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# I Love My Librarian!

2008 Award

## **Nomination for Jean Amaral**

Reference Librarian  
Antioch University New England  
Keene, New Hampshire

## **Nominator:**

Steve Chase  
Keene, New Hampshire

### **1. How long have you known the nominee and how did you come to know him or her?**

I have known Jean Amaral since she first interviewed for the Research Librarian position open at Antioch University New England (ANE) in early 2006. Out of the three finalists I met, she was the one I recommended to be hired.

This particular hiring decision was important to me because I teach in both the master's and doctoral programs of the Department of Environmental Studies and a core part of the new hire's job description was to serve as the research librarian for our department. I wanted to make sure the ANE Library hired a replacement as good as Jean's predecessor and I was therefore very motivated to take part in this hiring process.

Well, Jean was hired by ANE and in the two and half years since she took on the job, she has far exceeded the school's highest expectations for her job performance. She is a dynamo of energy, talent, humor, consideration, and has the most intense dedication to aiding students and faculty that I have ever seen.

This summer during a student review of our Environmental Studies doctoral program, the student reps all shared with the faculty the doctoral students unanimous agreement that "Jean Amaral is worth the price of our tuition dollars all by herself." The faculty had not even asked the students to comment on our library services, and this was the first thing they reported out to us during the review.

Given my own experience with Jean, and the many faculty and student stories I've heard about her that have echoed the assessment of our doctoral students, I knew that I just had to nominate Jean Amaral for the New York Times' "I Love My Librarian" award.

To set some context, Jean's job description includes such duties as: deliver reference services in person and via IM, e-mail, and telephone; teach information literacy classes and provide individual consultation; create in-depth, online research subject guides and tutorials; market the library to students, faculty, and staff; serve as research liaison to the Environmental Studies and Clinical Psychology departments; and select and evaluate monographs, serials, electronic resources, and websites of interest to her assigned departments. To this, she adds serving on the ANE Faculty Senate, chairing the ANE Academic Technology committee, as well as the ANE Focus the Nation committee that organized a climate protection teach-in at the beginning of this year.

This is a big "do-list." Still, you can't fully understand Jean's immense impact on this school until you hear some of the specific words about her from the faculty and students she has served so well for the last two-and-a-half years. Here's a note I got from her supervisor after I wrote an e-mail about how much the Environmental Studies faculty and student body appreciate Jean Amaral's service and leadership at our graduate school:

"Thanks for the note, Steve. Jean Amaral is one great info wrangler. She has a gift for making her students see themselves and their work as boundlessly interesting. I asked her to tell me something that happened today that she felt really good about, and she said that a student stopped by her post out in the library to say, "You make every one of us feel so special." And the magic is that all of her students feel that way.

Jean has fun researching with her students at Antioch University New England -- and they get the idea that doing research is fun, too. Though she's reluctant to talk about it, she truly believes that one person can make a difference in students' lives.

Sometimes people meeting her for the first time ask, "Does she always talk that fast??" And the answer is "Yes - isn't it great?!" Jean walks talks and thinks at warp speed - and she brings you right along with her. She brings Techno Tune-up and Cool Tech Tools to her faculty and students, she chats, IMs, emails, blogs, phones and is always available in person, sometimes with a stack of home baked cookies to offer.

She is our institution's academic technology leader, a boundless source of bright and good energy, shepherd of change, full of helpful ideas and fresh perspectives, optimism and plain good sense. No research need is too small, no institution-level task too gnarly (one of her favorite terms) for her to embrace. Jean believes in leading from the middle, and I count myself lucky to be on her team."

Having Jean Amaral on Antioch University New England's team has been an enormous boost to the quality of educational experience we can offer our students.

**2. Please discuss how the nominee has helped you and/or others and made your experience of the library a more positive one. For instance, did the nominee assist you in a research project or enhance your students' learning experience?**

Once the word got out that I was nominating Jean for this award, I started to get all kinds of written feedback about how Jean has brought her wonderful "librarian power" to people's academic lives here at ANE. A professor in the Clinical Psychology Department wrote me:

"In preparing to present at the national APA meeting in Boston, Jean was the one who found a pivotal piece of research supporting our proposition that conservationists may be suffering a different form of traumatic stress response in their front line work on planet degradation. It came from a British publication, and our colleagues at the APA session were impressed with the find!"

Another Clinical Psychology professor shared this with me:

"Jean Amaral is the library goddess. Not only has she been incredibly helpful with many of my classes about finding research materials and journals, but I have seen her help certain adjunct faculty feel more comfortable using the technology involved. I am convinced that if some form of information CAN be found, she'll be the one to find it and share it with the world."

According to an Environmental Studies master's student:

"Jean is the best in the biz! She really makes is a point to remember students names, their projects, comes up with great combinations of key words to locate relevant information, and is always willing to make herself available for consultations. The fact that she spends much of her time stationed in the center of the library with a laptop ready to help students with their research speaks to her commitment to "customer service." She always greets students by with a friendly smile and personalized hello with your name. Not to mention, she often has tasty snacks (usually cookies) and coffee to share, especially at stressful times during the semester! How many other librarians do you know who do that?!?!"

Many other ANE students also wrote me about Jean, including this working Mom coming back to school after a long time out of an academic setting:

"Jean is an adventurous partner in learning. As a full-time doctoral student, full-time professional, and working mom, finding Jean as the Librarian at Antioch New England was a dream. Where would I begin to look for current studies on social neuroscience, children and the environment? Or how could I cleanly switch my citing style depending on the audience? Jean has been absolutely amazing, frequently saving me time by getting me pointed in a positive and productive direction with efficiency. Jean always seems ten steps ahead for everyone..."

- \* making the library a welcoming and comfortable place for research, reading, discussion and contemplating ideas,
- \* being available front and center - - she seems to know when we will likely be in the library,
- \* sharing the most amazing tips for research, the latest technology and software programs or trends in the academic world,
- \* troubleshooting computer problems, and
- \* even emailing a friendly alert that her fair-trade coffee is freshly brewed and available for consumption--in the library no less.

Jean's enthusiasm for every student's quest for knowledge and meaning making is unflinching. Her unwavering support leverages our individual and collective efforts creating a rich and dynamic learning environment."

While I could quote people on and on, let me share here just one more student assessment about how Jean makes the Library an exciting and positive place for learning. This note is from a Clinical Psychology student:

"I am glad you are nominating Jean Amaral for the "I love my librarian" award because Jean always has a moment for a stressed out student who just cannot find that most important article. Jean somehow remembers everyone's names. Jean is incredibly knowledgeable and professional, as well as creative and she works relentlessly on finding new resources for Antioch students. Jean is completely dedicated to educating students and teaching them new skills. In short, Jean is a queen of online resources, a keyword fairy, and my favorite librarian!"

**3. How has the library, and the nominee in particular, had an impact on students and faculty and the teaching and learning process? Please be specific.**

In my own experience as a faculty member in the Environmental Studies Department, I've long been impressed with Jean's deep passion for creating a more ecologically sustainable, socially just, and spiritually fulfilling world. No wonder, time and time again, she goes the extra mile with our faculty and students--all of whom feel like she "gets it" and is devoted to the same ideals that they are. This helps build trust and enthusiasm for using the library as a key part of the learning process. Jean conveys this sense of mission in the many library orientation/education sessions she offers, in her animated personal conversations with students, and by regularly offering "fair trade" coffee to those studying in the library. Her enthusiasm for research, learning, and informed application is infectious.

Her direct service to teachers and students is particularly amazing. Each Fall I teach a course in "Patterns of Environmental Activism" and assign a major research paper to students. When I mentioned this assignment to Jean during her first summer on the job—at a one-on one, get-to-know-you meeting she had initiated--she asked me if I wanted to bring my students down to the library early that Fall for an hour-long session on using the library's online research resources. When I answered yes, she asked me to send her the specific research projects each student was considering ahead of time so she could customize her presentation examples to my students actual topics.

That Fall, when my students went to the library for this session, she knew all their names, as well as their topics. As preparation, she had accessed their school photographs and memorized their names ahead of time. People were impressed and, as she talked in her funny, lightening-fast way, she

further connected with my students with warmth and energy. She talked about their research interests with great knowledge and enthusiasm, used their own research questions as case examples of how to research a topic, showed them how to use many tools, provided handouts on her main points, and then had them each start using some of these research tools as she walked around the room answering individual questions. Before she ended the session, she invited all the students to contact her any time—through many different means—for research assistance.

Jean has offered this session with my first semester students for the last three years, and without a doubt the quality of my student's research papers have gone up since Jean took on this very personalized initiative. Every year, this session also lays a relational foundation between Jean and my students that helps them utilize the library throughout their time at Antioch. As one of my former students recently wrote me:

"I LOVE Jean Amaral and think nominating her is a great idea. She is always helpful and students can drop by almost anytime and she makes herself available to answer whatever questions we present. Morey and I stopped by once to randomly ask her a question about grammar that we disagreed upon and Jean humored our argument by gathering books to present the issue of commas.

Jean also helped me enormously when I was researching information for the VP of Academic Affairs regarding online learning. She kept sending me links, as if she continued to look for articles long after I had asked for her assistance. I was able to look at all the articles and forward on relevant information to the VP.

During my last week at ANE several of us were studying for a final in the computer lab room and Jean stopped by to see how we were doing. Somebody said we needed coffee (in a kidding way, not actually thinking she would be able to get us coffee) and Jean quickly returned with a coffee thermos and cups for us. She said she was there to help us and she has always gone above and beyond the normal expectations of a library employee.

She is so wonderful and I think ANE really lucked out when they hired her. In fact, I'd been meaning to send her a thank-you card for her awesomeness (yeah, a librarian would love the use of that word) but just hadn't gotten around to it. Thanks for nominating her!"

Here is another very telling story from a doctoral student in the Environmental Studies Department:

"Jean attends my off-campus presentations, after work hours -- and takes notes. She has invested much energy and time in trying to understand what I am researching. Not only does she somehow come up with combinations of search terms and database hunts that answer my many questions, she believes in what I do. When I get discouraged and feel like giving up, Jean is there to tell me how important a contribution I am making to the world. She tells me how she has changed her lifestyle because of what I've taught her, and how knowing that I am trying to solve these problems help her sleep better at night. Does Jean sleep? It isn't unusual for me to get emails from her at 1 am sharing articles she's come across that she thinks might be helpful to me.

One particular instance shows how invaluable Jean is...I collaborated with a famous author I much admire for a publication. Trying to impress this author was high on my list, but I didn't expect Jean would also make it her priority. The luminous scientist called me several times and said, "I need that graph by so-and-so. Do you remember seeing it? Where is it?" I had no idea, so I emailed Jean, who somehow had produced a PDF of that very graph by the following day. I don't know how she did it. Over and over, given only the most bare-bones descriptions, not anything approaching a real citation, Jean came up with obscure charts and articles from fifty years ago. It is only because of her that we met the publication schedule for the project. I don't know how she kept up with the other demands of her life that week. She made it seem that she always had time for me."

I think this student's final comment is especially worth noting:

"A friend of mine is a doctoral student at Harvard. I have to meet with her and teach her the tricks Jean shows us -- how to set up a TOC alert, how to subscribe to an EBSCO search, and how to use RefGrab-It. She isn't getting any of that sort of training or support through her program. She is so jealous when I tell her about Jean. She can only imagine having a reference librarian dedicated to her success. I would rather have one of Jean and our tiny library than no Jean and all the resources of Harvard's extensive libraries."

**4. How does the nominee make the college, community college, or university a better place? Please be specific.**

One example of her making our university a better place and offering a real service to the larger community is how Jean took the initiative to

organize and chair last year's Focus the Nation committee that planned Antioch's segment of the national teach-in on climate protection. Instead of coming up with just one day of events, as suggested by Focus the Nation organizers, she and her committee came up with a week's worth of lunch-time and evening events, based on the work of a number ANE students and professors from various departments—making this a truly interdisciplinary event.

She also did great promotion work for all the events internally and even reached out to the wider community through press releases, letters to local religious congregations, and making arrangements so that most of the events would be taped and presented several times on Keene's local public access TV station. None of this was in her job description. She took the time for this institutional service because she saw an educational opportunity to draw on both Antioch and community resources to further an in-depth, public conversation about the many paths to sustainable community development and climate protection.

I have also had the good fortune to serve with Jean on ANE's Faculty Senate, where her input on library and academic technology issues has been particularly meaningful. However, she has also stood up as a champion of making our administrative decision-making on campus more transparent, open, and collaborative. She also models this in her own behavior during our meetings. She is a quiet leader who speaks up when it will make a difference. She does not speak up out of ego-needs, or to hear herself talk.

Her accessibility to both students and faculty members is astonishing, which dramatically improves life on our campus. My favorite personal example was when, during an Environmental Studies faculty meeting discussing questions about the upcoming shifts in academic technology, a faculty member shot off an email to her with some of our questions. Jean, who is the chair of the Academic Technology committee, got the email and raced across the court yard to where we were meeting and--just as the Departmental Chair was saying she wished Jean were here to answer some of our questions--Jean knocked on the door and said she would be happy to answer any questions we might have about the technology shift. Now that is service!

In that one moment, our entire faculty got a vivid sense of what our students have known all along. She is devoted to service and accessibility. As one of our Conservation Biology students recently wrote me:

"Jean makes herself SO available to students. I've been able to set up meetings with Jean on short notice, I've had Jean help me out with research days before a deadline, and I've even contacted her via instant message on a Sunday (which I felt badly about). But Jean is always there to help and does it with a positive and friendly attitude. She really makes you feel like any question is relevant and that it's no trouble at all. Basically, Jean just kicks ass!"

Here is another student's story:

"I was working upstairs in the student lounge late one evening during my first semester. Having hit a snafu with a database, I send Jean an IM, but - oddly - got no response. Shrugging and moving on to other databases, I was amazed when, one hour later, Jean walked up to me and said "I'm sorry I missed your IM - are you still having trouble?" She had gotten back to her desk, found the IM, asked someone whether they knew where I was, and came to find me to help me troubleshoot my research."

And, another story:

"Well, for starters I was the first student to notice that the Lex/Nex link was broken on Monday and that prevented me from downloading legal case homework for Environmental Law from the ANE library site. I sent an email to Jean about this, and within 10 minutes she had restored the db link and emailed (and phone called) me that it was working. Outstanding support!"

I also love how this doctoral student put it:

"How many ways can you say that her response to the simplest request feels like a warm wave of empowerment and an invitation to kick off your shoes and dive into the world of research - or just learning how Zotero works. With Jean, it's all doable - stresslessly doable."

##### **5. How has the individual demonstrated leadership in the campus community or the profession?**

I have already described many of Jean's leadership initiatives and qualities. Jean is certainly a strong leader within ANE's library, and has taken on leadership roles within ANE and the entire University system. She has even worked to strengthen her leadership capabilities by applying, being selected for, and participating in the highly competitive, four-day New England Library Leadership Symposium.

Primarily, Jean is a leader by example through hard work, dedication, collaborative dialogue, and initiative-taking. In particular, she provides a great example of servant leadership. She builds relationships, listens well, discovers people's needs, and tries to assist them to achieve their goals, regardless of whether they are students or faculty. She has also stepped far beyond leadership within the Library. She has won the respect and appreciation of ANE's faculty, staff, and student body. Every day, I see her bring a light and warm touch to her work with others. She is careful with her speech, honest, and thoughtful. She's detailed-oriented, humane, and funny.

The main thing I would like to feature here, however, is Jean's leadership work on the Academic Technology Subcommittee of the multi-campus, University Informational Technology Steering Committee. Antioch University is a decentralized national university with campuses in Ohio, California, Oregon, and New Hampshire. For the last two years, Jean's committee has worked on a university-wide transition to a new online learning management system that will be completed by this summer.

As a faculty member, I have appreciated the notices and information sessions that Jean has provided to ANE faculty during this important evaluation and transition process, and I applaud her constant search for feedback from us. However, to give you a fuller sense of Jean's leadership work on this committee, I've included some comments below from three different faculty representatives who serve on this committee with Jean.

First, here is what the chair of the Organization and Management Department has to say of Jean's work on this committee:

"I am serving on the Academic Technology Committee that Jean Amaral chairs. She has the art of managing a group, pacing a challenging task, and holding all the questions respectfully. She is promoting a challenging change initiative for our faculty, yet she introduces and shares the new initiative with grace, wisdom, and academic excellence...all language our faculty listen and respond to. She is immediately respected as an expert and one to turn to for questions and answers. She is also skilled at holding the cheerleaders with the naysayers all at once; she lets everyone feel heard and appreciated. She is an amazing leader that is teaching us all how to be leaders just by leading our committee."

Here is what the committee member from ANE's Education Department has to say:

"All our librarians are great, but Jean's leadership on the technology committee and in support of faculty trying to navigate the transition to new on-line learning systems has just been outstanding. She's organized, understanding, unflappable, and just totally willing to help in whatever way she can do it. My students are having a way better experience in their courses because of the time and energy she's given to helping me be ready."

Finally, here is a comment from the faculty member on the committee representing the Environmental Studies Department:

"I have been talking with Jean more than any other colleague over the last month and can certainly state that she is like no-other resource librarian. She's clever, smart and knows her s--t better than anyone I've ever worked with; she responds faster than a speeding locomotive, is able to leap tall stacks of bureaucracy and mazes of library resources in a single bound, and never complains about her unceasing service to all of us. When Sakai becomes fully adopted, integrated, welcomed, and accepted in what we do here, it will be because of her persistence and openness to work with folks like me who took the earlier versions on a very bumpy test drive. I have come to adore and respect her immensely and now want her on every committee I am on."

What more can I say? It is not just me who loves Jean Amaral. The entire student body and faculty here at Antioch New England love Jean Amaral, and we all hope you will honor her exemplary work as an academic research librarian committed to the highest standards of higher education learning, teaching, and research. You could not pick a better recipient for this award.