

Stephanie Reyes and Magaly Salas

# The Post-Graduation Transition

Building Relationships with Faculty in a World with Unspoken Rules

**A**cademic Library Workers in Conversation is a *C&RL News* series focused on elevating the everyday conversations of library professionals. The wisdom of the watercooler has long been heralded, but this series hopes to go further by minimizing barriers to traditional publishing with an accessible format. Each of the topics in the series were proposed by the authors, and they were given space to explore. This issue's conversation discusses the transition from graduate student to librarian, building relationships, and the unspoken rules that shape libraries. — *Dustin Fife, series editor*

**Stephanie Reyes (SR):** The transition from graduate school to a full-time, tenure-track position can be daunting. There is especially a knowledge gap between being a student to becoming a teacher or a “full-fledged” librarian. Now I added quotations to “full-fledged” because I don’t feel fully fledged and it seems most of my colleagues that I do work with are consistently updating their methods of teaching, reference, and administrative duties. Every academic year is different, with new staff, faculty, and students coming in. Being in an academic career, we will always feel like students and be students to some extent. While librarianship is an engaging career, it relies on consistently learning, changing expectations, navigating academic cultures, and making sure I don’t feel rude by saying “no” to people who want me to take on roles outside of my duties but detrimental to annual reviews and tenure and promotion files.

I am going into my second year of my full-time library career, and it’s challenging to not to feel imposter syndrome, especially as a woman of color. I feel that there is a consistent expectation I put on myself to battle this “imposter” in me to do more, say “yes,” and brush off the microaggressions because if I don’t, then I will fall into the hole of needing to do more or my job is in jeopardy. And for most of us this can be the case, especially in institutions where the administration may not value their library and its services. Throughout my first year as a librarian, all my senses were telling me I was missing “something,” and it took me a while to realize that that something was understanding the unspoken rules, interactions, and respectability culture. Going into academia from being a student to being faculty, there is a culture shock.

Magaly, how did you manage the transition from student to full-time librarian, and what are some challenges or surprises that you encountered?

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Stephanie Reyes is research and instruction librarian at St. Mary's College of Maryland, email: slreyes@smcm.edu. Magaly Salas is student success librarian at the University of San Francisco, email: msalas5@usfca.edu.

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**Magaly Salas (MS):** Stephanie, the transition from student to full-time librarian was a bit unsettling, especially as a first-generation woman of color. I had no idea what was going on or what I was doing. I had just gotten used to graduate school and learning how to navigate that space, where I was often the only one who looked like me when, within a couple of months, I was thrown into being a professional librarian—it felt like I was just starting over. I entered a space where I had to learn how to navigate new, unspoken hierarchies and expectations. I also experienced a new kind of imposter syndrome, feeling unprepared for my role and the new responsibilities.

However, something that made a real difference was having a woman of color as a supervisor. She created an environment where I felt comfortable approaching her with questions, and she provided a thorough onboarding process that helped me avoid failure. Although my fears and feelings of imposter syndrome did not disappear with her support, it did give me a way not to be afraid to ask for help. That was the most significant support. I moved to a new city for my first job. I left my family and community, so having at least one person to ask for guidance made all the difference.

Stephanie, is there anything you wish you had when you began your job?

**SR:** You expressed a good point that management makes a major difference for an early career position. Having a supervisor that is cognizant that we are new to the system and navigating a career where most of the work is learned on the job and through experience. The director of my library continues to reiterate that onboarding takes a year, and with that mindset, I think I also felt comfortable knowing that it takes a year to understand campus culture, faculty governance, and understanding how campus works in terms of who to go to, what is prioritized, and what isn't—if not longer. I am fortunate that I work at an institution where my colleagues have been my mentors and teachers throughout my first couple of years.

Oh, I wish I had patience! Throughout my career I've worked in positions where I could physically and immediately see the effects of my work. In my position now as an academic librarian, I've heard many say it takes a few years to actually get to know your liaison faculty, or understand how the curriculum works, or get to know most of the offices and departments on campus. I have experienced all of these and also understand that projects and programs may take a year to come to fruition, and that's something I wasn't quite prepared for. Having to plan an academic year in advance or semesters in advance is something new to me.

Also, another thing I wish I had were networking skills. I still get the “ick” with the word *networking* since I worked in a corporate setting before librarianship, so it doesn't have the best connotation for me. Understanding how to communicate with faculty was a big learning curve for me! Usually their schedules are different from mine as a 9 to 5 worker. Also understanding that they have highs and lows to the semester, and also understanding when they're understaffed they may have overloads, and being cognizant of this as a liaison librarian. Learning to be tuned in and reading the room has been a struggle.

**MS:** Stephanie, I understand entirely what you mean about working with faculty. As librarians, we were not trained to engage in conversations or establish relationships with faculty. Every faculty member is different, and one size does not fit all. One thing I have noticed is that before even considering a collaboration with faculty, I need to explain to them what I do as a librarian. In my experience, most faculty members are unaware of what I do or hold misconceptions about my job. I first need to help them understand that my role extends beyond shelving books and that I bring my librarian expertise to the table, helping with

information literacy instruction. Another thing that makes it challenging to create partnerships with faculty is the lack of institutional support. If faculty members are not encouraged to build relationships with librarians, there is little reason for them to do so. I am a librarian and faculty member, and I also face this problem where faculty members do not see the value of librarian–faculty collaboration.

**SR:** Magaly, you bring up a good point regarding institutional support. I think that my outreach toward faculty wouldn't be half as successful if we weren't embedded within the first-year seminar curriculum. Being embedded within the first-year seminar curriculum helps with collaborating with faculty and students. Most faculty get to know me through the required information literacy session that their course is required to schedule with a librarian. Although the next challenge I face is continuing to build that relationship beyond our required partnership. Having a boss that encourages me to attend events has helped, but sometimes it can be a bit difficult to “upsell” my services to faculty and continuously having to advocate that information literacy can help with those projects and assignments they see their student's struggle with. I guess it's difficult to reach faculty who don't already see the value of library services beyond database searching.

**MS:** Thank you, Stephanie. I appreciate your mention of building partnerships beyond what is required. That is also my next focus. As a Student Success librarian, supporting students in innovative ways by developing programs that enhance learning and research is very important to me. I especially want to improve my understanding of how to better assist students from diverse backgrounds, particularly transfer and first-generation students.

**SR:** Yes! Supporting students is definitely something that my colleagues have stressed as a way to market my skills to faculty. The “help me, help you.” Something that I am definitely working on this year is just chatting with faculty regarding how students would benefit from researching skills and topic development with info literacy sessions. As well as being a good listener has helped me determine what faculty find challenging within their courses regarding their students' work. I'm hoping to continue using this strategy throughout the academic year. My hope is that by comparing how IL can be used to enhance student learning with the challenges faculty are facing, then they will be able to view my skills as necessary and valuable. *~*