



People of PROMIG

Eboni A. Johnson
Outreach and Programming Librarian
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People of PROMIG: How did you get started in your career?

Eboni A. Johnson: That's a fun story. I came to Oberlin College as an undergrad in 1990, and I think it was probably through that first year that I got my first work study job, which was in the library, and it was to be a student assistant at the reference desk. Then the summer between first and second year I got another job in the library in what's called the preservation lab. And that was the job that made me decide, oh, I could go and become a librarian and get my certification and preservation and conservation and, like, do this. It was really great. So, for a while, I worked both jobs, and then I figured out that I had to let one go just because of the demands on my time and work and all that. So, I quit the reference desk. I kept the other job for the whole rest of my time at Oberlin. Then I did go off to library school, but I did not end up pursuing that track to be a book and paper conservator, but instead, I ended up becoming a reference librarian.



Image courtesy Friends of the Oberlin College Libraries, Oberlin, Ohio

People of PROMIG: What is your current job title?

Eboni A. Johnson: My current job title is Outreach and Programming Librarian, but actually, my job has two very kinds of distinct parts to it. So, part of it is the outreach and programming part, helping to facilitate events happening either in the libraries or that the libraries are putting on. We've had dance recitals in the library. We've had some of our group study rooms used as kind of art exhibit spaces, so they were taken out of commission for a while and blocked, but they were turned into kind of an exhibit. So, we've had things that you might not expect to happen in a library, happening in the library. But, the other part of my job is what

you might expect from an academic librarian. So, the education, reference and instruction part and showing people how to use library resources to do their research and also helping to buy the books and other materials in the collection to help people do that research. So, kind of two very distinct parts of my job, but somehow it works.

People of PROMIG: What do you like most about your job?

Eboni A. Johnson: Oh, my gosh. Okay, so I think my most favorite thing, even though the two parts of my job are very different, I think my most favorite is doing one on one research appointments with students and kind of helping them get over their research hurdles and help them become more confident information seekers and users. I think it's my very favorite thing.



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People of PROMIG: What is the most challenging aspect of your job?

Eboni A. Johnson: I would say probably on the reference and instruction side the most challenging part or the most challenging part that we're dealing with right now is around budget. So, having to make hard decisions about what we can't keep paying for, right, but also working with faculty to get their input on those things before we make our decisions. So, we try to

be data driven as much as possible, but sometimes it's hard to do that. It's not very fun either. So, you have to make hard choices sometimes that not everyone is going to like.

People of PROMIG: What projects are you excited about right now?

Eboni A. Johnson: Well, I have one that's going to be published sometime this month, and I'm not exactly sure when, so I'm on pins and needles waiting for that. But, there's a journal called *Libraries, Culture, History and Society*, and last year there was a call for proposals and the issue that's coming out is all about Black women librarians. And so, I was really excited. I just sort of saw this call kind of accidentally on Facebook, and I'm like, I have to submit something. So, I was really excited to submit a proposal to write about Virginia Proctor. She was the first Black woman to earn a professional degree in library science, and she was an Oberlin graduate from the class of 1919. So, as an Oberlin alum myself, I sort of felt a special affinity for her, and I had known about her before. But as soon as I saw this call, I got on my computer and I'm like, I have to do this. And so, I'm happy that it got accepted.

People of PROMIG: Finally, you and Shaunda Vasudev, a Student Success Librarian at Capital University, in Columbus, Ohio, created PROMIG as an ALAO interest group. How did that come together?

Eboni A. Johnson: I think it was about 2016 or 17 when my job as a reference and instruction librarian sort of morphed into outreach and programming and I didn't know a lot of librarians who had that in there as a job title. So, I'm like, well, lots of us do that kind of work, even if we don't have the title attached to it. I was in a place where I wanted to create my own little community of practice, I guess you could say and I don't remember how this came up between me and Shaunda, but we're like, hey, we should create an interest group. We're like, yeah, that makes sense because she was doing the same thing. I think her title might actually have been outreach and programming or outreach and engagement or something like that at the time. We thought, well, since we know people who are doing this kind of work, we should all get together and have an interest group. I think we both hope that it will continue to grow and take off and be an important kind of resource for other people around the state who are doing the kinds of things that we're doing.