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Faculty Profile

Ratna Chandrasekhar

Ratna Chandrasekhar, Head of Reference, is no ordinary librarian, but then again there is no such person as an "ordinary librarian." In the ever-changing environment of the modern college, technology has transformed the library and in the process transformed librarians.

Ratna, for example, is involved in the Library’s Maxwell Information Literacy Center (MILC). Opened in 1997, the MILC houses thirteen Pentium computer work stations and a central instructional platform. The high tech center allows Ratna and other librarians to interact with students at their computer consoles. While in the classroom students and their professors discover the wide array of online resources available not only at the Maxwell Library but through the World Wide Web, Ratna and the reference librarians are much like modern day explorers as they not only find new sources of information, but also provide the Bridgewater community with the means to make their educational journey fruitful. As Ratna says, “because there are a wide array of information sources combined with increased demands on students, it is critical to rethink how to use library resources.”

Since information literacy programs like the one Ratna is involved in the Maxwell Library are being developed all over the country, she spent part of her sabbatical visiting other schools to determine how Bridgewater can improve its program. Ratna visited schools such as Harvard, Boston College, Duke and Louisiana State University. She sat in on classes, interviewed librarians and talked to students to get a hands on understanding of how information literacy is being developed. Ratna was pleased to report in her findings that Bridgewater’s MILC is matching up closely with these larger schools. Ratna’s conclusion after her visits was that Bridgewater has laid a solid foundation of information literacy. As she says with pride, “in terms of electronic resources over the past few years Maxwell Library has improved by leaps and bounds.” Ratna did find, however, that some adjustments to Bridgewater’s program need to be made, including adding the information literacy component to the Freshman seminar experience and for transfer students, providing a web-based tutorial, making instruction in MILC discipline specific, developing a walk-in mini-demonstration component and insuring that graduating seniors leave the college with the necessary on-line resource skills that will make them more marketable in the job arena.

A key to the success of the information literacy program in Ratna’s view is a partnership between the librarians and the faculty. In the last year Ratna has taught a number of classes with faculty and students and had entire departments visit the Center. As a result she has formed a professional bond that has made the MILC an integral part of the undergraduate experience at Bridgewater. While in the classroom students and faculty gain a first hand understanding of the library set-up through a PowerPoint presentation, an overview of campus network resources, a hands on session on research sources and a discussion of various bibliographic styles. As someone who has been a student of Ratna, I can say without reservation that the information literacy program is an absolute must for both students and faculty. Because information has exploded to the point where the world is just a proper key stroke away, the MILC is an essential resource for all those committed to enhancing their research skills.

Ratna exudes quiet satisfaction with the early development of the MILC. In the year since the Center opened she and the other reference librarians have conducted 159 sessions and instructed 2,573 students. The growing popularity of the information literacy program has invigorated Ratna who says with no hesitation, “being involved in information literacy skills is extremely intellectually stimulating.” With the continued growth of technology and the Internet it is a sure bet that the MILC will grow even faster and the Maxwell Library will continue its transformation into a hub of electronic information literacy.

Ratna Chandrasekhar and the other reference librarians are certainly up to the challenge of the information age and proud of the the way in which they have helped change the face of the library and librarians. Like her colleagues in the Maxwell Library, Ratna Chandrasekhar is a librarian for the 21st century.