

Librarian Helps

by Harve Leverenz

Visitors to the Viterbo College Library in Murphy Center see him stationed behind the checkout desk four days a week, from Sunday through Thursday.

His appearance is as dignified as the library itself. His sandy hair and beard are neatly trimmed. His conservative clothes—short-sleeve white shirt, dark maroon tie, and dark blue corduroy pants—fit his slender frame well.

One might assume from appearances that library assistant Bruce Roby's personality is drab, colorless.

However, assumptions can sometimes be dangerous. Roby is a man of strong beliefs concerning both the function of the library and his own function as librarian.

"I see the librarianship as a helping profession," said the 36-year-old Indiana native, who is married and lives in La Crosse.

Last fall, he succeeded Charlotte Lemke. Lemke temporarily replaced S. Nona Grover, who resigned due to health problems.

For Roby, one of the rewards of being a librarian is "helping people do what they either want or need to do in their (study) program—helping them to get information."

Saying that he believes people are information-poor, he continued, "Our education should make us information-rich. We should know how and where to get it without having to depend on somebody else."

Saying beliefs come easily to Roby, who has made librarianship his career. He is working on a Ph.D. in library science from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Currently, he is researching a dissertation which he will defend before a doctoral committee in three to four years.

"It's a long-term commitment," Roby said of the process.

Before coming to Viterbo, Roby served as a teaching assistant at the UW's library school, as a reference librarian at UW-Eau Claire and as director of an Indiana library.

"He is a knowledgeable, professional librarian," library director S. Frances Claire Mezera said of Roby. "He has a great interest in learning."

Roby believes learning is a means by which people are able to rise above their limitations.

"We grow up learning truths and untruths," he said. "The truths are always understood within a context which is the world as we understand it."

Untruths comprise part of that world. Learning, Roby continued, allows people to overcome those untruths.

"In so doing," he said, "we transform the world—our world."

It comes as no surprise, then, that Roby believes in the scholarship of Viterbo's students. "He likes to encourage the students to be real scholars," said Mezera.

When students visit the library to work on projects, said Roby, he assumes that those projects will be more valuable to students "if the reason they do it is to increase knowledge, not to get it done or because they have to get a grade."

He characterized such an increase as a form of growth that contributes to the process of maturing. When this happens, he said, the project become more than just another class assignment.

Roby sees himself as a facilitator, aiding students in their endeavors rather than as an authority figure making rules some students see as unreasonable.

"If people come to the library to study," Roby said, "then it should be a place where they can do that."

A minor controversy arose last semester over Roby's enforcement of a policy of checking students' bookbags for unregistered books and/or magazines before they left the library.

LUMEN Co-Editor Monica Muenster wrote in a November 13 editorial that she believed the policy represented an invasion of privacy that threatened the library's "comfortable, trusting" atmosphere.



Bruce Roby

In defending the policy, Roby said, "Books and magazines which 'walk out' of the library are lost books."

That, he continued, runs counter to the purpose of libraries, which he defined as the collection, organization, and preservation of information. It also complicates the librarian's task, as he is unable to provide requested information.

"The only things we're looking for," Roby stressed, "is material which hasn't been checked out. Anything other than that is none of our business."

Such problems aside, Roby is happy with his position at Viterbo. He harbors no ambition to serve in either the library of a larger college or in a public library.

"I am extremely comfortable in academia," he said. "I find it conducive to the type of lifestyle I want to live."

"I like the size of Viterbo in terms of the type of institution I would like to work in. It's very humanistic and comfortable."

He smiled. "I'm not impressed with bigness. I'm more impressed with the quality of scholarship."