Robert L. Byrd is the associate university librarian for Collections and User Services with Duke University Libraries, and is the adult recipient of the 2018 Algernon Sydney Sullivan Award from Duke University. This award seeks to perpetuate the excellence of character and humanitarian service of Algernon Sydney Sullivan by recognizing and honoring such qualities in others.

Bob’s professional accomplishments with University Libraries are numerous. In the four decades he has worked at Duke, Bob has negotiated the acquisition of some of the Libraries’ most noteworthy and distinctive collections, and in the process has enhanced the university’s scholarly reputation. It was Bob’s vision that ultimately led to the creation of the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library.

Bob has forged productive relationships with faculty, who trust and respect him and with staff who admire and appreciate his wisdom, diplomacy, and ability to get things done.

One of his nominators writes… “Bob never calls attention to himself. He is steady, humble, reliable... He does not come into a room and take over. He does not push himself forward. He listens, he takes measure of the situation, and then he gets down to work. And he gets a lot done, all on the quiet, without any care for whether he gets credit.”

Bob is a deeply spiritual person who believes that a vibrant Christian faith goes hand-in-hand with a rich and deep life of the mind. He has spent years devoting his time, energies, and considerable gifts to bringing together these twin passions—faith and education. In particular, he was instrumental in founding two local educational institutions that, like Duke, combine Christian tradition and academic excellence: the Trinity School of Durham and Chapel Hill, and the Center for Christianity and Scholarship.

The Trinity School was the first educational institution Bob helped get off the ground. Established in 1995, it is now a highly regarded K-12 independent school that educates students within the framework of Christian faith. The Center for Christianity and Scholarship (CCS) was the second. In 2012, Bob worked with local friends and colleagues to establish a nonprofit independent educational organization dedicated to exploring the intersections of Christian thought with the scholarly and academic life of the university. The CCS is based in a house on Buchanan Street near Duke’s East Campus. It works primarily with students and faculty at Duke, with plans to include other universities and colleges in the Research Triangle.

Bob is the very personification of a servant-leader. His noble willingness to lead in an environment that may not always be supportive, happens in a manner that reveals his genuine interest in others and his commitment to serving those with a minority viewpoint. Not only does he lead through example, he is hands on in engaging students and peers through activities such as the recent preparation of 50,000 meals in Duke’s Card gym with the Servants with a Heart organization.

Bob will retire from Duke in May 2018 after 40 years of service. For his many contributions to the Duke and local community and continuing impact beyond, Duke University is proud to name Bob Byrd as the adult recipient of the 2018 Algernon Sydney Sullivan Award.