field of practice (e.g. policy making; nutrition; sociology; museums)



- Studying the intended audiences/students enrolled in the course:
  - What motivates students to take the course?
  - What kind of future professional environment might these students be entering? what ethical dilemmas or tensions are associated with future professional practice?
  - How can they empathize with people affected by their professional practice?
  - What are the main demands/stressors in their lives?

**Course: "The Public Library in the Community"**  
**University of Toronto**  
**Department: Faculty of Information**  
**Leisure guide by Kate Restivo**

Case Study

### Course goals:

- An elective course for LIS students that explores the relationship between public libraries and the world they are embedded in, with a particular emphasis on community relationships.

### SAMPLE ANNOTATION

**The Uncommon Reader** by Alan Bennett. Faber & Faber: London, 2007. (Robarts Call #: PR6052.E526 U63 2007). The titular character of this novel is none other than Her Majesty the Queen, whose foray into a bookmobile is entirely the fault of her unruly corgis. Of course, so as not to be rude, she borrows a book and is quickly lost to the world of leisure reading. As she devours story after story, she begins to neglect her duties, contemplate the way of the world, and question the monarchy. Her newfound insight doesn't sit well with her advisors and the Prime Minister. As much as this novel is delightful, irreverent, and absurd, it is also an examination of the power of reading. The bookmobile, and libraries in general, can remove a proverbial blindfold and open new horizons; books can allow people to become receptive to new ideas and possibilities. A clever and humorous example of how libraries can affect their community members, even if the latter are fairly uncommon.



Case Study

**Course: "Managing Organizational Records"**  
**University of Toronto**  
**Department: Faculty of Information**  
**Leisure guide by Gwen Fisher**

- Course goals:**
- A graduate course intended primarily for Archives Master students, which serves as an introduction to managing organizational records



### SAMPLE ANNOTATION

**Agota Kristof, The Proof.** Meuthen: London, 1991. (Robarts Call #: PQ2671.R58 P7313 1991)

This is the story of two brothers, Lucas and Claus, who live in an unidentified place and eventually become separated by a communist invasion. Claus escapes while his brother stays and witnesses the horrors that befall their compatriots. Lucas keeps a journal as the only way to record personal history and reinforce his identity in a place that de-individualizes people and strips them of memory. Claus returns to his homeland only after his brother has fled. All that remains is Lucas' journal, which officials claim to be a work of fiction because it alludes to people who "never existed". A penetrating examination of the individual memory, record keeping, and documentation.



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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank Prof. Fiorella Foscarini & Siobhan Stevenson (UofT), and Prof. Emily van der Meulen (Ryerson U) for sharing their course syllabi with us for the purposes of this project. We also thank our dedicated photographer Mari Vihuri for the wonderful pictures incorporated in this poster.

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