Shaping The Future:
ASERL's Competencies for Research Librarians

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About ASERL

Founded in 1956, the Association of Southeastern Research Libraries has enjoyed nearly a half century of inter-institutional cooperation and support. Composed of more than 40 research and state libraries in the Southeastern United States, ASERL has successfully fostered a high standard of library excellence through resource sharing and other collaborative efforts to provide and maintain quality resources and services for students, faculty, and citizens.

ASERL formed its Education Committee in 1999 to develop ways of preparing staff — new and existing — to successfully meet the opportunities and challenges found in modern research libraries. *Shaping The Future* is the first ASERL publication arising from this effort. The Association offers its sincere thanks to the Council on Library & Information Resources (CLIR) for their generous support of this effort, including the publication of this report. Additional information about CLIR's ongoing activities can be found at www.clir.org.

Introduction

In 1999, the Association of Southeastern Research Libraries (ASERL) established an Education Committee to investigate the educational needs of librarians to support the research library of the future. ASERL members, like other research libraries across the nation, have experienced increasing difficulty in finding professionally qualified, motivated applicants to staff their libraries. After several discussions, the Committee determined that one method to help ensure a pool of qualified staff for research libraries in the future is to identify the competencies required for research librarians. The competencies can then be applied within libraries and serve as a basis for dialogue with regional library and information science (LIS) schools and other related programs. Hence, *Shaping The Future* address several audiences, including LIS educators, current research librarians, prospective research librarians, and those responsible for hiring research librarians.

Competencies have been discussed and developed by many groups in the LIS profession as a means to identify credentials, improve education, describe jobs, and evaluate performance. While existing competencies and related research informed the Education Committee's discussions,[1] the competencies articulated by ASERL incorporate both skills common to all librarians and those that are unique to research librarians in institutions of higher education. To understand the ASERL competencies and apply them effectively, they must be interpreted within the context of the academic research library.
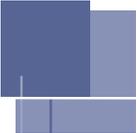
The Research Library of Tomorrow

The future of the academic research library will be shaped in part by the changing environments of higher education, the library and information profession, business and industry, and government. Within a complex educational culture, the research library and its staff will anticipate the changing expectations of users (faculty, undergraduate and graduate students, researchers, scholars), administrators, funding agencies, and an increasingly diverse array of partners (from the community, profession, and business). Technological advances will continue to provide new opportunities for research librarians to create, manage and disseminate information, serve new and often distant users, and enhance teaching and learning. Technology also will challenge research librarians as they seek to equitably and affordably provide and preserve access to information. The research librarian of the future will continue to support learning by creating and fostering a learning environment. The research library will also function increasingly as a teaching institution, as a key participant in instructional and research processes.

The research librarian of the future will be challenged by the need to balance traditional collection and service models with resource needs for new initiatives. Primary users of the academic research library in the future will continue to be students, faculty, and staff of the university. However, characteristics of these groups are changing, as is the nature of their use of library services. Demographics show that students are increasingly diverse, often older, more independent and frequently part-time. More users are from outside the university, representing students and faculty from other campuses as well as independent scholars from both within and beyond the community. All of these users are now able to access the resources of the research library with greater ease due to technology and community partnerships. Faculty and students are pursuing more interdisciplinary studies than ever before, while at the same time some areas are experiencing increasing specialization and fragmentation. It is critical that students understand the structure of a family of disciplines. Technology will continue to expand opportunities and provide new challenges for research librarians to serve remote users, distant learners and faculty. Teachers and research librarians will seek new approaches to learning, including just-in-time learning, life-long learning, and distance learning.

The research library will continue to be defined by the services provided by the research librarian, not by the physical location of information and collections. The academic research library seeks to take
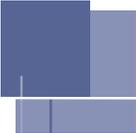
advantage of technology to provide improved or new services, to increase access to resources beyond those owned, to reach more users more effectively, to promote learning, and to enhance teaching throughout the higher education community. At the same time, research libraries maintain and apply traditional values and principles of librarianship to ensure high standards of service. These values and principles are key components of a democratic society, and include open access to information, respect for individuality and diversity, freedom from censorship, preservation of the human record, commitment to learning and to connecting people to information and ideas. The importance of excellence in service will also continue to be crucial to the success of research libraries.

In the future, libraries and librarians will continue to support the teaching and research missions of their universities. They will also participate more actively in the service part of the university's mission. Research universities and their libraries will continue to work closely with the community beyond the "walls" of the campus. Research libraries will form more partnerships with other libraries to provide services to broader communities and to improve services to their own campuses. One example of this is the critical role research libraries assume as members of statewide and regional virtual library consortia. Outreach activities at research libraries include not only different types of libraries but also businesses and the private sector, especially as higher education seeks to diversify funding sources.

> The research library of today and tomorrow is a dynamic, service-oriented organization, supporting a diverse clientele, and offering many exciting opportunities for research librarians.

Within the research library itself, the changing nature of use has changed the shape of physical facilities. Universities and librarians will continue to allocate more resources towards technology. As dependency on technology grows in the research library, so will the need for flexibility to ensure that the library can easily move from technology to technology, physically as well as intellectually. Research libraries will continue to have a crucial role in not only providing technology for users but also in creating new information systems for managing, disseminating, and preserving information regardless of format. At the same time, traditional

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library collections — books, serials, sound recordings, maps, videos, films, photographs, archives, manuscripts, etc. — will still need to be acquired, made accessible, and preserved. The expertise research librarians bring to the identification, selection, acquisition, organization, dissemination, use, and preservation of information will remain critical to users in the future.

As information products and services change within the research library, and as the nature of the use of the research library changes, research librarians will develop new tools to measure the effectiveness of the library. Today's traditional library evaluation tools are often not effective at assessing such factors as outcomes, service quality, electronic resource usage, and information quality. The outcomes of library service in higher education will need to demonstrate their value by articulating direct links to the quality of learning, teaching, and research. For example, future evaluation tools may allow for new correlations between library use and other academic measures (such as grades), correlations that would quantify the importance of library involvement in instruction.

> Attributes of the successful research librarian include intellectual curiosity, flexibility, adaptability, persistence, and the ability to be enterprising.

The research library of today and tomorrow is a dynamic, service-oriented organization, supporting a diverse clientele with a wide range of sophisticated information, learning, and teaching needs. Many exciting opportunities exist for research librarians to develop and apply new approaches to service, to advance the use of technology in support of learning, and to address critical needs in archiving and preserving access to information. The competencies listed below articulate, within the context of formal educational preparation, the knowledge, skills, and abilities research librarians need to move their organizations into the future.

Competencies for Research Librarians

Attributes of the successful research librarian include intellectual curiosity, flexibility, adaptability, persistence, and the ability to be enterprising. Research librarians possess excellent communication skills. They are committed to lifelong learning and personal career development.

1. **The research librarian develops and manages effective services that meet user needs and support the research library's mission.**

    · Provides excellent service, customized to meet the needs of individual users
    · Is knowledgeable about technology (theoretical and skills-based) and applies it to improve services
    · Anticipates user needs and critically evaluates and assesses existing and new services and systems to ensure that user needs are met
    · Is innovative, seeking out and acting upon new opportunities and challenges
    · Plans, prioritizes and organizes work in order to focus on what is critical
    · Participates in and applies strategic planning
    · Is able to adapt business approaches to library operations to ensure accountability and the wise use of limited resources
    · Communicates effectively with others outside of the library.

2. **The research librarian supports cooperation and collaboration to enhance service.**

    · Is able to work effectively with diverse groups, creating an environment of mutual respect
    · Forms and maintains partnerships both within and outside of the university community
    · Seeks opportunities to share expertise and knowledge through research and scholarship
    · Works effectively as part of a team
    · Provides leadership in providing information services.
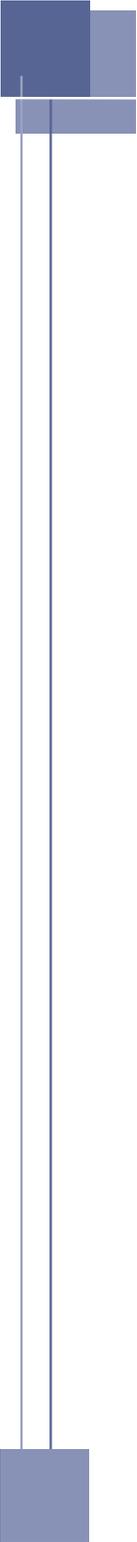
3. **The research librarian understands the library within the context of higher education (its purpose and goals) and the needs of students, faculty, and researchers.**

   · Understands teaching, learning, and research, and seeks to provide services that will enhance these endeavors
   · Is able to help users learn
   · Is an advocate for the library and the university
   · Is able to communicate the importance of library services to the higher education community
   · Serves as an effective member of the university
   · Is an expert consultant to the university on information
   · Participates in and supports fundraising efforts on behalf of the university.

4. **The research librarian knows the structure, organization, creation, management, dissemination, use, and preservation of information resources, new and existing, in all formats.**

   · Often has specialized subject knowledge to support collection development within the library and research and teaching within the university
   · Understands how information and the research library support and enhance scholarly communication
   · Understands the implications of information policy, including laws regarding copyright, licensing, and intellectual property
   · Is able to critically evaluate and assess existing and new information resources in relation to user needs
   · Describes and translates intellectual resources in a way that is useful to others
   · Participates in national and international standards processes as they apply to cataloging, serials, electronic commerce, intellectual property, and technical systems.

5. **The research librarian demonstrates commitment to the values and principles of librarianship. [2]**

   · Connects people to ideas
   · Provides free and open access to information
   · Demonstrates commitment to literacy and learning
   · Shows respect for individuality and diversity
   · Supports freedom for all people to form, hold, and express their own beliefs
   · Preserves the human record
   · Provides excellence in service
   · Forms partnerships to advance these values.

Conclusion

Research libraries and librarians are key partners in higher education, critical to the ability of universities to succeed in teaching and research. Research libraries will also continue to be important sources for the support and promotion of new developments in librarianship. Changes in the library environment, such as technological innovations and legal limitations on the use of information, will continue to offer opportunities for research librarians to gain and apply new knowledge. At the same time, the expertise that librarians have developed in organizing, providing access to, and preserving information will become more important than ever. The research librarian of the future will have more opportunities to support learning, enhance teaching, and improve research, providing services to the users of today as well as anticipating the needs of the users of tomorrow.

> The research library will continue to be defined by the services provided by the research librarian, not by the physical location of information and collections.

End Notes

1) Reviewed documents include *Competencies for Special Librarians of the 21st Century*, by the Special Libraries Association; *Competencies for Librarians Serving Young Adults,* by the Young Adult Library Services Association, a division of the American Library Association (ALA); *Platform for Change: The Educational Policy Statement of the Medical Library Association*; ALA's *Report on the Congress for Professional Education* (1999); and ALA's current *Standards for Accreditation of Master's Programs in Library and Information Studies*.

2) These are adapted from ALA's "Librarianship and Information Service: A Statement of Core Values" (5th draft, 28 April 2000), available at <www.ala.org>.
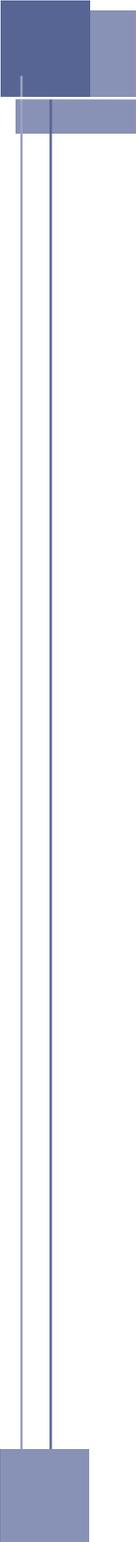
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ASERL Education Committee

Derrie Perez, *chair*
Interim Dean of Libraries & Professor
University of South Florida
Tampa, Florida

David Ferriero
Vice Provost for Library Affairs
William R. Perkins Library
Duke University
Durham, North Carolina

Charlene Hurt
Dean of Libraries
William Russell Pullen Library
Georgia State University
Atlanta, Georgia

Kate Nevins
Executive Director
Southeastern Library Network
Atlanta, Georgia

Lance Query
Dean of Libraries & Academic
   Information Resources
Howard-Tilton Memorial Library
Tulane University
New Orleans, Louisiana

Hannelore Rader
Director of Libraries
William F. Ekstrom Library
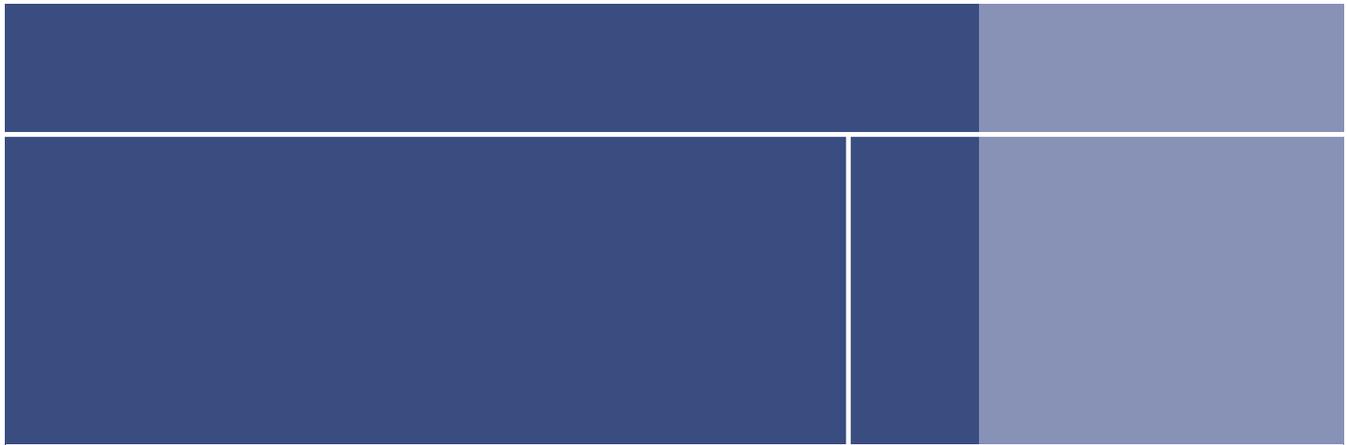University of Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky

Sharon Sullivan
Director, Personnel Services
William R. Perkins Library
Duke University
Durham, North Carolina

Project Staff

Amy Dykeman, ASERL Program Director
John Burger, ASERL Project Manager
Sandy Nyberg, Development Director
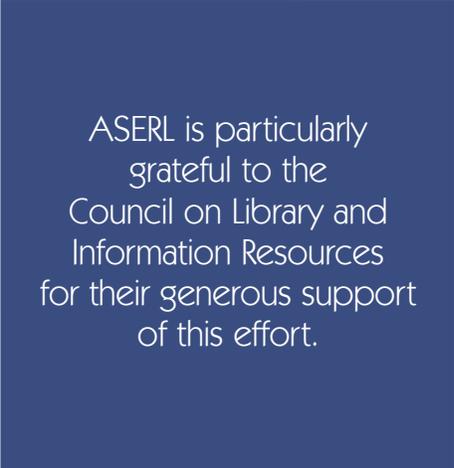
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ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEASTERN RESEARCH LIBRARIES

1438 West Peachtree Street, NW, Suite 200
Atlanta, GA 30309-2955
404.892.0943
www.aserl.org