



**Nominee: Michael Beller
F.W. Olin Library
Mills College, California**

Nominator: David Donahue

1. Please tell us in 2-3 sentences why your nominee should win this award. What sets him/her apart?

Beyond his expertise based on years of experience, Michael Beller's attitude and persona set him apart. As Head of Reference and Access Services at the Mills College Library, he takes the concept of customer service to the highest degree. Library patrons seek Michael out and have been heard to say in reference to him, "I love my librarian!" so this award is particularly appropriate. Michael is a librarian, teacher, leader, mentor, guide, expert, cheerleader, and friend to so many on campus.

2. Please discuss how the nominee has helped you and/or others and made your experience of the library a more positive one.

Michael is the "go to" person for everyone on campus when they have a question involving research or library services.

Cynthia Scheinberg, a senior faculty member in the English Department, writes that Michael routinely gives sessions to her classes about doing research in the library. She continues, "When he does these, it is like having my own personal librarian; he tailors each presentation (and he does tons of them) to the specific needs of my specific class, whether on nineteenth century women writers or doing research papers for an advanced expository writing class. The most important part of his work, however, is the sheer joyful energy he brings to all his work, teaching, and presentations. Michael excited our students about the possibilities of using the library on a daily basis!"

Another senior faculty member, Carol Chetkovich, the chair of the public policy department writes, "My appreciation for Michael has to do with his enormous helpfulness. In particular, when I'm struggling to get things on reserve, to get an ebook into the library quickly so students can access it for a course, or trying to hyperlink syllabus entries to articles in our databases, he's always there to help me get the job done, which in turn makes me a much more effective instructor." Mark Henderson, another professor in public policy, finds that students invariably learn something new about their topic from the experience of talking with a master of information like Michael. He says,

“No topic seems too obscure for him to quickly recommend an effective research strategy. Best of all, Michael’s infectious enthusiasm for every student’s research topic has never failed. I have studied and taught at other institutions with some of the world’s largest library collections, but my students are better off here with Michael as their guide to the wider world of information.”

Kathleen Walkup, Professor of Books Arts notes that Michael has given her one-on-one help with questions of access to digital platforms for her research, helped her to locate other sources for the texts that she needed when the Mills database could not supply those texts, and has given advice about bibliographic software. She says, “There is literally no question that I could ask that he would not answer.” She is equally confident about sending students with research queries to Michael, who answers them patiently and thoroughly. She comments, “While the entire library staff at Mills is incredibly helpful, Michael remains the patient, knowledgeable and caring first responder for student assistance.”

Colleagues in the library agree on his focus to help students and faculty alike. According to Michele Buchman, library circulation supervisor, “He has complete availability. No matter what he’s doing, if someone wants his help, he’s totally focused on them.” Carol Jarvis, former associate library director, notes that “Michael is incredibly intelligent, but what makes him a really great reference librarian is his patience. He’ll never make someone feel like he’s on a different level than they are, he’ll just help you get to that level.”

3. How does the nominee make the college, community college, or university a better place?

Michael is all-inclusive. He radiates warmth, good will, and acceptance towards all students, faculty, and staff. He has been honored several times by students as an invited guest to the Pearl M dinner, the Athletics Awards Banquet, and the Ethnic Studies lunch. He was made an honorary member of the class of 2009 and given a Pearl M at the time, one of the highest honors that students at Mills can bestow on faculty or staff. He was also the yearbook advisor for several years. He is frequently featured in the student newspaper, *The Campanil*, both as a columnist and a person of interest on campus (including an appearance in their May 5, 2014, “Fashionable Faculty” features where he is sporting one of his fifty bowties). He was also recently featured in a Mills College student’s video of “Happy” where he was dancing in the library stacks with a favorite book. Every year, Michael leads a graduation highlight: the confetti fanfare marking the ceremony’s end. All these examples illustrate how Michael is not only an outstanding ambassador for the library, but someone who makes Mills a dear and treasured place and creates memories of college that last students’ lives.

Kathleen Walkup, Professor of Book Art, sums up nicely how Michael makes Mills a better place: “Michael is one of the very rare colleagues whose passion for the community in which he works is so powerful that it spills over into all of his dealings with those of us lucky enough to be in his purview. I have had literally dozens of

conversations with Michael over the years about his interest in expanding and developing the library as the (rightful) core of the Mills student experience. He has been fundamentally instrumental in bringing about changes to the physical building such as the new study rooms, the library lounge, and the low-scent study area. He has introduced service dogs to the library lounge during finals and other stressful periods in our students' lives.”

4. How has the library, and the nominee in particular, had an impact on students and faculty and the teaching and learning process?

After a session with Michael students are excited about their research. He creates an environment where curiosity is awakened. He employs creative and unforgettable examples to demonstrate research concepts, e.g., the history of polka dots examined through the use of the library's subscription databases. The attention of the students might be enhanced by the fact that he happens to be wearing a polka dot shirt and tie while discussing the subject. The success of the students is the most important aspect of his job. This comes through in his contact with undergraduate and graduate students individually and in group settings. He is also the most sought after presenter for bibliographic instruction in all subject areas. He patiently shepherds stressed-out graduate students through their theses.

Michael teaches Letters 101, Library Resources and Methods, which introduces students to library research and the use of printed works and electronic databases in the search for source material. Each student develops a bibliography on a topic of her choice. This course and Michael's gifted teaching has inspired many students to further graduate work and careers in library science.

As a child, Michael's favorite book was *The Phantom Tollbooth* and to this day, he says it's the greatest book in the world. “The main character gets to appreciate learning through these adventures.” He continues, “The idea that learning opens up your life, allows you to appreciate more of what's around you means so much to me.” That openness and enthusiasm for learning as a limitless journey characterizes Michael's work with students and faculty.

5. How has the individual demonstrated leadership in the campus community?

Michael has been a leader in a number of initiatives at the library and across the campus. He has played a leading role in promoting our students' capabilities in information literacy. Michael is the teacher-leader of College 5, a required course for all new first year and transfer students. Not only does Michael lead the course, he is involved in continuous assessment and improvement. In preparation for our review from the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, Michael worked with the Mills College Assessment Committee to examine data about the effectiveness of our current approaches to developing students' information literacy. That work revealed that while students received an introduction to information literacy through College 5, Mills needed to do more to further develop information literacy as students work on more complex academic

tasks, particularly senior and graduate theses. As a result of this work where Michael's leadership was key, the faculty decided at their 2014 retreat to take further steps at embedding information literacy in upper level courses. Michael spent much of the 2013-14 academic year investigating new curriculum for our College 5 course and has worked with faculty and administrators to improve the course content.

Finally, Michael took the lead in moving the library from bound these to electronic versions. His leadership and reaching out to students and faculty made this transition a smooth and successful one. The chair of the English department writes about this process, "Michael was instrumental in helping our graduate MFA students learn how to file their MFA theses digitally, and he worked with the department to make what could have been a daunting process seamless and easy, carefully outlining to students the choices they had in making their theses public or not, and being on hand 24/7 to assist with technical challenges. What could have been a nightmarish new policy for digital submission was made easy and efficient!" The chair of the Book Art department similarly notes, "I have worked closely with Michael on the challenges of having our graduate students digitally file their theses, which for book art students can be a complex tangle of written work, visual images, video, audio and gallery documentation; in every case Michael has been patient willing and innovative in working with these students."

Michael is an ambassador for the F. W. Olin Library and for Mills College. His genuine affection for the institution, including its history and mission and what it represents is tangible. He received a much deserved promotion to Head of Reference and Access Services in 2011 and has been an inspiring mentor to his staff who are also uniformly excellent. He has often been heard to say, "I am here for you" and he really means it.