Creating a Curriculum for the ERL Core Competencies

Susan Davis

Abstract

The Core Competencies for Electronic Resources Librarians (ERL) were approved by the NASIG Board in July 2013 and widely shared amongst the information community.[1] Intended to form the basis for developing a curriculum in this specialty, the presenter is not aware of any attempts to compile a set of resources to aid librarians and library staff in mastering the competencies. This session discussed crowdsourcing as one way to involve the library community in identifying and curating resources that might be useful to develop and increase competence in each of the seven competencies. The presenter shared suggestions for resources applicable to each of the competencies.

Keywords: electronic resources librarians, core competencies, curriculum, crowdsourcing

Introduction

At the 25th NASIG Conference in 2010, Sarah Sutton presented her research into developing a set of core competencies for electronic resources librarians (ERL).[2] Sutton analyzed job postings to identify common skills, traits, and other attributes mentioned in the advertisements. This work led to a NASIG task force that created a set of core

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competencies which the board approved in July 2013. The competencies have been used in many contexts since they were approved. Several articles on the competencies have appeared in the literature, and as a basis for promotion and tenure dossiers.[3,4,5,6] However, there has not been any systematic effort to devise a means of achieving competence in the areas identified in the document. This presentation sought to address this gap by proposing crowdsourcing as a viable method to identify relevant resources for those seeking to develop, expand, or perfect competence in any of the seven competencies.

Crowdsourcing is "the practice of obtaining information or input into a task or project by enlisting the services of a large number of people, either paid or unpaid, typically via the internet."[7] There are several questions that need to be addressed before embarking on such a project. Is crowdsourcing a viable method to create such a curriculum? Is a curriculum the appropriate approach? Would a syllabus work better? Or a resource site? How might such a resource be organized? Davis suggested two possible approaches. The first one would start with a general overview that includes professional organizations and conferences, email discussion lists, vendor and system user groups and conferences. The other possibility would populate each competency with a common set of categories, such as recommended readings, standards, courses, continuing education opportunities and email lists, and social media, as a template for a consistent structure. After posing these questions, Davis discussed potential resources in each of the seven competencies.

1. Life Cycle of Electronic Resources

The NASIG Core Competencies for Electronic Resources Librarians shares a diagram created by Oliver Pesch.[8] This diagram was the first visual representation of the iterative life cycle of electronic resources. Print materials, even serials, follow a more linear process. TERMS (Techniques for Electronic Resource Management) created a similar diagram and also employed a crowdsourcing approach.[9] Resources

about bibliographic and metadata systems such as MARC21, RDA (Resource Description and Access), and Dublin Core could fit here. The ANSI (American National Standards Institute) Standards such as ISSN, ISBN, and ANSI Z39 (Library-related standards section) could be used to describe and explain the foundations of the Electronic Resource life cycle.

2. Technology

Davis admitted that she did not have a deep grasp of sources in this area. She mentioned a few ideas that could serve as resources in a technology curriculum. One important area is standards where standards organizations such as the National Information Standards Organization (NISO) whose committees and working groups develop standards and recommended practices for the library community. Marshall Breeding regularly publishes articles on technology trends. Many Integrated Library System/Library Management System (ILS/LMS) vendors host user group meetings, customer email lists, and provide training and documentation about their systems. Authentication services such as EZProxy and Open Athens have email lists that offer alerts and recommendations for action. ERL might benefit from learning various web and bibliographic editing tools and other programming languages.

3. Research and Assessment

Many library budgets are inadequate to purchase all user requested materials. Libraries are also under scrutiny to ensure that funds are being spent wisely. ERL may contribute to the assessment of current purchases using a variety of techniques and tools. Cost per use (CPU) is a common metric that relies on the COUNTER Code of Practice to generate counts of various user interactions with content. Familiarity and facility with data analysis tools might help tell the story of usage and return on investment (ROI).

Research is an area that often intimidates librarians. Many library and information studies programs (LIS) offer courses in research methods. Software used to conduct surveys and analyze them might be learned on one's own. Scanning the literature for well-designed research studies might provide insight into conducting and publishing good research, especially if an ERL has not taken a course in research methods.

4. Effective Communication

These suggested topics might be best addressed through exploration of continuing education offerings from your human resources office, professional workshops, and courses. They could also be good topics to work on with a mentor.

- Reading comprehension
- Listening
- Empathy
- Writing skills
- Presentation skills

5. Supervising and Management

There are various directions that could be pursued in this area.

- Project management certification
- Conducting workflow analysis
- Understanding systems architecture
- Policies, procedures, and documentation
- Clarify roles and responsibilities
- Mentoring

6. Trends and Professional Development

Electronic resource librarianship is constantly evolving to stay in sync with the evolving nature of electronic resources. Continuous

or lifelong learning is a good model to adopt. All of the tools, standards, and systems previously mentioned change over time. An ERL might pursue webinars, courses such as Fundamentals of Electronic Resources Acquisitions (FERA), attend conferences like NASIG, Electronic Resources and Libraries, Charleston Conference, ExLibris Users of North America, EBSCO Users Group, American Library Association, and read journals such as the *Journal of Electronic Resources Librarianship*, *The Serials Librarian*, and *Serials Review*, to stay abreast of current trends. There are many relevant email discussion lists as well as social media platforms to follow. Some of the most subscribed to are ERIL-L (Electronic Resources in Libraries), SERIALST (Serials in Libraries Discussion Forum), lis-e-resources (UKSG), and LIBLICENSE. Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok include content relevant to electronic resources.

7. Personal Qualities

Attention to detail, flexibility, tolerance for complexity and ambiguity, good time management, customer service orientation, delight in solving riddles, puzzles, and conundrums are common qualities found in a successful ERL. While no definitive answers to the questions of whether these attributes can be learned and how best to enhance them were shared by audience members, others in the community could weigh in with personal stories. Reflection and personal assessment may help electronic resource librarians find success and satisfaction in their work. A mentor could offer such an assessment and guidance around these topics.

Conclusion and next steps

Davis concluded the session by asking the audience if crowdsourcing a list of resources to achieve competence in a particular aspect of electronic resources librarianship a viable method to develop a curriculum.

Feedback during the conference was inconclusive, especially since the in-person audience was quite small. The presenter will populate a shareable spreadsheet and solicit additional feedback from the community.[10] There have been a few personal offers of assistance to help populate the spreadsheet. More work will be needed to determine if crowdsourcing is a viable method for creating a core curriculum.

Contributor Note

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Notes

1 NASIG, "Core Competencies For Electronic Resources Librarians," accessed May 23, 2022, https://www.nasig.org/resources/Documents/competencies/NASIG%20Core%20Competencies%20for%20Electronic%20Resources%20Librarians_Final_Version_2019.pdf.

2 Sarah Sutton and Susan Davis, "Core Competencies for Electronic Resources Librarians," *The Serials Librarian*, 60, no.1–4 (2011):147–52, doi:10.1080/0361526X.2011.556025.

3 Eric Hartnett, "NASIG's Core Competencies for Electronic Resources Librarians Revisited: An Analysis of Job Advertisement Trends, 2000–2012," *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 40, no.3/4 (2014): 247–58, doi:10.1016/j.acalib.2014.03.013.

4 Angela Dresselhaus, "Opportunities beyond Electronic Resource Management: An Extension of the Core Competencies for Electronic Resources Librarians to Digital Scholarship and Scholarly Communications," *The Serials Librarian* 68, no. 1–4 (2015): 361–69, doi:10.1080/0361526X.2015.1017716.

5 Sarah W. Sutton, and Paula Sullenger, "The Development and Use of the NASIG Core Competencies for Electronic Resources Librarians," *Serials Review* 43, no.2 (2017): 147–52, doi:10.1080/00987913.2017.1316633.

6 Angela Dresselhaus, Rebecca Tatterson, and Eleanor I. Cook, "Core Competencies at Every Stage," *Serials Librarian* 76, no. 1–4 (2019): 134–40, doi:10.1080/0361526X.2019.1588620.

7 Crowdsourcing, Google Dictionary, powered by Oxford Languages, accessed May 23, 2022.
8 Oliver Pesch, "Library Standards and E-Resource Management: A Survey of Current Initiatives and Standards Efforts," *The Serials Librarian* 55, no.3 (2008): 481–86 (Figure 1), doi: 10.1080/03615260802059965.
9 Jill Emery, Graham Stone, and Peter McCracken, *Techniques for Electronic Resource Management: TERMS and the Transition to Open* (Chicago: American Library Association). https://doi.org/10.15760/lib-01.
10 Susan Davis, "NASIG Core Competencies Curriculum Project," accessed May 23, 2022, https://tinyurl.com/bdheczz8.