

Going Further

Using Indirect RA to Meet the Needs of Romance Reading Patrons

by Phil Eskew

I was fairly fresh out of library school when I was approached to teach a readers' advisory course at Indiana University back in the spring of 2005. I have continued to teach the course regularly since then (sometimes twice a year), and it has reinforced something that a very wise instructor (whom I later married) told me: "The best way to learn is to teach". I think this is true not only for traditional educators, but also for librarians. I have learned more about librarianship and readers' advisory by helping patrons and teaching students than I ever did sitting in classes listening to instructors drone on about MARC fields and Boolean searches. Of course those experiences taught me a valuable lesson about teaching: you've got to make it fun. I approach readers' advisory in the classroom by first providing an introduction to philosophy behind the service and then describing what an ideal readers' advisory transaction looks like. Once this foundation has been laid, it's time to dig into the genres and get an idea of what draws our patrons to specific genres. Honestly, I love almost all fiction (some, perhaps, a bit more than others), but Romance holds a special place in my heart. The challenge, of course, is convincing a classroom of students (many of whom having never read—or even considered reading—a Romance novel) that Romance, put simply, rawks!

Yes, we who love the genre and who read it regularly are in the know, but many of my students snicker and guffaw at the prospect that Romance titles are little more than sappy novels featuring bosomy damsels in distress having their bodices ripped by stony-jawed men. They're often surprised to learn that the Romance genre includes mystery, science fiction, action, strong characters, and some of the wittiest dialogue around set in all manner of time periods and locales. More importantly, Romance fiction is good fun, healthy escape, and a vicarious way to experience new love blossoming—at least that's what I love most about them. My mission as an instructor is to share my enthusiasm and, hopefully, get them as excited about reading and exploring the genre as I am. That, however, is the easy part. The challenge is helping them come to grips with scope of the genre, the demands of its fans, and the wealth of resources available that will help them put the right book in the patron's hands. How is a Regency different from a Historical Regency? What's the appeal of the Sweet/Savage romance? How do I gauge the amount of sensuality a patron wants in book, and how do I determine the level of sensuality in books I haven't read? How do I best market and promote the collection? What resource do I turn to find the perfect read-alike for a patron, and how do I keep up with a genre that adds almost 5000 titles to its catalog every year?

Some of this I can explain in the classroom, but there is a lot that the students need to experience to learn. One aspect of readers' advisory that I push in my class is indirect readers' advisory, i.e., the creation of handouts, bookmarks, and annotated book lists. This is especially true when it comes to Romance. Romance readers are notoriously self-sufficient. It would be difficult to say whether this has to do with inadequate promotion of readers' advisory (RA) services in our public libraries or simple reluctance on the part of the patron to approach the desk, but, in my experience, it's a simple fact. As such, I emphasize the necessity of indirect RA. In my class, I have my students create annotated book reviews and book lists over and over throughout the semester. This allows them a chance to master the resources and create read-alike aids they may even use on the job after graduation. Indirect RA allows the librarian time to peruse the resources (both print and online) and to come up with top-notch read-alike suggestions. It also is a great way to promote readers' advisory in the library. *(continued on page 2)*

4 Ways to Grab the Attention of Your Romance Readers without Saying a Word

1. Create comprehensive booklists. List read-alikes by author, theme and subgenre. Make lists available as take-home fliers in the romance section. If the patron has to look for it, it's too hard to find.
2. Get creative with your romance displays. Theme displays by season, subgenre, popular subjects and even staff favorites! Include books by local romance authors or novels set in your state. Posters can easily be downloaded off of the RWA website or requested by e-mail.
3. Include author fun facts/interviews as bookmarks. With so many author websites, romance authors are more accessible than ever. Send an author an e-mail asking them a question such as, "What romance novel are you currently reading?". Include the answers as bookmarks in the books the authors choose.
4. Make romance reviews available for readers. Give patrons easy access to review sources for romance novels, whether written by other patrons, in newspapers, online or periodicals. Be sure patrons know what/where the resources are through prominent signage.

Don't miss RWA at ALA!

Romance Writers of America will be at booth # 3208 at the American Library Association Annual Conference in Washington, D.C. June 21 – 27.

Be sure to stop by for information on the romance genre, a contest specifically for librarians, plus autographed books and more!

Signing schedule to come -- check www.rwanational.org for further details as they become available.

Going Further *(continued)*

Another type of indirect RA that we discuss is the use of forms. Libraries have been having great success using forms for RA. Basically, the patron is given a form containing a list of questions that allow him or her to share favorite titles, preferred appeal elements, acceptable levels of sensuality, sub-genres of choice, etc. with the librarian. Not only does this take the pressure off the librarian to come up with three good suggestions at the desk while a queue of patrons is lined up, it provides a framework for the patron in which to express what it is that they truly want in a good book—and I'm sure we've all talked with patrons who struggle to articulate a book's appeal. As public library patrons become savvier searchers and as more and more information is made available on the Internet, librarians may find that readers' advisory is one service that keeps the profession relevant. Popular materials, like fiction, are a major draw in public libraries, but the public will be hard pressed (at least for the time being) to simply enter a book they've enjoyed into Google and expect the perfect suggestion to pop up. This is where public librarians come in. We need to be able to support not only our subject-specific collections, but our fiction collections. We can—and should—continue to do our best at the desk, but it is also crucial that we embrace indirect RA, that we help our patrons navigate our fiction collections via handouts and lists, and that we explore new ways to cultivate that most precious of romantic scenarios: a patron curled up with a good book.

For more information on the use of forms, see Neil Hollands' article "Improving the Model for Interactive Readers' Advisory Service" in the Spring 2006 issue of *Reference and User Services Quarterly*.

For a look at some of the work of IU's L622 students, point your browser at www.readalike.org and browse the reviews or look at the list of resources linked near the bottom of the homepage.

I am currently reading Christina Dodd's *Trouble in High Heels*.

Phil Eskew, M.L.S.
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Romance Writers of America Is Proud to Announce the 2007 Librarian of the Year!

Romance Writers of America honors one librarian each year for her/his outstanding contribution to the advancement of the romance fiction genre. This year's honor goes to Valerie Luna, librarian with the Spotswood Public Library in Spotswood, New Jersey. Luna will be named the 2007 "Librarian of the Year" at RWA's 27th Annual Conference at the Hyatt Regency this July in Dallas, Texas.

* Look for a full bio in the next issue of *Checking Out Romance!*

Visit RWA at BookExpo America

Stop by the RWA booth for fun give-aways and books signed by some of your favorite romance authors!

Where: New York City

When: June 1-3

Booth: # 4949

Authors Signing:

Melanie Atkins *Truth or Dare*

Mary Beth Bass *Follow Me*

Niki Burnham *Goddess Games*

Kathryn Caskie *How To Seduce a Duke*

Kristina Cook *To Love a Scoundrel*

Geralyn Dawson *Her Outlaw*

Anna DePalo *An Improper Affair*

Anne Elizabeth *Caramel Flava*

R. Garland Gray *Fey Born*

Sara M. Harvey *A Year and a Day*

Debra Mullins *Two Weeks with a
Stranger*

Sophia Nash *A Dangerous Beauty*

Caridad Pineiro *Sex and the South
Beach Chicas'*

Susan Ralph *Brompton Manor*

Farrah Rochon *Deliver Me*

Deborah Smith *The Crossroads Café*

Jeri Smith-Ready *Eyes of Crow*

Hope Tarr *It's a Wonderfully Sexy Life*

Karen White *Learning to Breathe*

CHECKING OUT ROMANCE

The Romance Writers of America Library Affiliates Program Newsletter

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When *Harry Met Sally*, *Bridget Jones' Diary*, *Pillow Talk*, *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*, and *Romancing the Stone* are a few examples of romantic comedy that we all love. **If you like romantic comedy movies, you're sure to like these books and authors...**

Andersen, Susan	<i>Just for Kicks</i>
	<i>Skintight</i>
Banks, Leanne	<i>Footloose</i>
	<i>Underfoot</i>
Blair, Annette	<i>My Favorite Witch</i>
	<i>The Scot, The Witch & The Wardrobe</i>
Bond, Stephanie	<i>The Body Movers</i>
Brandt, Beverly	<i>Match Game</i>
	<i>Dating Game</i>
Chase, Loretta	<i>Lord Perfect</i>
Crusie, Jennifer	<i>Strange Bedpersons</i>
	<i>Manhunting</i>
	<i>Getting Rid of Bradley</i>
Evanovich, Janet and Charlotte Hughes	<i>"Full" series</i>
Hill, Sandra	<i>The "Viking" series</i>
	<i>Pink Jinx</i>
Jump, Shirley	<i>The Angel Craved Lobster</i>
	<i>The Dating Game</i>
Klassel, Jennie	<i>It Happened in South Beach</i>
Linz, Cathie	<i>Good Girls Do</i>
	<i>Bad Girls Don't</i>
Phillips, Susan Elizabeth	<i>Match Me If You Can</i>
	<i>Natural Born Charmer</i>
	<i>It Had to be You</i>
Quinn, Julia	<i>On the Way to the Wedding</i>
Rich, Lani Diane	<i>Maybe, Baby</i>
Thompson, Vicki Lewis	<i>The "Nerd" books</i>

If you like a little mystery with your romantic comedy try these books and authors...

Evanovich, Janet	<i>"Stephanie Plum" series</i>
Fluke, Joanna	<i>"Hannah Swensen" mysteries</i>
Harris, Charlaire	<i>"Sookie Stackhouse" series</i>
Martin, Nancy	<i>"Blackbird Sister" mysteries</i>
Strohmeier, Sarah	<i>"Bubbles Unbound" series</i>
Swanson, Denise	<i>"Scumble River" mysteries</i>
Viets, Elaine	<i>"Dead End Job" mysteries</i>