



People of PROMIG

Laura Birkenhauer
Student Success Librarian
Miami University

People of PROMIG: How did you get started in your career?

Laura Birkenhauer: Before I ever started working at Miami University, I attended the university as an undergrad, majoring in English with a focus on creative writing. I'm a long-time patron of libraries, but I'd never thought seriously about a career in the field. In my final year as a Miami student, on a whim I went to a job talk presented by two librarians from the Miami University Libraries. It's wild to think about how I almost didn't go, and what I might have ended up doing instead post-graduation. In that talk, I learned about librarianship as a profession and about an in-state MLIS program. The presentation piqued my interest, and I quickly applied to and was accepted into Kent State University's program. Within a year, I was working and volunteering in all different kinds of libraries in the Dayton, OH, area - public libraries, a for-profit college, a K-12 school library - trying to gain experience and find my footing. In the second year of my MLIS program I landed a full-time position in the library back at my alma mater, Miami University, which was always ultimately my goal.

People of PROMIG: What's your job title?

Laura Birkenhauer: Student Success Librarian for Campus Engagement. I support underserved and at-risk student populations at my institution. I provide leadership for the Libraries' campus engagement and student success programs and work closely with campus partners along the way.

People of PROMIG: What do you enjoy most about your work, either as a librarian or in your specific role?

Laura Birkenhauer: The best part of my job is supporting students, in any context. I find joy in creating a safe space for them to ask questions, grow and learn, whether that's in the classroom or a reference consultation. I am energized by event planning and love the rush I get from executing an event day-of and engaging with the students in attendance.



Late Night Study Breakfast / Courtesy Miami University Libraries, Oxford, OH

People of PROMIG: Tell me about an event you planned that exceeded your expectations?

Laura Birkenhauer: I recently led efforts to host a student appreciation event at the library for military-affiliated students. The turnout, collaborations, and event itself all exceeded my expectations. This event invited military veterans, dependents and spouses, ROTC, active-duty military, and any other military-affiliated students to drop by the library anytime during a two-day period in the week before final exams to use dedicated study space and grab free snacks and drinks. The event had



Military-Affiliated Student Appreciation Days /
Courtesy Miami University Libraries, Oxford, OH

so many amazing tie-ins and partnerships. The event was co-sponsored by the Associated Student Government and the incoming student body president and vice president attended and staffed the registration table as part of their first official event, talking with every student who stopped by and expressing their support and appreciation. We worked with a faculty member and senior students in the Department of Kinesiology, Nutrition and Health to organize what ended up being a very popular “Lunch & Learn” program on the first day of the event. The students demonstrated easy, nutritious meals and snacks - overnight oats and power balls - and gave away meal kits and cookbooks to a packed house. The Makerspace made buttons for each branch of the US military and as students stopped by they were encouraged to pick up a button representing the branch they

affiliate with. We encouraged a friendly competition between the branches and announced the winning branch at the end with a celebratory message to all attendees. In the end, the US Air Force prevailed! The Makerspace also featured

supplies for sticker-making and hosted VR gaming during the event. While recent similar events hosted in the Division of Student Life targeting specific student populations attracted around 15-20 attendees on average, our event brought in 65 students! I'm very proud of this event, maybe more than any other I've ever planned; some of that has to do with my answer to the next question.

People of PROMIG: What do you think most people would be surprised to learn about you?

Laura Birkenhauer: People are usually surprised to learn I'm a "military brat." I grew up the child of a Lieutenant Colonel in the US Air Force and, because of that, I moved a lot growing up. I've lived in FL, CA, GA, NC, AL and OH, and I attended three different middle schools and three different high schools.

People of PROMIG: What's the best piece of advice you've ever received, career-related or not?

Laura Birkenhauer: To reframe your mindset from "I have to do this" to "I GET to do this."

People of PROMIG: You are co-chair of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) ULS Academic Outreach Committee. Can you talk a little bit about some of the work you are doing there?

Laura Birkenhauer: The main focus of the committee is developing and maintaining a community of practice around campus outreach for academic librarians. Since 2014, this committee has hosted online roundtable discussions on topics of interest to ACRL/ULS members interested in academic outreach. As a committee member since 2018, I've been part of roundtables for a number of years, acting in a variety of roles. But it's been an entirely new experience to coordinate roundtables as co-chair. I'm someone who enjoys the minute details of event coordination, so it's very much a good fit for me. Most recently, the committee hosted a successful series of roundtables on the topic of "Creating Outreach Plans" in April 2022, with over 25 attending the first discussion and more than 15 attending the second. After the 'Zoom fatigue' felt by many in the last couple of years, I think these numbers are terrific. Something we did a little differently this time: My co-chair, Sarah LeMire, floated the idea of inviting experts to our roundtables to further encourage conversation and bring even more experience and expertise to the table at these events. We were thrilled that Shannon Farrell, Eboni Johnson and Emilie Vrbancic each accepted our invitation to participate as Topic Experts. And, since the test run went so well, we will definitely be inviting experts to participate in future events. Our committee has also recently kicked off some very exciting work around developing professional competencies for academic outreach work - stay tuned!