

Job ^{of a} Lifetime

Ann Wheeler

Pregnant orangutans, manatee milk, and other topics of veterinary librarianship

André Nault is a passionate person: he loves animals, loves science, loves a challenge, and loves libraries. His perfect job? Veterinary science librarian at the University of Minnesota, home to one of the premier veterinary science libraries in the United States.

Discovering librarianship

A native of Canada, Nault has an undergraduate degree in wildlife biology from McGill University. Before becoming a librarian he worked as a field biologist in Louisiana and then co-managed a veterinary practice in North Dakota.

"We had a mobile practice, one of those big RVs going around, doing everything. I'd be out there in the field, in the rain and snow, pushing prolapsed uteruses back into cows to dealing with very fractious cats."

Fractious, Nault explains, is the veterinarian's polite way of saying, "You got one mean cat there, Mrs. Jones."

Nault's move to libraries turned out to be a great fit. "After we sold our veterinary business, I decided to not go back into field research. So much of it is hand-to-mouth for funding, and that got to be a little old. Instead, I decided to pursue a master's in statistics at the University of Rhode Island. I went through a semester of that, but I was not very impressed by the program. I was

leafing through the graduate course catalog, and I saw the library science program, and thought, I wonder what that would be like. I've always loved libraries, and I've always loved finding information. I spoke with the dean, and once he heard of my science background, he said a lot of libraries would

be really interested in me. So I enrolled. I got through the program very quickly, and around the time I graduated, there was an opening here. It was like, poof!"

Instant manager

Nault admits that becoming a library manager right out of library school has been a challenge, but that's what keeps him interested.

"I'm the only librarian here at the Veterinary Library, although I have two library assistants and a bunch of student workers. As a result I'm spread really thin. I do liaison work, I do collection development, I'm managing my staff, I manage my own Web site. I also do research as part of my continuous employment process, and I'm on a lot of committees. But that's great, it keeps me engaged, it keeps me learning new stuff. It suits me well, because I need to be challenged all the time."



André Nault

Ann Wheeler is the librarian at the Maryland Department of Natural Resources. Have a story idea for Job of a Lifetime? E-mail David Free at dfree@ala.org.

Working with faculty

Nault enjoys academic librarianship because he “likes to be around smart people,” and at the Veterinary College he’s in good company. “There’s a reason veterinarians make fun of medical doctors, because medical doctors only have to treat one species, whereas [veterinarians] have to treat them all. They’re a really sharp bunch.

“Here at the university, [there are] a lot of demands placed on them, so their time is at a premium. They are maxed out in a lot of different ways. A librarian can fall off the radar a lot. You have that small window when you first meet faculty or you first contact them to make your sales pitch, and to make it well, so that they will think of you later when they need something.”

Nault recognizes the importance of meeting the faculty in their arenas. “Information resources in the sciences have become so electronic that we’re losing face time with faculty, so it’s important that I go where they are. We need to find ourselves at the table when something’s being discussed in which the library has a stake, or that we can put some added value. We need to get ourselves into the whole bloodflow of the college.”

One way he’s creating face-time is by staying active on committees. “I recently joined the professional skills committee, which deals with the way we instruct veterinary students on non-clinical proficiencies. I’ve joined the group to find where can I insert library instruction into the outcomes that are needed. It’s been really rewarding to see how faculty think about their teaching, what they’re trying to get at, and the hurdles they have to jump over. It’s just very insightful for me to see the inner workings of academic instruction.”

Just another day on the job

As a veterinary librarian, Nault has fielded

his share of unusual reference questions. “I’ve been asked to find the fat content of different mammalian milks, such as musk ox milk versus manatee milk, or the hormonal levels in some unusual animals. We have one faculty member who works with the local zoo, and sometimes unusual animals come into the college. Once we had an orangutan that required a C-section at the college.”

For Nault, it’s another chance to get involved. “One of my hobbies is photography, so sometimes, if we have unusual cases, I go in and take pictures. I have big 3-by-2-foot frames around the library, and I blow the pictures up and put them in there. Right now I have a picture outside the library of a blue-tongued skink, which is a large lizard. They had to enucleate one of its eyes which had ruptured, and I got this wonderful picture of it being masked with isoflurane as part of the sedation process.

I’ve also taken pictures of some big horses undergoing surgery. It’s really intimidating to watch how they put them on hydraulic tables and move them up and

sideways after they’re sedated. It’s really something to watch a half a ton animal up on a table.”

Advice to others

Nault has found his perfect job, and he encourages other individuals with science backgrounds to pursue librarianship. “In science librarianship, there’s been a move towards the informationist concept, meaning someone who has a background in the specific field. I brought a lot of field background with me, and it has served me very well.

“Unfortunately, a lot of people in the sciences do not consider librarianship often, but they tie in so well. I think for someone who has some science or biology background, librarianship can be a unique and very fulfilling career.” ❧

Veterinary science librarian

What: Veterinary science librarian

Where: University of Minnesota, Veterinary Medical Library

For more information, visit:
www.vetmed.lib.umn.edu