

## A COLLABORATIVE EFFORT: IMPORTANCE OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCHOOL LIBRARIES AND THE UNIVERSITY

*by Robyn Young*



**A**lthough media specialists know that they will take additional classes to maintain their teacher certification, for many, there is never a second thought about a university once the graduation ceremony is complete. Most media specialists are too

busy with day-to-day work to consider the ways in which a relationship with a university might be of benefit. This is unfortunate because a relationship between the school library program and a university can be beneficial to both parties. Universities are looking for a place to conduct action research and to apply the tools of the trade within a practical application. School library media specialists often need help with the research process to answer their questions. Taking these two different perspectives into consideration, the affiliation can be one of mutual benefit.

As a practicing media specialist at Avon High School, I wanted to know if reading graphic novels could increase a student's score on the ISTEP, Indiana's state standardized graduation qualifying exam, by increasing overall academic achievement and reading comprehension. Additionally, I wanted support for having graphic novels in the collection. I had the burning questions and I had the desire to search for the answers, yet I had no idea how to go about finding the answers.

While attending a session at the American Association of School Librarians conference in Kansas City in 2003, I learned that I would need to contact a university in order to get the kind of help that I needed. Since I graduated from the SLIS program at Indiana University – Indianapolis, I contacted Dr. Daniel Callison, Executive Associate Dean, SLIS – Indianapolis. Knowing the faculty at both the Indianapolis and Bloomington campuses, Dr. Callison put me in contact with Dr. Marilyn Irwin. At the time, Dr. Irwin was Director of the Center for Disability Information and Referral at the Indiana Institute on Disability and Communication. She has recently joined the SLIS faculty in Indianapolis as a full-time associate professor. One of Dr. Irwin's areas of expertise was disability information, so after discussing the questions that I wanted the research to answer, I was able to focus on working with special education

students because they were most at-risk for failing ISTEP and also seemed to have the most room for improvement. Additionally, Avon High School's Special Education Department was willing to be part of the research process to determine what is academically best for its students.

After speaking with Dr. Irwin on the phone about some of my questions, we decided to set up a meeting. Dr. Irwin came to Avon High School and began to lead me through the research process as it should be done. Together we determined the research questions, the methods by which we would collect the data, and the various quantitative and qualitative measures that we would use. I had the initial questions, she knew the research process, and together, our shared knowledge made for an interesting research study.

Dr. Irwin's knowledge throughout the research process was invaluable. Additionally, she was instrumental in writing a grant application, and in 2004 we were awarded the AASL/Highsmith Research Grant for our proposed work with graphic novels. Avon High School received \$2,500, most of which was spent on purchasing graphic novels for the collection and purchasing testing materials to help substantiate our research; however, a portion included payment of travel expenses for Dr. Irwin. The School of Library and Information Science also provided her time to travel to Avon High School as needed.

We presented our research findings at the American Library Association Annual Conference in Chicago in June 2005 and at the American Association of School Librarian's Annual Conference in Pittsburgh in October 2005. We are in the process of submitting the research data for publication,

The collaboration between the university and the school library media center has been an enriching experience for all concerned. The partnership enables the school library media specialist to answer important questions regarding student achievement and the university is provided with a place to do research in a school environment. The collaborative effort with a university faculty member is of great benefit to both interested parties.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

After receiving her MLS from Indiana University in 2001, Robyn Young has been the library media specialist at Avon High School in Avon, Indiana, for the last five years. She received the 2004 AASL/Highsmith Research for her work with graphic novels and student achievement. She presented the results of the study at ALA and AASL in 2005. She is currently the committee chair and selection committee chair for the AIME Blue Ribbon Award for Exemplary School Media Programs for the State of Indiana.

