Reference Competencies

For Academic and Public Librarians in the United States

QQML 2012

Motivation for Study

▸ **Revising Reference curriculum**

  ▸ Theory vs. Practice

  ▸ Sources vs. Service

  ▸ Print vs. Electronic

Research Questions

▸ Which competencies are most highly valued by current reference librarians and hiring managers?

▸ Do these librarians find skills lacking in their new hires?

▸ What are the implications for LIS curricula?

Methods

▸ Survey

▸ Mix of open and closed-ended questions

▸ Random sample of public & academic libraries from a U.S. nationwide list

▸ Asked participants to select "necessary" competencies from three separate lists: general, technology, and interpersonal.

▸

General	Technology	Personal/Interpersonal
Second Master's degree	Online searching	Verbal Communication
Budgeting	Programming	Written Communication
Foreign language	Web design	Listening
Marketing	Web maintenance	Working in teams
Supervisory experience	Social media	Approachability
Ability to conduct research/publish	Hardware troubleshooting	Comfort with instruction/teaching
Knowledge of cataloging	Software troubleshooting	Self-motivated
Assessment/evaluation	Chat/IM	Stress management
Customer service		Building relationships with co-workers
Familiarity with Paper Sources		Building relationships with other professional colleagues
Familiarity with Online Sources		Conflict management
Search Skills		Adaptability/Flexibility
Negotiating		Sense of humor
Current Events Awareness		Organizational awareness
Traditional Reference Interview		

Response Rates

Academic

- 436 participants
- Range in age from under 25 to over 71
- 76.4% female
- 96.8% hold MLS
- Highest proportion of respondents had between 8 and 15 years experience in the field

Public

- 463 participants
- Range in age from under 25 to 70
- 81% female
- 82.2%
- Highest proportion of respondents had between 8 and 15 years experience in the field
- hold MLS

What Employers Want

Overview of Findings

Overview

- Interpersonal skills are among the most important
- Technology skills, especially online searching are also highly rated
- "Traditional" skill– reference interview, knowledge of print and online sources– still considered important
- Instruction is increasingly a focus of reference

Overview Cont'd

- ## Of lesser importance are:
  - 2nd Master's (but this is correlated with Carnegie Classification)
  - Knowledge of a foreign language
  - Programming

Top Rated "General" Skills

Academic

1. Customer service (82.6%)
2. Search skills (72.3%)
3. Knowledge of online sources (71.1%)
4. Knowledge of print sources (62.7%)
5. Assessment & evaluation (61.5%)

Public

1. Customer service (97.1%)
2. Search skills (95.6%)
3. Knowledge of online sources (92.7%)
4. Traditional reference interview (77.8%)
5. Knowledge of print sources (70.3%)

Lowest Rated "General" Skills

Academic

1. Foreign language (22.8%)
2. Negotiating (26.3%)
3. Budgeting (31.5%)

Public

1. Second Master (5%)
2. Research/publishing (12.5%)
3. Foreign language (28.3%)

Top Rated "Tech" Skills

Academic

1. Online searching (87.6%)
2. Social media (62.9%)
3. Software troubleshooting (54%)
4. Web design (52.6%)
5. Web maintenance (51.9%)

Public

1. Online Searching (98.5%)
2. Software troubleshooting (77.8%)
3. Hardware troubleshooting (64.4%)
4. Social media (64.1%)
5. Chat/IM (38.8%)

Top Rated "Interpersonal" Skills

Academic

1. Listening (85.9%)
2. Verbal communication (85.7%)
3. Approachability (83.1%)
4. Comfort with instruction (80.8%)
5. Adaptability/flexibility (80.5%)

Public

1. Verbal communication (98.3%)
2. Listening (97.1%)
3. Approachability (94.8%)
4. Adaptability/flexibility (88.9%)
5. Sense of humor (87.2%)

Significantly Different?

Academic vs. Public

Some Emphases Similar

- Interpersonal Skills/Reference interview
  - Very important- emphasized in close- and open-ended questions
  - Do new reference librarians lack interpersonal skills?
- Knowledge of sources
  - Choosing print resources not correlated with age/length in the profession
- Searching

Areas Without Significant Differences

- Importance of:
  - Comfort with instruction
  - Organizational awareness
  - Social Media

- Lack of emphasis on
  - Foreign language

Areas of Significant Difference

- p<.0001 (significant)
  - 2nd Master's
  - Research & Publication
  - Assessment & Evaluation
  - Customer Service
  - Conflict Management
  - Web Design/Maintenance
- p=.006 (significant)
  - Knowledge of Print Resources

Conclusions