
Focus on volunteering

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Lucy and Catherine volunteered in autumn 2011 with the Arts Faculty Team at the Hallward Library, University of Nottingham. Both have recently graduated: Lucy with an MA in English and American Studies and Catherine with a degree in Philosophy.

INTRODUCTION

We volunteered at the Hallward for about six weeks in the autumn semester (Lucy carrying on until late January), doing a variety of things. During this time our main task was to process donated books, sorting out which were already in the collection and which could be added to it. Those that were not in the collection were added to the online book suggestions. We sorted through old material and transferred books to other departments. We attended short seminars on topics to do with the day-to-day running of the collection, copyright law and employability, useful both for careers in libraries and generally for applying for jobs post-graduation. Lucy also assisted in writing a presentation on using e-resources.

We decided to volunteer because we are both interested in pursuing a career in academic libraries. Working with the Arts Faculty Team gave us a taster of what this sort of work would involve. The experience has given us skills that have enabled Lucy to get a job in a library at the University of Birmingham and Catherine a job at a secondary school. This article will detail some of the work we undertook, the knowledge we gained, and how we have used the experience now that we have left university.

COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT

An important part of library work in general, but especially in large academic libraries, is collection management and development, so this naturally formed part of several discussions. TAs the Arts Faculty Team leader, Neil Smyth, is directly responsible for the management of the collection at the Hallward Library, and so was uniquely placed to enlighten us about its complexities.

One of the challenges of a modern academic library is to keep a working balance between the research needs of the students and academic staff and the need to create space for the new material needed every year. At the Hallward the Arts Faculty Team removes 130 – 150 metres of printed material from the shelves every year, mostly through the highly convenient method of purchasing journals and books in a digital format rather than as printed documents. Obviously this development of library collections from printed to digital is a process which enables libraries not only to provide more materials to its students, but also provides better access to these materials, as each student can peruse their own copy of an article online without having to fight for the physical text on the shelves. However, most subscriptions are very expensive – the university recently purchased the *Patrologia Latina* database for the Hallward for a huge chunk of the annual library budget (circa £30 000). Often both students and academic staff are reluctant to part with their printed materials, meaning reducing collections in this way has to be very delicately managed in order to reduce friction.

There are some other challenges to collection management, however: university libraries are often part of national initiatives to manage academic collections throughout the country; these initiatives (such as CoFoR [Collaboration For Research]) may restrict the ability to reduce certain types of printed materials. Nottingham, for example, is required to maintain and accept transfers of material in the areas of former Yugoslavian history and Serbo-Croat language and literature (it recently accepted a transfer of material from the University of Birmingham); thus any library management scheme has to work around these parameters. While this meant that the collection was highly developed for research and teaching, it prevented shelf space from being used for items in demand by current students and staff for their everyday research value, and meant that the Arts Faculty Team had to find room for new additions to the collection. However, these kinds of agreements are ultimately very important in collection development and allow libraries to secure space in their stores for valuable research materials.

Processing and cataloguing donations formed a large part of our time at the Hallward, and gave us a unique insight into the relative complexities of the procedures involved. Much labour is expended ascertaining whether items will be useful to the collection as a whole, and many books are passed on to other places because of

duplication or poor condition. These may include other departments of the university, students, charity shops or specific book disposal companies such as the Book Rescuers, although of course the library tries to utilise as many donations as possible. The donations can be very interesting, though, and can illustrate how well a university is connected to its local community. A recent bequest of the late historian Robert Frazier augmented the library's collection of Cold War material, as well as providing us with an opportunity to decipher declassified intelligence reports from World War II as the bequest included several boxes of unlabelled microfilm.

All these aspects, together with collaboration between library staff and departments to ensure that all the material necessary for students is present in the collection, combine to form the complex nature of collection management and development in the academic library. Even in an era where the digital might eventually overtake the physical, university collections will still need competent management and this will continue to be an essential skill for all librarians.

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY AND THE LIBRARY

Another area we touched upon during our time volunteering at the Hallward Library was the importance of copyright law, and how it relates to the library. Catherine also provided valuable insight on this, as her father works in this area. Intellectual property includes trademarks, patents and copyright. Someone who owns a trademark, patent or copyright is the owner of the intellectual property, which is protected. Copyright concerns libraries more than patents or trademarks, and this is relevant to the Hallward in three main ways.

Firstly, works in the collection are subject to copyright law, and librarians ensure that staff and students are aware of copyright legislation and the related licence agreements. The Copyright Designs and Patents Act 1988,² as amended, is the basic law regarding copyright and related rights in the UK. It designates books, lectures and compositions (as well as many other works) as literary and artistic works, where the owner of the copyright in the works has to authorise any copies made of the work, broadcasts or performances of it, and any translation. These strictures are consistent with the Berne Convention, the oldest copyright treaty in the world. When it comes to libraries, exceptions are granted for educational reasons and research. A student is able to make a

copy of part of the work for the purpose of private study without needing to ask permission.

Secondly, the library manages licences such as those granted by the Copyright Licensing Agency for works in the collection that are copyright. These licences allow the university to make multiple photocopies of works so that they can be accessed by the students and staff of the university.

Thirdly, the librarians are able to provide information and advice for staff and students who own the copyright in their works. The university technically owns the copyright in all works produced by its employees, but waives these rights in favour of its academic authors. Students, however, own the rights in their original work, such as essays and theses. The university can ask them to assign their copyright to the university, but the students have the right to refuse.

All of this is key to the integrity of the library as an institution, as authors need to know that their copyrights are respected, while at the same time their works are available in limited ways for non-commercial research; without this the academic library would be a much less useful tool. So a very important part of a librarian's job is making sure that these rules are properly observed, whilst being flexible enough to allow both staff and students to gain as much as possible from the materials available.

EMPLOYABILITY AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

One of the areas in which Neil's expertise was invaluable was in letting us in on some of the secrets of library (and presumably also general) recruitment.

During the first couple of weeks of our volunteering stint he happened to be leading the recruitment process for a new member of staff in the Arts Faculty Team, and he provided practical activities to increase our experience of recruitment. One of the keys to any recruitment process, especially at the higher level of speciality, is having both academic and professional qualifications, as a candidate with only one of these is often turned down in favour of someone with both. He also emphasised the importance of demonstrating one's ability to meet all the specifications set out in the job description – and never leaving a box blank on the application form. If you have not achieved Certification or Chartership but are a registered candidate for them, say that you are

working towards them in the 'Professional qualifications' section.

Experience is vital in getting past the key hurdles in any librarian's career: gaining your first professional post, and then making the jump to a supervisory or managerial role. For the first professional post, voluntary experience is essential, which is why we decided to volunteer, and why Neil provides that opportunity for people looking to get a foothold in the profession.

In terms of gaining skills essential for supervisory or management positions, Neil recommended getting involved in one of the many groups and societies in the libraries sector, giving the example of the CILIP Career Development Group.³ Joining in with committee meetings and volunteering to organise events is, according to Neil, the most effective and useful way to gain management experience, as well as allowing you to network in the libraries sector and perhaps attend both national and international conferences – all good for the CV.

Neil also advised trying to bring in any specialist knowledge you may have gained from other areas of your life – with Catherine's father working in the field of copyright law, for example, Catherine is naturally more knowledgeable on this subject than Lucy – in order to make your application stand out and to demonstrate your interest in libraries themselves, rather than just the desire for a job. These steps should help an application to find its way onto the short list.

Professional development is a key part of being a librarian. Gaining both academic and professional qualifications, such as being a chartered librarian, can be done whilst working, and most librarians have this mix of academic and professional expertise. This requires librarians who are already developed professionally, to be committed to the development of others, by providing volunteers such as us with the opportunity to gain experience of working in a team at an academic library. Some librarians are also mentors, guiding others through the Chartership process. One of the great things about working in libraries seems to be that there is a wider culture of sharing knowledge and ideas throughout the library community: not just within libraries but also between them, as is demonstrated by both our volunteering opportunity and our collaboration in writing this article.

INTO THE FUTURE

All this advice bore fruit when Lucy managed to gain her first professional post as a Library Support Assistant in the Harding Law Library at the University of Birmingham, in no small way thanks to the experience gained from working at the University of Nottingham with the Arts Faculty Team, and to the reference provided by Neil. Her new role is quite different from the role at the Hallward, but much of the advice Neil gave has been invaluable in helping her to familiarising herself with the Harding and the way it works as a smaller site library. Hopefully much more of it will be useful in the future as she looks towards gaining Certification and Chartership.

Catherine has now graduated and is employed in an administrative position at a school, part of which includes working in their post-16 library. She also found many of the tips on the recruitment process, as well as the specific library experience and the more general experience of working in a team, very useful.

While the initial impetus to volunteer came from our own motivation, it was vital that everyone at the Hallward Library had such a positive view of volunteering and were therefore willing to welcome us with such enthusiasm and provide us with the opportunities we needed to allow us to take the next step.

NOTES

- 1 <http://www.rluk.ac.uk/node/82>
- 2 <http://www.ipo.gov.uk/cdpact1988.pdf>
- 3 <http://www.cilip.org.uk/cdg>