



Nominations for: Dr. Shahla Bahavar

Director, Public Services Division 1, USC Libraries
USC Libraries
University of Southern California
Los Angeles, Calif.

Nominator: Najmedin Meshkati

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

Dr. Shahla Bahavar has provided exceptional leadership in the provision of student focused instruction and services within the USC Libraries, with initiatives and impact that extends to the greater library profession. Shahla's professional career has been built around being on the leading edge of connecting users to the information services they require. Early in her professional career she mastered the challenge of bringing the one of the very first Information Commons online as a fully realized student-focused service model. Since then she has gone on to continue to actively implement new patron services and provide managerial oversight to multiple public services units while maintaining personalized contacts with students and faculty on the frontlines. She sets the highest instructional and service standards and inspires others to follow her lead.

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

My professional rapport with Dr. Shahla Bahavar was established in 1994, shortly after Leavey Library opened to the public. I asked Dr. Bahavar to help me and my students and I was impressed with the quality of research training she offered to us during customized library research sessions. The course-specific interactive class instructions as well as the follow up appointments with Dr. Bahavar had enormously positive impact on the quality of course work that students presented to me. She patiently guided students through their research projects and prepared them to conduct independent scholarly research. I missed her unmatched intellectual contribution to my teaching when she was on leave for four years. I was happy to reestablish our professional collaboration upon her return to USC in 2000.

In recent years, Dr. Bahavar has conducted invaluable research training sessions in support of two classes that I teach: the "Freshman Seminar on Technology and Environment" and "Freshman Engineering Academy." Invariably, thanks to her tireless commitment to disseminating her extensive knowledge of research resources in the area of Science and Engineering, papers produced for these classes have consistently represented high levels of library research competency.

With Dr. Bahavar's help, students enrolled in the Freshman Engineering Academy in fall 2003, created the content for an amazing course website that at the time was a popular reference resource for engineering students all over the world. Four major energy generation technologies were selected: Fossil Fuel, Fuel Cell, Nuclear, and Renewable. Four teams of USC freshman engineering students, each studied one of such technologies and their environmental impacts wrote a report and made a power point presentation, which were then all posted on the class project's Internet site. Dr. Bahavar's invaluable assistance in creation of this web page was reflected in the students

acknowledgment which was posted on the site: “We would also like to express our gratitude to Dr. Shahla Bahavar, Information Services Coordinator, USC ISD- Leavey Library, for her instructions and assistance in searching electronic sources.”

My students often express admiration for Dr. Bahavar’s expertise and gratitude for her willingness to assist them. The following unsolicited feedback from my student’s email is an example of high quality of Shahla’s professional contributions, her commitment to the educational mission of our university and overwhelming impact on the students’ academic endeavor: “Dr. Bahavar opened my eyes to a vast collection of information that I am now frequently using for my Engineering class as well as my other classes.”

I would like to underscore that I am personally grateful to Dr. Bahavar for her leadership and expert assistance during an emergency leave. When I had a personal family emergency and had to be away from campus, Dr. Bahavar competently coordinated my students’ group projects and offered them research consultations. As a result, the students produced papers that exceeded all my expectation in terms of the demonstrated quality of library research. In addition, I frequently turn to Dr. Bahavar to assist me in my research needs and to solve the e-journal access problems that I encounter. I am very pleased that her Director of Public Services Division I libraries leadership responsibilities include the Science & Engineering Library among many that she supervise. and that she continues to share her exceptional knowledge of research resources with the Science and Engineering students. She is truly an asset for our institution.

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

Shahla has always been dedicated to the highest quality standards of service to USC faculty and students through the reference and instruction programs she has designed, conducted and shared with others. Even as her administrative responsibilities increased she has consistently continued to provide information literacy instruction to the full spectrum of students from freshmen to Ph.D. candidates. Her greatest recent emphasis has been devoted to ensuring USC’s sizable international graduate student population, enrolled in the American Language Institute, and beginning engineering majors, through the Engineering Freshman Academy, receive an effective introduction to the most important resources and techniques appropriately geared to their special information needs. Course instructors repeatedly seek Shahla out to conduct sessions for their classes semester-after -semester because of the positive experience she consistently delivers to their students.

Shahla’s professional career has been built around being on the leading edge of connecting users to the information services they require. Leavey Library is the only USC Library conceived and built since the advent of the personal computer. Early in her professional career she mastered the challenge of bringing the Leavey Library’s Information Commons online as a fully realized service operation. A decade later, she has been instrumental in returning the Leavey Library to a position of national prominence as a model for information commons operations.

Professionally, Shahla’s implementation of the Information Commons in the Leavey Library is a transformative contribution to the profession of librarianship and the student learning environment. There is no question that students quickly made Leavey, and the IC in particular, a destination point. So much so that the 2nd floor was converted from bookstacks to an Upper Commons in 1998 and even then students were queuing for seats. Leavey Library is the only USC Library conceived and built since the advent of the personal computer. It is the Information Commons, where information resources and productivity tools merged in a collaborative environment with supportive research assistance, that became the Leavey Library’s innovative centerpiece. The Information Commons

quickly began attracting hundreds of student users per day and garnered international attention within the library profession. As the original Information Services Coordinator, Shahla was at ground zero in actually making an Information Commons work. She was in uncharted territory, with few existing models or road maps.

In 1994, libraries had reference departments while universities, usually via academic computing centers, operated user rooms, generally stocked with as many computers as could be squeezed into a room. Software interfaces were far from intuitive and the staff hired to provide user room support tended to be long on technical expertise, but short on people skills. Since the librarians and staff were only brought onboard shortly before opening day, Shahla not only had the challenge of merging these two cultures, she was not afforded the luxury of time for detailed advanced planning. Never-the-less, she successfully hired and trained student navigation assistants, set standards for service, developed policies and procedures for computer and collaborative workstation use, coordinated activities with the Customer Support Center's computer consultants, and negotiated the different cultural and service orientations. She was among the first at USC to introduce students, faculty and staff to the potential offered via gopher, then the World Wide Web. When most of the campus was just exploring the potential of the Internet, Shahla was busy conducting sessions on Internet usage for students, alumni and the Staff Development Office. The values and standards she established solidified the link between Leavey's reference service and instructional mission as a "teaching library." Remaining ever attentive to students' information and learning needs, her leadership during Leavey's first two years of operation set the pattern of heavy student usage of the Information Commons that eventually led to the establishment of the second Upper Commons. Shortly after opening, throngs of academic librarians and administrators began visiting USC to see the new Leavey Library. Even over a decade later, they still host delegations every year as others seek to model what we've achieved at USC. Inevitably the thing they are most interested in is the Information Commons: what's the atmosphere like, what services do we offer, how do we provide service 24/7, and how do we train staff to operate in this environment. They are very interested in the policies Shahla has established, the organizational configuration she is using, and most particularly, the rigorous training program she has devised for the student navigation assistants (SNA). She has presented at several national and regional conferences on Leavey's Information Commons, training program she has established for the Student Navigation Assistants, as well as assessment of Information Commons services. Shahla is a national and internationally known scholar and figure in the area of Information Commons implementation. When Shahla embarked on shaping and forming the service methods of the Information Commons no such models existed. Today the service philosophy and the foundation of the Commons services, policies, and procedures are still based on those that she established during her original appointment as Information Services Coordinator in 1994. At the time when the Information Commons concept was unknown to academic institutions, USC Libraries embarked on an innovative program that set the milestone for libraries. A decade later, Leavey continues to be a leader for new Information Commons' initiatives, nationally and internationally. I'm very proud that her contributions have helped make the Leavey Information Commons a model for the 21st Century.

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

Early in Shahla's professional career she had the opportunity to lead the organization and fulfillment of the service and instructional mission of USC's Leavey Library Information Commons. When she began, the Information Commons movement was in its infancy: she had no role models to draw upon. In addition to setting high service levels, Shahla developed a training program for staff and student navigation assistants that eventually served as a model, not only within the USC Libraries as a whole, but which has been studied and adapted for implementation in information commons internationally. The Information Commons was immediately a huge success and continues to be a magnet for students to this day and serves as the hub for our student orientation and instruction programs. Even as she has assumed more administrative responsibility, Shahla has continued to maintain her involvement in ensuring the quality of the services provided.

During her leadership role as the Libraries Reference Coordinator, Shahla contributed significantly to mission and vision of the Libraries and the University. She led and coordinated the USC Libraries virtual reference services and implementation of the 24/7 Ask-A-Librarian live chat service. She has served as the USC Libraries administrator for virtual reference global chat services and initiated policy issues, training and assessment of the service. With advancement of information technology and the University's trend toward online resources and services, I know and have heard from my colleagues and students how popular this service is at USC and how much they appreciate the access. With her expanded administrative responsibilities, due to her interest in public services and user-driven services she has continued to lead this worthwhile service.

Another area where Shahla has demonstrated leadership skills is coordinating the Tiered Reference Project Team's activities. In previous years as the USC Libraries Coordinator of Reference Services, she took on several projects to implement consistent training to librarians, staff and student assistants. She led a team of energetic, talented and dedicated librarians and professional staff who were passionate about bringing innovation to the Libraries information services. Through her efforts the team developed several online tutorials. Though Shahla has moved up the organizational ranks, she has continued to provide guidance to those in charge of providing the Information Commons services, first while she was the USC Libraries' Reference Coordinator and most recently as the Director for Public Services Division 1, which included the Leavey Library until a couple of months ago.

As part of Shahla's initiative for implementing tiered reference staffing model at USC Libraries, especially in Leavey, she developed a comprehensive training program for student Navigation Assistants that consisted of several modules. The tiered staffing model, employing highly trained student navigation assistants backed up by staff and librarians to support an escalating service model, enabled Leavey to provide quality answers to the most frequently asked information and technology questions 24 hours/day, 7 days per week. Her tiered staffing model and training program have been shared with and adapted for use by libraries nationally and internationally. Indeed, one of the interactive tutorials Shahla's team developed under her leadership on customer service has served as model for other institutions. She has been contacted by colleagues from other institutions if they could adopt and use her tutorials in their of staff on reference and customer services activities. Instruction and teaching information literacy library instruction is another area that Shahla has made a huge impact on the student's academic lives on campus. Shahla fulfills instruction responsibilities by teaching information literacy to a wide range of students at various academic levels, from freshman to Ph.D.

As Shahla took on more administrative responsibilities she refused to relinquish her ties to students, so she has continued to actively serve on the frontlines, providing reference service and teaching nearly as many classes as she did when this was her primary responsibility. While this puts too much on her shoulders to continue teaching as many sessions as she does she enjoys the interaction with her students and feels a deep commitment to the international students in the American Language Institute (ALI), The Language Academy and the freshmen students in the Engineering Academy. USC is ranked top among research institutions in the nation in regards to international students enrollment. Over the years, Shahla has established a strong partnership with the ALI faculty who routinely request library instruction session for their multi-section courses. Shahla is always their preferred librarian to conduct the sessions and they request her by name. A vast majority of these students are graduate students in the Viterbi School of Engineering. Shahla competently leads comprehensive tutorial on the libraries electronic resources during two-hour hands on interactive session and provides her contact for further consultation later. Several times that my international research assistants were tasked to gather information for my research projects, I referred them to Shahla and as usual the outcome has been the best experience of their academic lives. Also, I appreciate Shahla's attention to conducting library sessions for my Engineering Freshman Academy and the Freshman Seminar on Science and Technology classes that I teach. Her insights, vast knowledge of the library resources and electronic databases as well as subject area expertise and follow up consultations have had enormous impact on my students academic affairs. Due to overwhelming positive feedback from my classes, other faculty teaching the Engineering Freshman Academy courses, contacted Shahla for such library sessions.

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

Over the years, Dr. Bahavar has had progressively high leadership positions at the USC Libraries: Information Services Coordinator for Leavey Library, Assistant Reference Coordinator of the USC Libraries, Reference Coordinator and Interim Coordinator Instruction Services of the USC Libraries, and for the last four years as Director of Public Services Division I. The scope of Shahla's responsibilities, leadership activities and contributions encompass the entire USC campus. Until a couple months ago she had two large and two medium-size libraries in her purview, including the Leavey Library. Through establishment of Leavey in 1994 and its Information Commons facility, Shahla has played a key role on implementation of tiered reference staffing service model and incorporation of Student Navigation Assistants (SNA) training program. The notion of Information Commons and integrated service model (reference and computing services combined) were indeed originated from USC's Leavey Library. Shahla has published in peer review publications and presented at scholarly conferences and professional organizations workshops on these topics, including, ALA, ACRL, CARL (California Academic Research Libraries), CARLDIG (California Academic Reference Librarian Discussion Interest Group), and DIAL (Diversity in Academic Libraries). Due to her personal interest in Information Commons services, tiered reference training and staffing model, and virtual reference services, she continues to be active professionally contributing to the profession and scholarly communication. She has a track record of research papers, peer review publications, scholarly presentations, and leadership positions at professional organizations. Recently, she led a group of colleagues on publishing a peer review book chapter about USC's international students. The chapter titled: "The University of Southern California's campus-Wide Strategies to Reach International Students" appeared in *International Students and Academic Libraries: Initiatives For Success* which was published by ACRL (Association of College & Research Libraries) in 2011. This is an example of Shahla's many leadership opportunities at USC. No doubt that Shahla's campus-wide outreach to ALI and the Language Academy students and faculty led her to submit a proposal to this peer review publication. This brings a great pride for our campus sharing information about unique student population that for ten year in a row ranked

USC as top institution in the nation. She serves on university committees and continues to bring excellence in her position as Director of Public Services Division I libraries.