Chapter VII
Evolving Roles for Electronic Resources Librarians

Debra Engel
University of Oklahoma, USA

Sarah Robbins
University of Oklahoma, USA

ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the evolution of the electronic resources librarian position within academic libraries as a result of increasing demands for electronic resources and the need for librarians devoted to planning, selecting, implementing, and evaluating electronic resources. The authors discuss the core competencies of electronic resources librarians and analyze the content of job advertisements for electronic resources librarian positions published in the College & Research Libraries News and The Chronicle of Higher Education between July 2001 and June 2006. The analysis reveals that electronic resources librarians are expected to be skillful communicators and collaborators as well as experienced with technology and versed in the issues surrounding electronic resources. Implications of these findings on the organizational structure are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

For the past several decades, new information technologies have dramatically changed the way academic libraries provide information and services to their patrons. The profession has become adept at adapting new technologies to best meet the needs of users. The impact of the digital environment on library collections, providing access to electronic resources, and the need to manage hybrid collections of print and electronic resources are ongoing challenges. The increasing demand for electronic resources has resulted in the need for more librarians and library staff devoted to job functions related to planning, selecting, implementing, and evaluating electronic resources. In the 1990s, as a response to the increasing and differing workload introduced by electronic re-

sources and online services, electronic resources positions were created that specialized in these areas (Fisher, 2003).

While the specific job titles, job responsibilities, and job qualifications vary by institution, a holistic study of the evolution of the electronic resources librarian position and the role they currently play within academic libraries can provide guidance to administrators seeking to create similar positions within their institutions, to library and information studies educators developing curriculum, and to graduate students interested in pursing similar positions upon graduation. In addition, an examination of core competencies for electronic resources librarians can be useful for recruitment, professional development, and training.

This study analyzes job advertisements and position announcements for electronic resources librarians as they appeared in the *College & Research Libraries News* and *The Chronicle of Higher Education* from July 2001 to June 2006. It explores already published literature discussing the job titles, duties and qualifications required for electronic resources librarians and shows how core competencies have evolved since the electronic resources librarian position was introduced in the early 1990s. This study will examine the following questions:

1. How are core competencies defined?
2. What are the core competencies of electronic resources librarians?
3. How have electronic resources librarian positions evolved?

A qualitative analysis of job advertisements for electronic resources librarians allowed the researchers to trace job responsibilities and job qualifications and identify patterns of change through the five-year time period studied.

BACKGROUND

Core Competencies

Core competencies within librarianship have been discussed since the early l990s (Corbin, 1993; Dole, Hurych, & Liebst, 2005; Fisher, 2001; Nofsinger, 1999; Ojala, l993). The trend within academic libraries to identify and to use core competencies in performance evaluations gained momentum in the mid- to late-1990s. (McNeil, 2002). The discussion of core competencies has been approached in a number of ways for different purposes including identification of needs for professional education programs as well as continuing education programs identified by library associations, state libraries, and library organizations. References to core competencies have generally included discussions of skills, knowledge, and abilities.

Murphy (1991) defines competencies as "knowledges, skills and attitudes required to perform a job effectively" (p. v). Fisher (2001) echoes this sentiment and asserts that, "work-related competencies are a combination of knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to be successful at a certain job and into the future" (pp. 180-181). The Association of Research Libraries (ARL) Systems and Procedures Exchange Center (SPEC) Kit #270 on core competencies similarly defines core competencies as "skills, knowledge, abilities, and attributes that employees across an organization are expected to have to contribute successfully within a particular organizational context" (McNeil, 2002, p. 7). Competencies are a framework used to identify expected levels of performance for and desirable traits of employees and can be generalized to the profession as a whole, created for specific specializations within the profession, or developed by local institutions as a way to measure their employees. A variety of library associations