Transitioning from a Paraprofessional to Professional Librarian

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Transitioning from a Paraprofessional to Professional Librarian

Introduction
Transitioning from a paraprofessional (library assistant/technician) to a librarian is a very interesting experience. Library support staff usually work under the supervision of a librarian, but some may also work independently. Paraprofessionals in small libraries handle a wide range of duties. Those in large libraries usually specialize. The work of library support staff includes (but is not limited to) directing library users to standard reference resources, organizing and maintaining periodicals, preparing volumes for binding, and interlibrary loan requests.

Objective
This poster is designed to describe some of the ways roles and responsibilities might change when paraprofessionals transition from being support staff to the role of an academic librarian. Advancing to librarian from a paraprofessional position is certainly a big change that comes with added responsibilities, and duties. The reality of the new day-to-day schedule of instruction, reference desk shifts, research consultations, office hours and scholarly pursuits is a shocking “eye-opener” to say the least! Some of the new duties include:

- collection development
- website maintenance
- ongoing professional development (skills enhancement, technology and subject liaison duties)
- faculty & student outreach
- membership in professional organizations and campus committees

This poster will provide a comparison of roles and responsibilities before and after the transition.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Similarities &amp; Differences in Duties</th>
<th>Paraprofessionals</th>
<th>Librarians</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public service desk time</td>
<td>Daily shift duties at public desks.</td>
<td>Daily shift duties at public desks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology skills</td>
<td>Technology skills must stay current to navigate the library’s website &amp; databases</td>
<td>Technology and research skills must be current for basic service delivery and in-depth research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written/oral communication skills</td>
<td>Good verbal and written communication skills</td>
<td>Excellent verbal and written communication skills the patron can understand is key</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer service.</td>
<td>A high level of customer service is required.</td>
<td>A high level of customer service is required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committees</td>
<td>May be required to serve on organizational and external committees.</td>
<td>May be required to serve on organizational and external committees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional memberships &amp; Conference Attendance</td>
<td>Membership in professional organizations is encouraged but not required.</td>
<td>Membership and active participation in professional organizations expected.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research skills</td>
<td>General research skills are required.</td>
<td>Advanced research skills are required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library Collection</td>
<td>Collection maintenance (e.g. shelving books.)</td>
<td>Collection development (selecting library resources).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results

Conclusion
Authors of the article entitled “Changing Roles of Librarians and Library Technicians” discussed how work responsibilities are often perceived to be overlapping between the librarian and a paraprofessional. Both groups appear to be performing more tasks that are new to their domain and are spending less time on traditional functions. Librarians indicate that they are having less face time with patrons, while paraprofessionals report that they are providing significantly more public-facing services.

Transitioning from a paraprofessional position to a librarian is a rewarding experience. In addition to taking on more roles and responsibilities, librarians also enjoy other incentives including a quieter working environment, the opportunity to grow professionally in many areas, and the satisfaction that comes from helping library users.

References
