

Ensuring Success: The Impact of First-Year Faculty Librarians



Preethi Gorecki
Business Liaison Librarian
University Libraries
she / her / hers



Melina Zavala
Digital Scholarship Librarian
University Libraries
they / their / theirs

In the fall of 2017, Grand Valley State University Libraries joined the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Diversity Alliance. The purpose of the Alliance is to increase the retention of qualified academic librarians from underrepresented groups by creating opportunities for skill development and leadership early in their careers. As a result, University Libraries created a residency program which allowed for the hiring of two visiting faculty members, Melina Zavala and Preethi Gorecki. Zavala is the Digital Scholarship Librarian, located in the Mary Idema Pew Library Learning and Information Commons on the Allendale Campus. Gorecki took on the role of Business Liaison Librarian, located in the Steelcase Library in the Richard M. DeVos Center on the Robert C. Pew Grand Rapids Campus.

The roles and responsibilities of first-year faculty librarians can encompass many areas of outreach, including user services, library instruction, and interdepartmental collaboration.

Zavala's responsibilities involve staying current with digital scholarship, including researching digital media, and what new digital tools and technologies are on the horizon. This information is not only



useful in their scholarship, but in helping faculty implement these tools in their own work.

Gorecki's responsibilities currently include her work as a liaison, conducting research consultations with students and coordinating with instructors to locate resources and integrate instruction sessions into their classes. She liaises with multiple departments, including accounting, business, finance, management, marketing, and economics. When asked what skills she employs most in her work, she highlighted research skills and emphasized that being an effective communicator is integral to providing students with meaningful assistance. "I get so much email reference, it's not like I have my computer in front of me and the student is right there...so I really rely on my communication skills and technical writing – step one, step two, step three – because I don't want a student to have to email me back and forth a few times with their questions, I just want to give it all in one go," said Gorecki.

Zavala also emphasized the importance

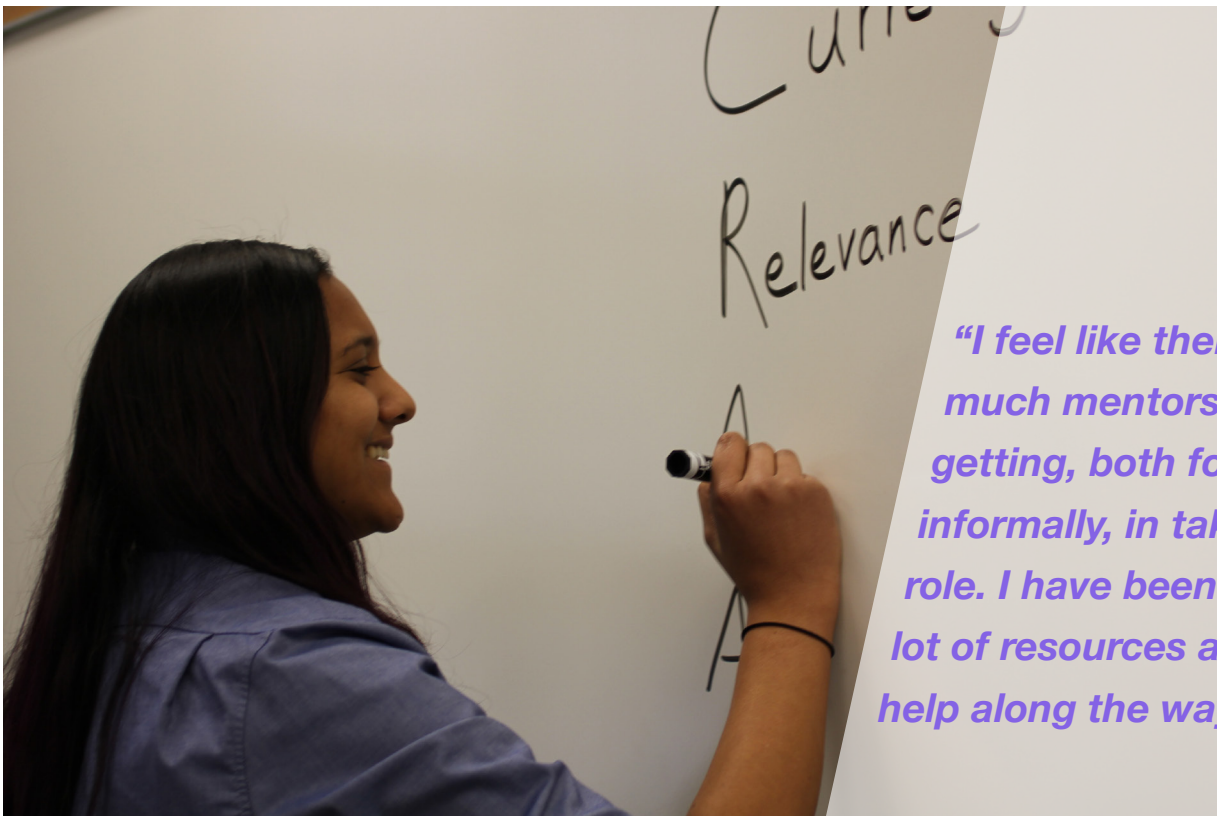
of research skills in their work. With the landscape of digital scholarship constantly evolving, their research allows for new worlds of possibility. They are energized by that potentiality, stating the importance of “Doing the research. Doing the work, figuring out where things could go, and seeing what the world has right now.”

Opportunities to collaborate with colleagues across departments are integral to both positions. Both faculty members highlighted the collaborative aspect of their work. Zavala is currently collaborating with Gayle Schaub, a liaison librarian, and the Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies (WGS) Department to digitize the department’s archival materials and create a timeline of the department’s creation and activities.

It can sometimes be hard to pinpoint what aspect of their work is most rewarding. When asked what aspect of their work most sparks their interests, Zavala said, “Everything. Just everything.”

Gorecki echoed this sentiment, “I feel like there is so much mentorship that I’m getting, both formally and informally, in taking on this role. I have been afforded a lot of resources and a lot of help along the way. There’s so much understanding that goes into me taking this position, not having a lot of experience going in. I’ve had fellow librarians just come up to me and offer me resources and I didn’t even ask a question, they just gave me what I needed. And not just librarians, but everyone I work with. It’s been amazing. I really appreciate that.”

Grand Valley State University requires that faculty members generate scholarly or creative output. Gorecki and Zavala have quickly immersed themselves in ideas and projects. “It’s kind of funny, I was joking with someone, that the next three years of my research have been spoken for, I have committed to so many things at this point,” laughed Gorecki. Currently her many projects range from co-writing a book chapter on race dynamics in the wizarding world of Harry Potter, to a major collaboration on the Ithaca S+R Project: Supporting the Changing Practices of Undergraduate Business Teaching. In this study, Gorecki and Erica Millspaugh, another Professional Programs Liaison Librarian, are conducting interviews with business faculty. The pur-



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pose is to help inform University Libraries' development of resources and services to support undergraduate business instructors in their teaching practices. The project launched in January 2018 and will conclude in December 2019.

Zavala's scholarship interests revolve around the developing and dynamic field of digital scholarship research. "I research digital scholarship elements online, so what is the newest stuff. What are people doing, and what new tools are out there," Zavala stated. This knowledge has allowed them to assist faculty members across campus with

projects surrounding digital scholarship. Currently, they are working with Peter Anderson, a faculty member in the Classics Department, using an online platform called WebAnno. This program allows users to annotate pieces of work and then create relationships between different elements of the work. One of Zavala's main roles is to research, learn and analyze the technology, and see how or if it fits with the faculty member's project or idea.

In the short time Gorecki and Zavala have been with University Libraries, they have already started to make a lasting im-

pact. They are using their work to innovate new and creative approaches to instruction and research. Their past experience guides the way they assist students and collaborate with faculty and to support student success •