

## News from the School

### *“You Couldn’t Ask for a Better Group of People” SLIS Administrative Staff Get Straight A’s*

*Alvin Schrader, SLIS*

In this issue, we celebrate our School’s outstanding administrative team – Darlene Syrotuik, Joanne Hilger, and Sophia Sherman.

Take a bow, ladies! They have been a consistently great team working together for more than six years now, and all told they bring 35 years of exceptional service to students, faculty, and the professional community at large. It’s no exaggeration to say they are the School’s corporate memory.

But not just our corporate memory – they are also the School’s humanity, soul, and humour. No matter what our concerns or who we are, from the cautious new prospect anxious about their MLIS application package to the seasoned instructor teaching a course for the first time, everyone benefits from these three amazing women in the front office as they keep the School not only afloat but steadfast on course. We are incredibly lucky here at SLIS, because our admin team is always there when we need them.

I asked my graduate assistant this year, Jenny Ryan, to find out what people had to say about them. Jenny told me she hadn’t been sure what to expect, but as she began to poll current students, graduates, professors, and sessional instructors, she was amazed by the responses and in fact once she got people talking about these three remarkable women, she couldn’t get them to stop!

Over and over, it was clear that, individually and collectively, the SLIS admin team have made very positive contributions to the campus and professional communities.

This consistent message comes from what Darlene, Joanne, and Sophia have in common – sterling leadership qualities grounded in dedication to the highest standards of service. They are always happy to help students and faculty, they often go the proverbial “extra mile”, they have excellent social and interpersonal skills, they are outgoing and sociable, they are very efficient, they have great empathy, they are good listeners (and talkers!), they are positive, relaxed, and easy to get along with, and they are wonderful advocates for the School and

students. These are just a few qualities and characteristics that come quickly to mind. I’m no psychologist, but in my personal experience of observing them over many years in many different situations, I’d say the three of them have very very high “EI” scores.

Darlene, Joanne, and Sophia also have interesting individual stories, although there’s a common thread here too. All three are very fit and very active.

Darlene is legendary around the School as the resident fitness guru – she runs every day and also teaches fitness classes for Campus Recreation four times a week; one of the second year students mentioned to Jenny earlier this fall that “a few of my friends took Darlene’s aerobics course and really liked it.” Sophia is also involved in on-campus fitness; according to an alumnus, Sophia attends kickboxing lessons on her lunch breaks and apparently has a rather impressive left hook!

Another common thread is how much their work has changed over the years, due in large part to technology impacts how we conduct our business. This brings up another common trait among them – flexibility, adaptability, and teamwork. They share many responsibilities, from payroll, faculty research grants administration, timetabling, and classroom assignment to student advising, financial and scholarship support, event planning, purchasing, and public relations.

Darlene is the School Administrator and has been in this role for 21 years this fall; before that, she was employed in nursing administration at the University Hospital, where she first met Joanne when they would have coffee breaks together. Before joining the SLIS team in September 1996, Joanne worked for the School of Nursing dealing with student nurses. So her interest in students goes back along ways, and it seems perfectly natural that she is now our Student Services Administrator, responsible for everything from recruitment and admission records to guidance through the MLIS program from course registration to the final “capping exercise”. In her spare time, Joanne enjoys sewing and making crafts. Born and raised in Edmonton, Joanne has two children, a boy and a girl, who are “all grown up” – she says that’s why she nags the students so much!

Sophia Sherman joined the School as our Office Administrator in September 1998, with responsibilities for reception, data input, expert software helper, and general office and office equipment purchasing and maintenance. The newest member of the SLIS administrative team, Sophia was born in Hungary and moved to Canada at the age of six. She says this was her first “real job” and laughs at how young she felt when she first started – “I grew up in the School!” Sophia has two pre-school children, a boy and a girl.

The SLIS community is very close-knit, and in large part this is due to our admin team’s hard work and dedication. Not only do they organize wonderful receptions, reunions, retirement parties, and new student orientation events, but they also ensure that faculty and students are looked after on a day-to-day basis as well. Dr. Toni Samek said, “Darlene, Joanne, and Sophia are fabulous! We have the best admin staff in the world. Laughter in the lunchroom, great holiday spirit. They always put a smile on my face. They’ve saved me many times!”

Faculty colleagues echo these feelings. Dr. Margaret Mackey said all three are “terrific, reliable, and kind – they’re the hub of the School and all-knowing! It’s almost impossible to go to them with a problem they don’t already know about, and half the time they’ve already got a solution in mind.”

And Dr. Ali Shiri, new to the faculty at SLIS this year (see the July 2004 issue of the Newsletter), also expressed his appreciation for the front office trio. Coming from Iran by way of a PhD in Glasgow, with so many questions about his new Canadian environment, Ali found all three to be immediately welcoming and approachable, helping him with day-to-day tasks, introducing him to the various social opportunities within the University community, and even arranging for his first apartment with his family.

And as directors of the School Dr. Anna Altmann and I can add our own testimonials. When I became director of the School in 1996, it was at that point that I really came to appreciate how service-oriented and professional all three of them are. And Anna says, “Darlene, Joanne, and Sophia are experts on the bureaucracy of the university. They know whom to call, where to apply pressure, and where to plead to get us all what we need. They’re not only nice, they’re tough!”

If they’re good to the faculty and staff at the school, Jenny says they are great with the students, “who recognize the lengths they go to in order to ensure we have positive experiences at SLIS.” One student told

Jenny, “Joanne has been really awesome in helping all new students feel welcome and at home.” Joanne might be flattered by this compliment, but she shouldn’t be surprised; she told us herself how much she appreciates having a small student population at the School as this enables her to get to know the majority of the students, which she and Darlene and Sophia all feel is an important part of their jobs. The youngest in the group, Sophia loves being around the students who are generally her age, and she enjoys talking with those who also have young children at home. Joanne says she loves watching the students grow and develop during their time in the MLIS program.

Not only do they pay attention to the students during their time in the program, all three keep up with students after they’ve graduated and moved on. Joanne says the community continues, especially when former students contact the School and let us know what they’re up to, where they’re working, who’s having children, and who’s getting married (they especially like it when it happens to former library school romances!). “You feel like you’re a part of their successes,” says Joanne. Note to current students and alumni: stay in touch.

One first-year student told Jenny how touched she is by their thoughtfulness. “I am impressed with whoever takes the time to place a small vase of fresh flowers in the women’s washroom. Seeing this sweet little vase in the first weeks of class was certainly welcoming.” That simple vase of flowers speaks volumes about the thoughtfulness, dedication, and creativity of the three individuals who hold the SLIS community together.

What is their secret? What makes the three of them stay with the School and continue to thrive? The answer is another characteristic they share in common, and it might sound like a simple cliché but that doesn’t make it any less genuine – a heartfelt interest in each and every one of us, alumni, faculty, community members, and especially the students – getting to know them, finding their unique personalities, staying in touch after they leave the program, following their careers.

So that’s why we have one of the best-run offices on campus! Everything changes every year in an educational setting, but some things will always remain.

Thank you, Sophia, Joanne, and Darlene, our unsung heroes. Congratulations on a job well done and well doing! We couldn’t ask for a better group of people.

*(Many thanks to my Graduate Assistant Jenny Ryan (MLIS ’05) for gathering testimony for this “exposé.”)*