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Scope Drift? More of a Sharp Turn: Visual Resources Director One Day, Architecture Librarian the Next

Abstract

When the position of Director of Visual Resources was transferred from the School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation (the School) to the University Libraries a dramatic scope drift occurred. There was a physical move down the hall within the School, from the Visual Resources Collection room to the Architecture Branch Library. The Director was reassigned as Visual Resources Librarian (with faculty status) and would run the Visual Resources Collection within the Library. Within a month, as the Architecture Librarian was moved across the street to run the Art Library, various subject librarian tasks were added to the Visual Resources Librarian job description. Training in reference interviews, selecting a mentor, and gaining access to collection development funds followed quickly, as did a new position title; the Visual Resources Librarian became the next Architecture Librarian. Although initially intimidated by the sheer numbers of databases and journal subscriptions, it became apparent that collection development skills, student employee supervision skills, budget management experience, image cataloging knowledge, and photography instruction sessions could all be applied to the new job as the Architecture Librarian. The growth of the image collection is one part of the architecture librarian's job, along with all the other aspects of running the architecture branch library. The new librarian has been quite successful at this position, thanks to all the experience gained while running the School's Visual Resources Center.

Keywords

scope drift, VRC, visual resources, librarian, branch management, budget, librarianship, mentor, architecture librarian, job transition

Author Bio & Acknowledgements

Cynthia Frank is a licensed architect, and the subject liaison librarian for the School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation (the School) at the University of Maryland. Before becoming the librarian, she shared the job of Slide Curator, and then became Director of Visual Resources Center at the School. A graduate of the architecture program here, she worked for several architects in the Washington DC area, working on residential and institutional projects.

Introduction

On July 22nd, 2013, The Director of Visual Resources at the School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation, (the School) moved her office from room 1107, 150 feet down the hall to the Architecture Library, room 1102. A yearlong internal assessment of the architecture branch library the year before had included a recommendation that the Visual Resources Center be combined with the Architecture Library. The Dean of Libraries and the Dean of the School acted on that recommendation immediately, and negotiated a transfer of the Director's staff line and the visual resources collections from the School, to the Libraries. The former Visual Resources Center (VRC) is now the business office for the School and houses seven staff people. In the meantime, the Visual Resources Director embarked on a new career as a subject liaison librarian for the University of Maryland Libraries.

Position Change and on the Job Training

When the VRC Director moved her office, her salary and position were transferred to the Libraries with a title change to the Visual Resources Librarian. Librarians at the University of Maryland have faculty status, so the Visual Resources Librarian started with a rank of Librarian II (parallel to an assistant professor), and the permanent status timeline began. As part of that position, librarians are required to have a mentor and a peer review committee. The immediate supervisor for this position, the architecture librarian, communicated expectations to practice and document librarianship, service, and scholarship.

Originally the Visual Resources Librarian worked alongside the architecture subject librarian, continuing to guide the visual resources collection and adding visual literacy instruction to the job description. To support this work, the Libraries provided an office within the architecture library, and three iMac workstations for the VRC. However, the architecture librarian was also managing the art library, and it became apparent that she needed to be based in that library, located across the street from architecture. Therefore, the reality of day-to-day architecture library activities became more and more of the Visual Resources Librarian's daily responsibilities. By the end of the first semester in the architecture library, the position description changed to include architecture, historic preservation, real estate development and urban planning subject librarian, with a reduced role in the visual resources subject area. The position title changed as well and officially became Liaison Librarian to the School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation; the shortened title is architecture librarian. As a subject librarian, the new architecture librarian would now report directly to the head of Research and Learning within the campus Libraries administrative structure.

She started managing the architecture library, originally with two full-time staff people to help supervise students, process course reserves, and organize the periodicals. After one year, those two staff people were re-assigned as part of a revisioning the Architecture Library as a 24/7 accessible library. The staff assistance over that one year of overlap provided a safety net of stability for the new librarian. The previous architecture librarian, before transferring to the Art Library, provided training on how to access the budget information, how to buy books, how to package up magazines to go to the bindery and who to ask for help within the library staff hierarchy. The new supervisor lined up several more experienced librarians to provide training in the reference interview

and research areas. These one-on-one meetings were incredibly valuable in building up the confidence of the librarian in an area that was weak. The new mentor provided guidance on how to navigate the permanent status path. This includes participation in service and scholarship, areas that she had not been encouraged to contribute to, earlier in her career as the VRC director.

Service and Scholarship

The service and scholarship requirements of the librarian position are different from any requirements of the Visual Resources Center Director position. Librarians get professional development monies to attend conferences and conduct research. The VRC Director could have asked for funding to attend a Visual Resources Association Conference, for example, but there was no dedicated funding for this type of work. Now, as a faculty member seeking permanent status, the librarian is encouraged to write articles, document outreach, participate on committees, join organizations, attend and present at professional conferences.

Transfer of Skills

The architecture librarian was now running a library and conducting reference interviews, teaching library information courses and answering online Chat questions, beginning to serve on national committees, all without a degree in Library Science. However, she brought a strong set of skills with her from the Visual Resources Position. She was dealing with the same faculty and students, and once she moved to the library, she had more interaction with them. She has a master of architecture degree, so she knows the subject matter. In addition, the Director of the VRC, and before that, the Slide Collection, gained all kinds of experience that were relevant to managing a library.

Collection development had been a daily process in the VRC. Collaboration with faculty to acquire the appropriate images to support the various history courses was part of the work routine. This collaborative approach to collection development was transferable to supporting courses with books, ebooks and journal subscriptions. Knowledge of the faculty, the subject areas, and the required course programs help guide decisions about the library collections. The other part of collection development, gift acceptance and processing, is often an exercise in diplomacy with books, just as it was with slides and digital files. Several faculty consider themselves great photographers, but only some of them truly are. Skills developed turning down image gifts diplomatically have been used to turn down attempted book gifts. Many faculty and members of the general public consider their book collections unique, and therefore of great benefit for an architecture library. However, the library supports an accredited architecture program, an accredited urban planning program, and houses a Special Collection of rare monographs, so often the gifts are duplicates of the library's holdings. Policy dictates that the libraries can't accept items that are duplicates of what is in the collection. If a gift is accepted, it is made perfectly clear that any duplicate books will be given to students; the donors have to agree to that, for the gift to be accepted.

Budget management is another skill relevant to both the VRC and Libraries. Currently, this includes payroll for student employees, collection development, supplies, and requesting capital expenditures like furniture. Managing the VRC budget meant overseeing monies in those same categories, so previous experience allowed for a very

easy transition. There are a few differences: the Libraries have a form to fill out for capital expense requests, and there are subject area funds to spend on resources, but it is a simple transfer of skills.

Student employees are the same in both the VRC and the architecture library. Each year the librarian interviews, hires, trains, schedules and manages the student employees. The applicant pool remains the same - students in the programs of the School, looking for some part-time work. Currently, there are six students working in the library, four undergraduates and 2 graduate students.

Managing the branch library also means overseeing the physical spaces, something that was relevant in the VRC as well. Window leaks are common at both ends of the building, and need to be monitored. Whether in the VRC or the Library, requests to change light bulbs in the ceiling fixtures goes to the same office - Facilities Management. Security issues are more prominent in the library than the VRC; the library is accessible 24/7 by swiping an ID card, whereas the VRC was only accessible during daytime business hours. There are video surveillance cameras in the library and computer recordings of who has accessed the library via the swipe card system. However, the strong relationship with campus security was built over the years before the librarian started working in the library.

The Visual Resources Center Within the Library

Images, in both slide and digital form, are now part of the library collections, along with books, ebooks, slides, periodicals, and a special collections room of rare books. Faculty still request the occasional flatbed scanning of pictures in books to supplement ARTstor images for their lectures. Students and faculty continue to borrow cameras, video cameras, and light sets. Every semester a pop-up photography studio is set-up in one of the library group study rooms so that students can document their models for their portfolios. The VRC now has a lower profile within the School, but still provides the unique image and photography related services that are relevant to the School disciplines.

Conclusions

Although the Librarian position was not sought after by the Visual Resources Director, the opportunities for career growth have expanded through librarianship. The libraries provide colleagues for support at the job, friend and professional level. Prior to 2013, as one of two visual resources professionals on campus, the local community was quite small, and the Art History visual resources person retired in 2014. Skills like budget management, collection development, and student supervision have been easily transferred to the new position. The employer, the state of Maryland through the University of Maryland, stayed the same. The bureaucracy and budget limits did not change, and neither did the retirement system.

Originally, there were some concerns about the fact that this person was a librarian without a library studies degree, but that has faded from the conversation, since the architecture library remains a fully functioning resource of the School, supporting its programs. There are other subject librarians on campus without an MLIS degree. The support of the librarian's supervisor, mentor and peer review committee has been crucial to the evolution of this particular librarian. The experience directing the VRC, knowledge

of the profession and the School, plus the support of professional co-workers in the library, made this transition a success.