

Nomination of Christian J. Miller

SUNY Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Librarianship

Over nearly twenty years of service, Christian J. Miller has demonstrated innovation in service, commitment to his values, skill in librarianship, and dedication in service to his patrons, his profession, and his own continued growth as a librarian. Since he joined Cornell University's Martin P. Catherwood Library in 2007, his work with faculty, students, and staff has made a tremendous impact on the scholarly community of the ILR School and made him sought after as both a librarian and an instructor. Through his efforts across the Cornell University Library (CUL), he has established himself as an exceptional contributor, collaborator, leader, and mentor. As Debra Howell, CUL's Director of IT Operations, put it, "He brings a passion to his profession that is both invigorating and inspiring and sets the standard for service to the library and the university."

Skill in librarianship

Since 2012, Chris has served as a lecturer for the ILR School's Human Resources Studies department, teaching for-credit courses to both undergraduates and graduates, collaborating closely with ILR's Center for Advanced Human Resources Studies (CAHRS). Chris's courses are highly praised by both School administration and students due to the breadth and depth of information covered and for the direct access to real-world companies that the course provides to students. Former student, now eCornell HR Director Becky Hill states that, "As a grad student, Chris was an incredible librarian to learn from. His research course was one of the most valuable I have taken, and it was due to his expertise, commitment to extensive/exhaustive research, and his passion for helping his students discover the full extent of research available... Chris helped to ensure our research was honed and carried significant weight and poise, as we were developing it for Fortune 200 clients."

Through his collaboration with CAHRS, Chris also provides direct support to those companies. As Beth Flynn-Ferry, Executive Director of CAHRS, explains: "[CAHRS partner corporations] are also entitled to searches of the Catherwood Library by our librarians. Chris is our go to here and again works to understand the needs of the companies and get information back to them that helps shape their policies and programs. Both [this research and Chris's classes] represent his flexibility to adapt to the needs of CAHRS and our diverse companies and serve the HR profession." These efforts help demonstrate Catherwood's value to the ILR School, and the School's value to its students and partners.

But Chris's support for students is not limited to those in his classes: he is a longstanding partner with student services in welcoming new students to the ILR School, making them feel at home both in the School and in the Catherwood Library. Jessie Mancilla, Associate Director of Multicultural Affairs at Cornell University ILR School, describes Chris as "model librarian for the students," and notes that, "He uses the tools available to develop meaningful opportunities that interactively engage the students. The attention he provides the students allows them to come forth and continue to seek the resources in the library."

Chris excels at outreach to students who are unfamiliar with the academic environment, and academic libraries in particular. He is a longstanding contributor to ILR's Prefreshman Summer Program (PSP), leading tours and engaging students in fun library activities such as scavenger hunts and escape room-like challenges. As Chris's supervisor during the COVID-19 crisis, I was especially impressed at how quickly he adjusted that programming to the remote learning environment that we had been dropped into so abruptly. Chris provides regular support to ILR's first year and transfer colloquia program, and Kara Lombardi, Assistant Dean for Student Experience and Wellbeing at the ILR School, stated, "In this role he pays careful attention to students who may be facing unique challenges and provides individualized outreach, care and concern for the student, ensuring that they are connected to all the relevant campus resources."

This is but one aspect of Chris's passion for work supporting equity, diversity, and inclusion. Last year he planned and co-taught a workshop for CUL instruction librarians on "Teaching Strategies that Promote Equity and Inclusion" and co-facilitated a discussion section for a group reading of Ibram X. Kendi's *How to Be an Antiracist*. He is part of CUL's First Generation Personal Librarian Program, and consistently participates in training and professional development programs to not only develop his skills in this area, but to contribute to making CUL, Cornell, and ILR more equitable, more diverse, and more inclusive.

Chris's skill in these areas is not limited to incoming undergraduates: he also leads tours for new graduate students in the Master of ILR and executive HR programs. The latter group does most of their work online but come to Ithaca for three week-long sessions. Christie Avgar, ILR Director of Graduate Enrollment and Student Services, notes that, "Many of these students have not used university libraries for academic work for many years, and they are at a loss of how to navigate library services virtually and access reserves, articles, and materials. Chris does a great job engaging them and walking them through the process of utilizing library resources and helping them build their confidence around using library resources."

In my time as Chris's colleague, and these last months as his supervisor, I have found him to be generous with his time and expertise, always willing to help students, faculty, school administrators, and his fellow library workers. That sentiment is echoed across ILR and CUL, and speaks strongly to Chris's skills as a librarian.

Service to the university and to the profession

As noted above, the expressions of Chris's skill as a librarian are consistently in the service of Cornell University and the ILR School: his work with students and other internal patrons enhances their experiences with the school, and his support of external patrons demonstrates the School's value beyond its walls. Kevin F. Harris, Frank B. Miller Director of ILR School Student Services, notes that Chris "has always been more than willing to partner with me and the Student Services team to successfully help us introduce new students to the Catherwood/Cornell Library system and how to most effectively use those resources, thereby playing a critical educational and community building role for us with onboarding new students to the institution."

Chris has also developed programs for building connections between colleagues that have made profound changes to CUL and expanded to all of Cornell University. One of the most notable of these is #randomcoffee, a program through which members of the CUL community can sign up and be matched with a different random colleague from around CUL every month. The program became tremendously popular almost immediately, with people from across the library system being matched with peers they might otherwise never get a chance to connect with; I myself have been matched with everyone from archival assistants to front-line catalogers to the University Librarian. The impact of this program has been amazing, not only in terms of building ties among the community, but in breaking down silos that made our day-to-day work more difficult.

"The #randomcoffee program he developed for Cornell Library is truly remarkable," said Debra Howell. "From what seems like a simple concept, Chris has created a sense of community and cohesion across all parts of the library." Like so many of the initiatives Chris has been involved with, #randomcoffee pivoted cleanly to remote work, with meetings now happening over Zoom instead of at campus coffee shops. The program's impact has been striking enough that Chris was invited to co-present a lightning talk at ACRL 2019 in Cleveland about its success.

Not only that, but #randomcoffee has now expanded beyond the library to the broader university. Becky Hill, one of Chris's former students and now HR Director for eCornell, worked with Chris to implement #randomcoffee in other units and departments at Cornell. She states, "To institute the #randomcoffee initiative, he showed his commitment to the community of library professionals, and also to the

University community as a whole. When I inquired about how he launched the program, the potential benefits and what the impact had been, he was very collaborative, helped me through our launch of #randomcoffee for HR and offered to provide additional guidance after that point as well. We got to see the benefits of #randomcoffee in action – the connections made, and the community fostered.”

Chris’s service has always extended beyond the walls of the library. He is an active and involved member of ACRL, serving on multiple committees for both its Instruction Section and University Libraries Section. He held several leadership positions within the Special Libraries Association, as well, in their Academic Division and Social Sciences Division, as well as their Upstate New York Chapter. He is recognized throughout these communities for his creativity, innovation, and service.

Scholarship and continued professional growth

Chris’s career at ILR is a testament to his pursuit of continual scholarly and professional growth. Prior to joining Catherwood Library, Chris was Head of Public Services at the National Cancer Institute, and his educational background is in English. But as soon as he arrived, Chris dedicated himself to the study of human resources, and thus has established himself not just as an exceptional subject librarian in the field, but also as a highly regarded instructor.

Chris’s commitment to this development is acknowledged across ILR and CUL. Beth Flynn-Ferry notes Chris’s “interest in learning more about how companies are tackling issues and ideas in the Human Resources arena. He invites many CAHRS company guest speakers to his classroom as a way to not only inform his students, but also himself on happenings at the corporate HR level.” Christie Avgar calls attention to the fact that Chris is entrusted with teaching graduate students to develop “key HR competencies and skills for researching and presenting information necessary for executive decision making... [His] course is instrumental in helping MILR students connect research to practice, and students find that they draw on the knowledge that they learn from Chris many years after they graduate from the program.” And Kevin Harris commented, “I’ve known Chris for his entire career as a Librarian in the ILR School and witnessed continued professional growth as his creativity, collaboration, work ethic, and successfully executed deliverables resulting in achieved outcomes earned him advancement within the Catherwood Library.”

Another area that I have personally observed Chris’s commitment to development is his skill in mentoring. Chris served as a co-chair of CUL’s Career Development and Mentoring Committee, helping to organize the program as well as working with mentors and mentees to get the most out of the program. I have seen the rewards of this work in how Chris works with both newer library staff and student employees; he is generous with his time and with his experience. Last year, when his successors on the

CDMC held a “Mentoring the Mentors” panel to help mentors develop their skills, it was no surprise that Chris was asked to be a panelist.

In recent years Chris has also begun developing skills in performing scoping reviews and other evidence syntheses. This past fall he joined the Evidence Syntheses Services Team, and has been working on a scoping review with scholars from the Yang-Tan Institute on Employment and Disability. Far from resting on his laurels, Chris continues to develop new skills and expertise to better serve his constituents.

Bethany Dixon, Senior Interlibrary Loan Assistant and Chris’s co-chair of the Library Forum Steering Committee, had the following to say of Chris:

“Since the first day I began working with him, what strikes me about Chris is that he lives his values. There is no separation between ideology and practice; no question of just ‘talking the talk.’ He cares deeply about fostering a sense of community within the library, in which every person is accountable for each other, not in a burdensome sense but in a co-operative, shared experience.”

Christian J. Miller is a skilled librarian whose career has been dedicated to the service of the Cornell University Library, the ILR School, and Cornell University as a whole. He has contributed innovatively and collaboratively to building community not just at Cornell, but within the profession of librarianship. He is committed to growing as a scholar and as a professional, and I look forward to seeing what challenges he takes on next. It is my honor to nominate him for the SUNY Chancellor’s Award for Excellence in Librarianship, and I urge you to give his nomination your most careful consideration.

Sincerely,



Jim DelRosso
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Cornell University