

Catalyst Profile
Nancy Butkovich

Aspiring volcanologist-turned-professional librarian, Nancy Butkovich, the WCU alumna of 1979, has melded her infatuation with magma and Shakespeare into one, joining millions of others in the library science niche that has exploded in years past.

Though this WCU alumna currently resides over the Physical and Mathematical Sciences Library at the University Park campus of Pennsylvania State University, she got her start in Cullowhee's own Hunter Library.

As an undergraduate student, Butkovich studied geology, gravitating toward courses taught by Steve Yurkovich and Tom Wilcox. The latter, a now-retired professor who once constructed a model river in the basement of Stillwell, was the first to suggest that Butkovich use her researching shtick in a library atmosphere.

Still, she gave being a geologist a whirl, quickly realizing that the classroom was very different than the field.

"I realized librarianship would be a good way to combine my knowledge of geology and science with my interest in information," said Butkovich, only affirming Wilcox's previous assumptions.

From there, the Oregon native worked on staff at Hunter Library for a stint before earning a Masters of Library Science at the University of Tennessee. Her career was launched at Texas A&M University, where she was responsible for the College of Geosciences, the Petroleum Engineering Department, and the Chemical Engineering Department.

In her current tenured faculty position, Butkovich focuses on the Chemistry, Physics, and Astronomy Departments: the triad of Pennsylvania State's Eberly College of Science. She also teaches a 400-level course in chemical literature, disproving the stereotype that science majors do not need writing.

"Research isn't useful until you've disseminated your results to others," said Butkovich after mentioning the various English classes she took as an undergraduate student. "Most of the time, that's done through publications, and if you can't clearly and concisely explain your research, you won't get published."

And Butkovich knows something about being published. In her nearly 40-year career, she has written articles and book chapters, and presented papers at a wide range of professional conferences. The "military brat's" groundbreaking research has earned her elected positions in the American Library Association, and she was even one of the stakeholders in the development of ScholarSphere, Penn State's institutional repository.

Right now, when she is not transcribing bird migration data for the U.S. Geological Survey or rereading J.R.R. Tolkien's trilogies, she works with representatives from the

Eberly College of Science, re-envisioning the Physical and Mathematical Sciences Library.

“My goal is to create a research-focused, technology-rich science commons while maintaining elements of a library, such as quiet study spaces,” said Butkovich.

Though Butkovich is no volcanologist or mineral analyst, she accredits her revolutionary occupation as a rock nerd-turned-librarian to a solid grounding in the sciences.

“When I graduated from WCU, I had absolutely no idea I’d end up making librarianship my career,” said Butkovich. “But that’s what happened, and I like to think I’ve been successful in it.”