Amy Pass
Albany Academy for Girls

(formerly of The Sage Colleges Libraries)
When I last presented at this forum, I was a college librarian. I was responsible for library instruction campus-wide, especially focusing on first-years. I was at a fairly small institution, but we had two campus libraries, a large print collection, extensive database coverage, and strong library services in place (ILL, document delivery, etc.). I saw our first-year students arriving with a wide range of library skills, and worked with them to get them comfortable and agile in a college environment.

When I last presented at this forum, I shared with you this book, “Tales from a College Library.” But now I want to share “The Other Side of the Story.”

Now I am the Upper School Librarian at a small private girl’s school. I teach kids from grades 7-12. I’m on the other side! After only three months in my new environment, I have learned a lot about the challenges that come with being a high school librarian, and I think I understand even more how the gaps between high school and college library readiness come about. I get it, now....!

Please keep in mind that this is my own, PERSONAL experience that I’ll be sharing with you. We’re not all in the same setting; we aren’t all facing exactly the same challenges. But perhaps you will recognize yourself in some of these scenarios.....
First, the transition from college to high school is not easy! I’ve been a college librarian for 13 years and a high school librarian for only 3 months! There are some challenges I expected and many I did not. But there are also some positive elements of the job that I have been enjoying! Let me tell you about a few.
CHALLENGE: LIMITED RESOURCES

• At my college library, there were extensive print and electronic collections and dozens of online research databases. What wasn’t available was easily supplemented by ILL. Now, I find myself in a room with about 3,500 books (not including the children’s collection) and only a handful of databases. ILL is challenging, and the purchasing budget is small. How does one prepare students for college-level research when resources are limited?
PRO: THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY!

It’s not easy to expose students to a broad range of resources …when there isn’t a broad range of resources! **BUT** the basics of library searching remain the same. I can still teach them how to search, how to evaluate, how to use library resources in an efficient and effective way. These skills will be scalable when they are in college, applying them to a much larger collection.
CHALLENGE: WHAT THE SCHOOL WANTS VS. WHAT THEY NEED

- School wants media literacy, digital citizenship skills – valuable in their own right! – but the kids don’t know how to find library resources!! I’m trying to find that “magic” sweet spot – addressing the school’s wishes but also carving out space for crucial and desperately-needed library skills. It’s also a challenge to get the time I need with each student. More on this later....
CHALLENGE: Teacher Expectations – HS vs. College

When I was teaching at the college level, I found that some professors had ridiculously-high expectations for the kinds of sources they wanted their students to use. This often carried over into instruction. For example, I was once teaching a group of first-year students in the first week of class (expecting to cover VERY basic topics like “where is the library web page” and “how do I find articles?” plus things like “can I eat in the library?” You get the picture. As I was setting up for class, the course instructor (who had asked me to come in and do a library orientation) asked if I’d cover scholarly journal “impact factor.”

She had no idea that the students sitting in front of her didn’t even know how to find out library databases, let alone learn about impact factor. A WIDE gap in expectations vs. practice, there.

I’m seeing almost the opposite here at my new school. Teachers are allowing – almost encouraging? – their students to use basic encyclopedias and less-than-scholarly web pages for senior-level research papers. While I needed to lower some college professor expectations, I now need to – hope to! – raise teacher expectations.
PRO: LONGEVITY

- In a college environment, you have them for only four years (perhaps more at a graduate level, perhaps less at a 2-year school). In a K-12 school like mine, many students begin at Kindergarten and stay in the school until their senior year! I have them for a loooooooong time. One can really get to know the students, and work with them through each stage of their “library development” (even though I’m only “officially” teaching from Middle School upwards, I see the kids on a daily basis and often find myself helping them when they’re in the library)
PRO: BUILDING GOOD LIBRARY USERS

Another bonus of this longevity is that I have the ability to build good library users over the years. Not only do I have the opportunity to build strong library research skills, but I am setting the stage for what a “library” experience is like for them. It’s my job to feed them a positive vibe! Show them what a great space a library is, get them to feel comfortable asking for help, getting them to love their library! I have this privilege and responsibility.
PRO: UNEXPECTED DUTIES

Unexpected job duties: asked to promote the joy of reading! This is actually part of my job description. I've been building book-joy activities (even just reading aloud) into my library classes. One teacher has already approached me about having her students write book reviews and have me come and be “persuaded” by their presentations to buy the books! I’ve been scouring the net looking for fun book ideas, like “book speed dating” and other great activities. I’d love to learn more about how you all are promoting reading in your own libraries.
So what am I doing with all of this new knowledge and experience? All of these challenges? ...now that I’m on the other side?
College Research-Readiness Seminar

- College Library Spaces
- College Library Services
- Organization of Resources
- College-Level Resources
- Citing in College (including Zotero)
- College Library “Lingo”

For 11th grade students – all sections
Required “leadership” seminar

Will have them focus on a library from a college they want to attend

eight 40-minute modules
Field Trip!

- Senior “Honors Project” students
- Visit a local college library
- Overview of library resources, meet librarians, time to do research

Field trip to local college library – I know some of you are already running programs like this and have partnered with local colleges. We didn’t do much of this at Sage (I always wanted to!) so I’d like to try it now from the other way around!

Important to prepare for this visit – students are to identify research gaps, questions, wishes, etc. so that they are better prepared to work with the librarians and resources

I’d like to grow this program if it proves successful – our close proximity (walking distance!) makes it even more ideal
How I can best prepare my students for college-level research from my high-school vantage point:

**KEEP BUILDING SKILLS:** use that built-in longevity to keep building library research skills.

Push them to reach beyond what they are “expected” to do – keep them growing.

Other ways I can continue to prepare my students best for college-level research – regardless of what resources I may have in my own library:

- not just research skills for honors/ap students – for all, at their level(s)
- encourage them to use local college libraries (student who needed book we didn’t have – was available at Union, was able to go there on a Saturday to use)
- if your school uses a centralized search (or some other entry point where all databases are lumped into one search location), show your students the different databases that feed that search. That can help them understand how advanced searching involves more precise database selection.
- teach the use of the advanced search features to high school upper classmen
How I can best prepare my students for college-level research from my high-school vantage point:

**ENCOURAGE COLLEGE LIBRARY USE:** some students will benefit from using their local college/university library collection to supplement their research at your library.

You can ease access by checking policies and access levels ahead of time and connecting with the librarian there.
How I can best prepare my students for college-level research from my high-school vantage point:

TEACHING DATABASES...WITHOUT DATABASES: Explain what’s behind centralized search (if you have one) so students understand (and are ready for) more precise database selection.

Demonstrate advanced search techniques, and discuss what other options are out there (even if they can’t see it!).
Thank you!

Amy Pass
Upper School Librarian
Albany Academy for Girls

passa@albanyacademies.org