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# MARK RUSSELL MAKES THE GAME OF RESEARCH MORE WINNABLE

When students and faculty at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary need to do research, it might feel like rolling dice in a board game. What will turn up, and where will it lead them? Will they advance on the board as far as they hope, or have to take several turns until they land in the right spot?

Enter Mark Russell, the research and instruction librarian at the Seminary's Clifford E. Barbour Library. His job, as he describes it, is to help people track down the answers to their questions. Since 2015, he has directed the paths of PTS students, faculty, and staff so that every roll of the dice results in a research win.

One way he accomplishes this is through instruction: visiting classrooms to teach students how to use the Library's resources, how to do good research, and to verify the integrity of resources.

> "I really enjoy my work with the students through instruction," Mark says. "And working with the faculty is fun in that I get to be part of their research and work. I work with staff too, and those are also enjoyable projects."

One might think of research as a solitary endeavor, but Mark views it differently. As with many things in life, the best research is collaborative. Sometimes that happens within the PTS community, when he gets to do this work of instruction. Other times, it's through collaboration across libraries and institutions of higher learning. Mark manages the inter-library loan services for Barbour Library, which means he's responsible for lending and receiving library resources locally and globally. As an example of the collaborative nature of this work, he recalls that not too long ago he and a librarian from Aberdeen, Scotland, discovered that each was looking for a resource the other ended up being able to provide!
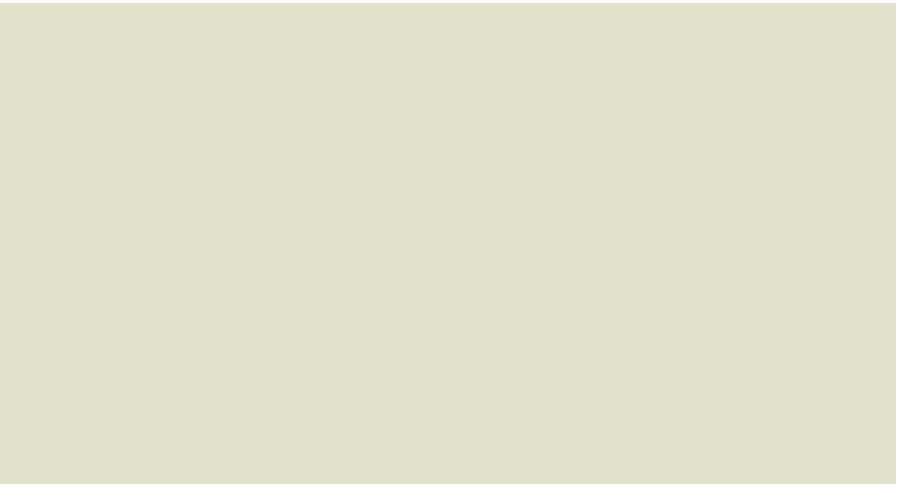
Mark believes that part of what makes Barbour Library so valuable is that its collection is actually a unification of several collections. It holds the collections of the antecedent seminaries that make up Pittsburgh Theological Seminary: Allegheny, Western, Service, and Pittsburgh-Xenia. "This library is amazing!" he exclaims. "It's an incredible historical snapshot of theological education of the entire region."

In an effort to maintain and improve these and other library resources, Mark has become the de facto archivist of PTS. To help with this, he's pursuing a post-masters certificate in digital archives and records management. Of this, he says, "It's been a good experience. I've learned a lot, and I feel better equipped to maintain our archiving so it doesn't fall by the wayside, and so we can improve it down the road."

Mark didn't always work in theological library sciences, but it suits him well. He has an MTS from Harvard Divinity School, a master of library information science from University of Pittsburgh, and before working at the Seminary spent many years working for the Carnegie Library System in Pittsburgh. He's glad to be in a position that fits his interests and skills so well.

When Mark isn't helping others roll the figurative dice of research, he rolls literal dice as a board game enthusiast at home and at PTS. Mark, his wife, and two children, ages 13 and 9, are a big board game playing family, and Mark loves being a dad more than anything in the world. He's also created a community of *Dungeons & Dragons* players at PTS which includes staff, students, and alumnae/i who play on lunch breaks and online, rolling 20-, 12-, and 10-sided die (among other die) to discover what will turn up.

Indeed, for Mark Russell everything—researching, archiving, or game-playing—has the potential to surprise and enlighten all who partake in the journey together.

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