

Career Connections

Librarianship

OBJECTIVES OF THE PROGRAM

The Library Science Career Connections program is intended to encourage you to take advantage of some of the opportunities to discover and explore the library profession and to learn about the broad spectrum of library employment possibilities.

In the most general terms, a career as a librarian involves the organization of information, be it books, music, maps, government documents, electronic sources, manuscripts or any other format containing information. A librarian may specialize in public services (such as Reference, Circulation or Bibliographic Instruction) or in technical services (such as Cataloging, Serials, Collection Development, or Library Systems) as well as pursue a career in management. In addition, a librarian may specialize in archives, which may incorporate rare books or manuscripts, photos, genealogical resources or other ephemera. Employment opportunities range from work in a public library, academic library, school system, a special library containing a subject-specific collection (such as a law library or within a corporate setting) or for companies that develop and market library computer systems and products. Special libraries may also include those found in hospitals, research institutes, government agencies and publishing houses. A few librarians are self-employed as consultants or information brokers.

Useful skills for a librarian include attention to detail, a desire to assist patrons in a variety of settings (many positions include a user service aspect, even those that concentrate on behind-the-scenes activities), and the ability to analyze and synthesize information and to coordinate with other staff and librarians. Intellectual curiosity, persistence and resourcefulness; a commitment to intellectual freedom, opposing censorship; and strong sense of respect for patron confidentiality are also necessities.

While librarianship is considered by many to be a 'low-stress' profession, in actuality, there can be considerable stress caused by meeting multiple demands in a timely fashion, balancing patron needs, administrative functions, budgetary concerns and other factors.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Exploring Options

One of the best ways to learn about being a librarian is to visit with a variety of librarians available to you now - at the public library, local schools and colleges and within any corporate settings that may contain a library, such as large businesses, law firms or hospitals. Ask them about their duties and responsibilities. This may give you a sense of the type of library you may be interested in and the different kinds of patron questions received in those settings.

The Career Center at Hanover College offers the Campbell Interest and Skill Survey to help students assess career interests.

Job-shadowing a librarian may also help to clarify duties and expectations, as you follow them through their day to observe their activities. Many public libraries welcome volunteers, either as part of a Friends of the Library program or to assist with tasks such as reading to children during story time or shelf reading. Many libraries also participate in promoting literacy and are usually in need of volunteers willing to complete a literary-training program to help others learn to read. Volunteer opportunities may also be available delivering books to shut-ins or nursing homes. The Career Center has a list of Hanover alumni who are now working as librarians and who would be willing to host or mentor students interested in the field.

The American Library Association's website (www.ala.org) has many features that can aid in research on a career in library science, including listservs, salary guidelines, job postings and specialized areas for school, public and special libraries. The web site also contains a listing of ALA-accredited graduate library programs.

There are several library journals published as well that cover a broad array of library topics, journals such as *American Libraries**, *College and Research Libraries**, *Library Journal* as well as more focused titles such as *Computers in Libraries** and *School Library Journal*.

* Available at Duggan Library.

Academics

Professional librarians have majored in all disciplines; there are no specific subjects best suited to a future career as a librarian. It's been said that as a librarian, everything you've ever heard, read or seen will come in handy someday. Perhaps most appropriate is exposure to as many disciplines as possible, from humanities to the sciences, unless you know now that you would like to work in a specific type of library, a business or music library for example. Pursuing your interests now will carry over to being a successful librarian, as intellectual curiosity is as essential to the discipline as is critical thinking and the ability to analyze information. Therefore, take a variety of courses in all fields to accumulate fundamental concepts in a broad variety of fields.

Coursework in such areas as Communication and Computer Science will provide invaluable skills for a career in libraries. History and Sociology classes will also expose you to concepts and theories that are relevant to librarianship, such as historical movements and thought as well as being able to communicate effectively during a reference interview.

Basic understanding of standard office software, and/or hardware will be beneficial, as will computer skills such as data manipulation, web page development and understanding the structure of data. Writing well, precisely and critically, is also a fundamental library skill. The research papers you produce while an undergraduate will hone those skills as well as introduce you to the basic research skills, such as database searching, and using indexes, abstracts and citation sources.

An MLS or Master's in Library Science (also called Library and Information Science or MLIS) from an American Library Association (ALA) accredited program is required for the majority of professional library positions, though there are paraprofessional positions in some larger libraries that require either an Associate's Degree or a Bachelor's Degree. Additional degrees or certification may be required for positions within secondary education and for some positions in public libraries; requirements vary state to state.

Co-Curricular Activities

There are a variety of opportunities on campus that will help you develop skills you may later find useful as a librarian, such as advising fellow students (peer or resident counseling) to sharpen your listening and critical thinking skills. Serving as secretary of any student organization would be a good experience for future librarians as it involves keeping records, recording minutes, etc. Likewise, acting as treasurer of any organization would expose you to handling funds and budgeting and will hone your accuracy. A position on the Student Senate Public Relations Committee would enable you to plan forums, and share information about campus happenings.

However, any on or off campus activity can feature aspects that will transfer into library skills, such as attention to detail, listening skills, problem-solving abilities, compassion, meeting deadlines, and functioning within a budget. Any activity that involves interacting with others, participating in meetings, setting priorities and goals will produce a useful set of skills for library work.

Work Experience

On-Campus Jobs

Working at the College library can yield valuable experience and transferable skills for later employment, skills that may set you apart from other candidates applying for library staff jobs after college graduation. Employment at the Circulation Desk entails answering questions, charging and discharging library materials, putting items on reserve, answering basic patron questions, and shelving, and may involve supervision of fellow student workers. Working in Technical Services, students may affix call number labels to book spines and handle minor repair and other cataloging-related duties. Technical Services work also encourages familiarity with library classification systems, such as the Library of Congress. A job in Interlibrary Loan involves opening incoming ILL materials, searching for our items to be loaned out to other schools, photocopying, processing outgoing materials, etc.

Another on-campus job that would provide transferable skills is within the food industry, such as the cafeteria or Underground. Working in such a position will introduce you to the occasionally hectic pace of working with the public and fielding unanticipated questions.

Related Jobs in the Area/ Related Summer Jobs

Most local librarians know one another and are familiar with library services offered at community libraries. Libraries in the Madison area include Duggan Library here at the College,

the Madison-Jefferson County Public Library in downtown Madison, local elementary, junior high and high school libraries, Ivy Tech State College and Madison State Hospital. Most non-professional positions will involve shelving materials, assisting in Technical Services, or other entry-level tasks to familiarize yourself with library duties. Of course, larger cities surrounding Madison, such as Cincinnati, Louisville and Indianapolis, feature more libraries, many of them with a special focus, such as a large law firm or medical library.

Internships

Currently, there are no internships available at the Duggan Library, however other local libraries may have such programs. The value of completing an internship lies in the self-exploration (“am I really interested in this field as a career?”) and skill development involved, as well as making valuable contacts within the field who may provide references for graduate school or future library work. Many internships are unpaid; if you need income, you may need to juggle your internship with other paid employment.

The Internship Coordinator at the Career Center has additional information regarding library internships available locally, regionally or nationally.

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