L. Understand the nature of research, research methods and research findings; retrieve, evaluate and synthesize scholarly and professional literature for informed decision-making by specific client groups

Librarians are guides to the world of information, helping library users navigate the myriad items and resources in the library collections. People from all walks of life enter libraries seeking information on a variety of subjects. The goals of users are varied and range from members of the public looking for information for personal or vocational purposes, to business professionals, academic scholars and students who require information to help them meet specific professional and scholarly goals.

Different sets of users have different information needs and different ways of communicating those needs. For example, a child who may not have a large vocabulary will ask for information about a book using different words to identify key features of the item in question than a teen user would use, who in turn would communicate his or her information needs differently than adult. Additionally, members of different cultures or socio-economic groups may have different information needs as well. In order for a librarian to be able to effectively meet the information needs of a particular group of users, he or she must have an a knowledge or understanding of the different information resources that the library has available, so as to be able to readily provide this information when it is called for. Librarians become aware of the different information needs – and different expectations of what the library is meant to provide – from observation over time. Ethnography – the study of ethnically, socially or culturally distinct groups of people – is a means by which researchers gain an understanding such distinct groups through the process of interacting with them as an observer. A key component of this involves gaining the trust of the group who is being observed. As the observer gains the trust of
the group, her or she gains an understanding of the groups practices, mores and values. The observer also gains a new perspective than he or she previously had, that can foster a new understanding of the world. How does this translate into the world of the library? For many people, regardless of whether or not they belong to a distinct group, it can be rather daunting to approach a stranger and ask for help, as many people do when seeking assistance from a librarian. The librarian has to indicate trustworthiness, understanding and a willingness and ability to listen without judgment. If users are able to trust the librarian, then they will feel that they have an ally in the library, and will be more likely to rely on the library to meet their information needs. However, while it helps to have a generalized understanding of how different groups of users communicate their information needs, each user still must be treated as an individual, as forming generalizations without paying attention to the current user who is seeking assistance can be cause users to feel like their particular information needs are not important or relevant, and may be a cause for them to shun the library.

For those users who have information requirements related to complex subjects, the librarian must be able to gain an understanding of the user’s needs and direct the user to the appropriate material, be they databases and articles within databases, or books and other materials. Understanding the nature of the request is only one part of the equation. A librarian must be able to understand the resources that the library has and how to use them, otherwise he or she can be of no assistance to the person seeking information. Knowing the libraries’ resources allows the librarian to guide the user to the resource that most closely matches the user’s need. This involves knowing whether a book or database is most appropriate given the circumstances, and more importantly, knowing which book or which database contains the most relevant information.
The next step after determining the type of resource to use is finding the actual item that will meet the user’s information needs. This part of the process requires the librarian to have as close an understanding as possible as to exactly what the user is looking for. Oftentimes, the user will not know how exactly to put the nature of the query into words, at which point the librarian will need to ask more specific questions and listen carefully to the user’s replies until the nature of the query becomes clear. This will help the librarian determine which are the most appropriate search terms to use when querying the database or the catalog. It also is necessary for the librarian to have the ability to think about the topic from a different perspective than would be immediately apparent based on the information received from the user.

The best way to illustrate this is through an example. As part of my internship at the University of San Francisco’s Gleeson Library/Geschke Learning Center, I have been providing reference assistance at the Reference Desk. Recently, a student came up to the desk seeking information about the Bodoni typeface. She said that she had looked up “Bodoni” in the library’s online catalog and had found nothing relevant to her query. I recreated her search to see what she had done to make sure I had a good understanding. I also asked her the nature of the project that she was working on. Then I walked her through the process of using appropriate keywords to find relevant information. I realized that the search for “Bodoni” was not returning anything relevant, as it was too narrow. I pointed this out to the student and suggested that we revise the search by using search terms that were broader in scope and that would return resources that included information about the Bodoni typeface, even if there were no resources that were written exclusively about it. The keywords I eventually chose were “(font*) AND (type*) AND (history)”. We found five results in the library’s catalog.
Beyond finding results, a librarian must be able to evaluate them to determine if they are actually relevant to the user’s needs. Using keywords helps narrow down the search results, but the results must be analyzed to see if they make sense in terms of what the user is looking for. Only a person is able to do this, and it is the role of the librarian to combine his or her understanding of the user’s query and the nature of the topic for which the search has been made to determine whether or not the information is truly usable. The librarian also needs to listen to the user to gain feedback as to whether or not the information found is indeed relevant to the user’s query. If it is, then the interaction has been successful. If it is not, then the search terms need to be revised in the hopes of finally finding the relevant information. As it turned out with the above reference interaction, all of the results were relevant to the user’s query.

In addition to librarians who work within traditional institutional framework such as public and academic libraries, independent information professionals (IIPs) are private entrepreneurs who work outside of such institutions. IIPs tend to focus their businesses on niche markets, based both on their own personal expertise and ideals, as well as analysis of both the market and their own strengths and weaknesses. IIPs provide their clients with a wide variety of services based around their ability to do effective research, and produce a variety of deliverables that include research reports and market analyses. Focusing on a particular segment of the market – such as industry or education – requires an in-depth knowledge of the market in question so that the IIP is best able to anticipate their client’s needs and conduct the appropriate research using the appropriate resources. Being able to conduct effective research and package the results in a way that is most useful to the client involves good communication skills. IIPs need to be able to communicate to the client that they understand the
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particular market in general in which the client operates, and their client’s own business needs and goals.

Finally, the information professional – whether working independently or within a traditional library institution – must have the skills necessary to bring all the pieces together. For librarians, this can be the result of a request from a user for a specific set of resources. Such requests often arrive via email reference queries or requests from users who are working on a specific project and do not know where to begin, or who may be under time constraints. Being able to research and evaluate sources of information allows the librarian to provide the user with a set of resources that have been evaluated ahead of time as to their relevance. For the IIP, the need to synthesize research findings into reports and presentations is important as the client is presented with information that is understandable and therefore useful.

Evidence and Criteria for Selection

1. LIBR 200 – Information and Society – Annotated Bibliography

The goal for this assignment was to develop an annotated bibliography, which goes beyond the scope of a traditional bibliography in that its purpose is to describe the references that are listed therein in the form of summaries. In addition to describing them, the annotated bibliography also provides evaluations of the references based on my readings of them, which along with the descriptions serves to guide potential readers who may decide whether or not they wish to use these resources for their own research on similar or related topics. For this annotated bibliography I chose the topic “The Library and Intellectual Freedom”, and provided a one-page synopsis of the topic. This synopsis and annotated bibliography formed the basis for my final paper for this class.
This evidence demonstrates my competency in selecting resources that are appropriate to a topic and evaluating them in such a way that they can be of use to others who may wish to find information on the same topic. In addition, the synopsis demonstrates my ability to synthesize the references into a summary of a specific topic. Such an annotated bibliography when rendered on its own independent of any project or paper can also take the form of a pathfinder for reference purposes.

2. LIBR 250 – Design and Implementation of Instructional Strategies for Information Professionals – Module 1: Synthesis

This focus of this course was to study and learn about the roles that teacher-librarians can play in the education process. The aim of this assignment was to summarize the research that others and I had done in four areas relating to education: educational theory, curriculum and assessment, collaboration and 21st century skills and information literacy. This was the final part of a three-part process. The first part was a self-assessment of our knowledge and understanding of each of the four areas. The second part involved doing independent research on each of the four topics, including selecting and summarizing articles and other relevant resources. The criteria for this part was that we were to focus our research on the areas about which we felt we had the least knowledge and understanding. Each person’s resources and their summaries were posted on a class wiki under the appropriate topic headings. This final part involved incorporating the research done by others into my own research to come up with a comprehensive summary for each topic, which would demonstrate what I had learned from both my research as well as that of the other students in the class. The idea behind this project was that each person’s learning would contribute to the shared knowledge and “collective intelligence” of the whole class.
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This evidence demonstrates my ability to conduct research relevant to specific topics and to synthesize that research into a coherent whole for a specific group – teacher-librarians. In addition, this assignment increased my own personal knowledge base on this subject so that I now have a fund of knowledge that I can draw upon to assist others in the future who may come to me for information about this topic.


The focus of this class was to learn about independent information professionals (IIPs). The long-term goal of the class was to develop a business plan of which this evidence formed a component. This particular assignment, followed upon a SWOT analysis, in which we analyzed our own strengths and weaknesses, the opportunities for a successful business, and the threats to this success that would need to be addressed. Based on my own interest in education and my knowledge of educational resources, I decided to focus my business on conducting research on areas that would be of use to institutions of higher, including grant opportunities, enrollment statistics of similar institutions and patent and legal issues that could affect an institution’s income or influence decisions as to whether or not they wish to expand their services and physical infrastructure. In addition, I outline the resources I would use to find necessary information from a variety of sources, including public and private libraries, databases, public records and regional centers that have a specific focus.

This evidence demonstrates my ability to identify particular user groups and the types of resources that would be appropriate to find relevant information. In addition, it demonstrates my
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ability to think about the format for presenting the information that would enable a specific user to make the best use of the information in question.

4. LIBR 285 – Research Methods in Library and Information Science/Topic: Ethnography (with a focus on technology) – Fieldwork 1-3

The focus of this course was to learn the particular research methods used in the field of ethnography, which is the study of ethnically, socially or culturally distinct groups of people. This assignment was completed in three parts over the course of the semester with the same group of people. The main object of each assignment was to work with the other members of the group in recreating an image that was given to us by the teacher. As part of this process we were required to meet using the Elluminate system, which is an electronic classroom environment that allows users to meet in real time, and share information via a designated “whiteboard” feature. Elluminate also has chat room features, and a means for vocal communication. The feature that it made it a required means of communication was that sessions could be recorded for later review. The overarching goals of the assignment were many. First, we were to study the process of meeting and deciding how to proceed with the recreation of the image and report on this experience. Second, we had to report on the nature of the group as a distinct entity. Third, we had to observe the other members of the group and describe them and their behavior. Fourth, we were to examine our own role in the process. One of the marks of ethnographical study is that the researcher’s interactions with the group under study, has an influence on the behavior of that group. Finally, we were to offer our predictions of how we felt the group and its dynamic would change and develop over time, and to mark the actual changes and developments at the end of the third project.
This evidence demonstrates my competency in using established research methods in cooperation with others to collaborate on a shared goal. Librarians interact with people from a variety of backgrounds, and each person we interact with brings their own life experiences to the reference interview or other means through which they seek information. As the librarian and user interact, they themselves form a new “group”, and influence each other’s perspective on the information seeking process.

Note: I requested permission from each of the members of this group to identify them by name. Three of the group members consented to be identified by both first and last name, and one wished to be identified only by her first name and final initial.

Conclusion

Knowing how to find information, and the variety of resources by which it can be found is one part of the librarian’s role. Beyond that however, a librarian must be able to discriminate between different resources and items of information to be able to find the information that best meets a user’s needs. Being able to analyze and evaluate information is key to ensuring that the information found is indeed relevant. A librarian can also share the criteria by which information is evaluated with the user, thus providing the user with an additional tool to use for future queries. Finally, the information professional’s ability to bring together all the pieces together allows him or her to present information in a way that is coherent, understandable and useful to the information seeker.