Statement of Competency B

B. Compare the environments and organizational settings in which library and information professionals practice

Information professionals practice in a variety of organizations and settings, each with its own unique set of challenges. Information professionals work in public, private, specialized and academic libraries, in the K-12 setting as teacher librarians, and in archives. In addition, there are many information professionals who choose to go into business for themselves, unaffiliated with any larger organization.

In general, excluding the self-employed information professionals, library organizations tend to follow the bureaucratic model as examined by Max Weber. According to Weber, bureaucracies tend to favor public institutions such as public libraries and public academic institutions that incorporate their own libraries as one of the purposes of bureaucracies is to create such a well-defined structure of responsibility and procedures that the political element is removed from the running of the organization. Ideally, all members of the organization, from the highest executive to the lowest tiered staff members, have to follow set rules and procedures that also include systems to maintain accountability. Weber’s model states that bureaucracies are ideal for large organizations, particular those that have multiple sections carrying out diverse functions that contribute to the smooth operation of the organization as a whole. Such large organizations tend to have a somewhat complex managerial and staff structure. In an ideal situation, the bureaucratic model provides for clear lines of responsibility and communication. Ideally, each member of the staff and management has their own distinct area of responsibility, and knows who to report to in order to get tasks completed.
Jonathan Leff – Statement of Competency B

The reality is often far from the ideal. The structure set up (or imposed) by a bureaucracy does not guarantee good management. Managers must be adept at handling diverse staff that not only have diverse backgrounds, but who also have diverse working styles and personalities. Two management theories that have been used in libraries are “management by common sense” and “humanistic management by teamwork (HMBT)”. Common-sense theory states that there are certain actions which are most effective in managing staff, and which involve open communication, not confusing personal and performance issues, and setting an example for the staff. HMBT is a theory that recognizes that teamwork is key to meeting the library’s mission, and that skillful management of staff is necessary to achieve this. In addition, as a bureaucracy imposes a rather rigid organizational structure, it is difficult for change to take place, or for promotions to occur. This can lead to frustration on the parts of library staff for managers will need effective skills to handle.

However, theories of organization and management can only at best prepare librarians and archivists in the best ways of meeting their goals, as public, academic and private libraries as well as archives each face different situations during their day to day operations that require specific responses.

Beyond the subject of organization and management, the environments in which libraries operate are quite diverse. Public libraries serve a variety of communities that range from well to do to poorer, and from densely urban to more rural. In particular, people in poorer communities can live both in urban and rural settings, and often rely on public libraries for their information needs, particularly when Internet access is required. Public libraries also serve the information needs of the community beyond the provision of space in which to practice free intellectual inquiry, such as through
literacy programs, and the establishment of e-libraries (remote banks of computers with dedicated
Internet access including access to card catalogs that are set up at community centers).

For academic librarians, the situation is different as one of the key roles of the academic library
is to support the education goals of the institution that it serves. This is done primarily through what is
called integrated instruction. In an ideal situation, course instructors collaborate with librarians to
provide instruction to their students on how to use the library’s resources to find materials that will
support the course’s curriculum. One challenge faced by both academic librarians and teacher-
librarians in the K-12 arena is the lack of awareness on the part of students, faculty and administration
on the role that libraries can play in supporting instruction, as opposed to just being “the place where
the books are kept”. Librarians are often the ones who are left to advocate for a greater role for the
library in the educational life of the school.

Archivists often face similar situations as academic librarians, in that archives are often situated
within academic institutions, and thus archivists must often work within the bureaucratic model. The
tasks of archivists often go beyond merely being curators of the collections to managing the archives as
well. This involves working with the administration of their home institutions in order to ensure that
the needs of the archives are met. It is important to involve the administration and key faculty figures,
including the university librarian (as the case warrants, based on the institution) when creating
collection policies and managing archives, as a collection that supports the needs and goals of the
home institution as a whole, will be more likely to maintain support and funding over the long run and
ensure the viability of the archives. Therefore, archivists must often be aware of the various
organizational structures that exist beyond the walls of the archives that they manage.
Evidence and Selection Criteria


   This was a review of an article by Sheila Ayers in the *Southeastern Librarian* that examines the roles that public libraries can play in serving the needs of poor and homeless users in their communities. Often, libraries serve as the only connection that poor and homeless people have to the rest of a society from which they are alienated due to their economic condition. Libraries can turn this fact of existence faced by poor and homeless people as an opportunity to turn themselves into gateways, by providing services and information such as voter registration forms, “homeless kits” that provide information about social services, snacks and toiletries, and library cards that allow homeless users or others with no permanent address to borrow library materials. Some libraries also use “e-Libraries”, or remote computer banks set up in local community centers as a cost-effective way of providing access to library catalogs and email to library users. The article also examines some of the challenges that public libraries sometimes face when dealing with unruly or disruptive users.

   I feel this work represents my understanding of one of the challenging environments that public libraries often face, and how they can turn those challenges into opportunities for further service to meet the needs of all of their users.

2. LIBR 204 – Information Organizations and Management – Organizational Management in Theory and Practice

   In this essay, I examined theories of organization and management from a “real-world” perspective, based on my own experience working in an academic setting that followed the
bureaucratic model of organization. I also looked at the ways that theories of management, which are ideals at most, tend to run up against real-world situations, such as the interplay between supervisor and manager based on their own life experiences and situations. As public and academic libraries tend to follow the bureaucratic model of organization, it is important to see how the bureaucratic structure impacts the day-to-day operations of the library, as well as the impact that both bureaucracy and management styles have on a library’s staff.

I feel that this work demonstrates my understanding of the organizational structures that libraries and librarians face, and the opportunities and challenges inherent within them. I feel that this work also demonstrates how an organizational structure can influence the work environment with which librarians and staff deal on a day-to-day basis, and that there is an interplay between structure and environment that must be taken into account when in order for librarians to effectively manage staff and promote the goal of their institution.

3. LIBR 250 – Design and Implementation of Instructional Strategies for Information Professionals – Teacher Librarian Interviews

The assignment for this class was to interview three teacher librarians about the role they play within their institutions and the opportunities and challenges involved. As I felt most comfortable with the academic world, I chose to interview one academic librarian and two college librarians. The stipulation of the assignment was that we protect the anonymity of the librarians we interviewed, so both they and their employers were not named in the report. The librarians discussed the procedures by which they provide library instruction, including the level of interaction they have with faculty, students and the administration. Interaction ranges from close cooperation with the faculty to develop a library instruction course based on a particular course and
subject, to complete lack of interaction, wherein students are sent to the library to obtain a particular work without the faculty checking to see if the library even has that work in their collection. The key challenge that academic librarians face is that of raising the libraries’ profile as an educational resource and ally within their institutions, which they often do through arranging to attend curricular development meetings.

I feel this work demonstrates my understanding of the role that academic and teacher librarians face, as well as their place – both actual and potential – within the organizational structure and environment of their home institutions. This work also demonstrates the opportunities and challenges that academic and teacher librarians face in navigating the organizational structures of their institutions in order to participate in the achievement of the institutions’ academic goals.

4. LIBR 256 – Archives and Management – Archives Final Exam

In Part Two/Question I of the final exam, we were given the task of taking a struggling archive at a fictional small college and turning it into a successful one. One of the means by which this was done was to form an advisory board with members of administration, librarians and faculty to help develop a comprehensive collections policy, thus involving them in the life of the archives and raising its profile on campus among the key players within the organizational structure of the college.

While the goal of this section dealt primarily with effective outreach and marketing, I feel it demonstrates my recognition of the organizational structures that archivists must often navigate and work within in order to ensure that their archives not only become successful and useful resources, but that they also remain that way.
Conclusion

The world of the information professional is not monolithic. There are a variety of organizations and environments within with librarians and other information professionals work, each with their different opportunities and challenges. The bureaucratic model is one of the main structural models for large-scale organizations, particularly those that serve in the public sphere as civic institutions. While bureaucracy provides structure and efficiency, it can also impede change and growth. Librarians and archivists who work within academic institutions must take extra steps to navigate the organizational bureaucracies of their home institutions in order to promote their libraries’ and archives’ presence on campus and the roles that they can play in fulfilling the educational goals of the institution. In addition, information professionals work with a wide variety of users, from members of the public who may be poor or homeless, to students and researchers.

It takes a great deal of skill, patience, and enthusiasm to be able to navigate the organization structures of library and academic institutions in order to promote the goals of academic institutions libraries and meet the diverse needs of the users.