Statement of Competency M

M. Demonstrate oral and written communication skills necessary for group work, collaborations and professional level presentations

With rare exceptions, librarians and other information professionals do not work alone. Maintaining library collections and services for users is a collaborative effort that requires the support of a wide variety of participants so that librarians can do their jobs to help fulfill their institutions’ missions.

Collaboration is necessary in a variety of settings. As part of their role as guides to library resources, librarians continually evaluate services to ensure that they meet their users’ need for continued access to information. For librarians who work in public libraries, this can include forming working groups and committees to plan for the expansion of existing services, or the creation of new services, including services for previously underserved groups of users.

For librarians who work in educational settings, such as teacher-librarians in elementary and secondary schools (K-12) and those in higher education, collaboration among librarians only is not sufficient, as libraries in these institutions serve to support their institutions’ curricular goals. This requires an understanding of the goals of the curriculum, and requires communication with members of the faculty to both clarify these goals and to work on creating sets of learning tools that supports effective teaching of the curriculum. Teacher-librarians ideally have close working relationships with members of the faculty and school administrations, which allows for collaboration for instruction, in which teacher-librarians, faculty and administrators collaborate to ensure that students’ have the necessary skills and means to access information via library resources, and that these skills and means can be applied to particular lessons in subjects they are studying.
Planning for new or revised services often requires presentations to the stakeholders who either make decisions regarding the management of the library and its services, or who are in a position to influence these decisions or undertake actions that can support the library in its mission and goals. The latter group of stakeholders can include advocacy groups, such as Friends of the San Francisco Public Library, community groups from the library’s service area, or members of local, state or federal commissions and legislatures who are in a position to make funding decisions that will affect the library’s decisions to continue to provide the same level of services, provide more services, or in unfortunate circumstances, to scale back services due to budgetary shortfalls. For those librarians working in the educational field, such stakeholders can also include teachers and faculty, members of the school’s administration, members of the local or state board of education or board of regents, and officials in the federal government who can influence decisions on how funds for educational resources are allocated. Designing services, programs and learning models for schools and academic settings requires both collaboration and clear communication. They ability of librarians to cooperate with each other to create easily understood, concise presentations and reports goes a long way towards crafting a persuasive and effective message that can be presented to stakeholders. Collaboration however, requires commitment on the part of all participants in the effort. Agreement on the goals of the effort and the extent of the effort is necessary. To use the creation of a new library service as an example, there must be agreement on identifying the user group or groups that the new service is meant to be benefit. There must also be agreement on a desirable time frame for implementing these goals.

A well-planned presentation is able to present an often-complex array of data in a manner that can be grasped or easily explained to people who may not have the same expertise as the presenters. Such data can include historical background information about the current situation, data on budget
requirements and possible sources of funding to meet these requirements, timelines for implementing the goals, and information on how similar solutions have been implemented in other libraries, and what the outcomes were. It is important to have charts, graphics and language that can be easily understood. The key thing to remember is that the decision-makers to whom the information is being presented are, in a sense, similar to library patrons in that they need to be able to absorb the information that is being presented to them so that they can make informed decisions.

Advocacy for users takes many forms and requires different types of presentations for different purposes. Whereas sometimes it is necessary to create presentations that are geared towards decision-makers, at other times it is necessary to create tools that support learning. This includes collaboration to create well-designed learning tools that can be easily navigated by students. This includes PowerPoint presentations that display salient points of a lesson in a way that is easily absorbable, and that can be referred back to as needed. It also includes making the fullest use of online learning management systems (LMS) such as Moodle or ANGEL.

Collaboration, cooperation and communicate requires the ability to listen, as well as the ability to not become attached to one’s own ideas at the expense of the overall goals of the effort in question. Each member of a group comes into the group and the effort with his or her own experiences and perspectives. It is the fortunate – and sometimes rare – group whose members share the same mindset from the beginning of the collaborative process. For many groups, discussion and debate may be necessary before agreement is achieved. This requires the ability to listen to and consider opinions and ideas different from one’s own without dismissing them out of hand. It also requires the ability to suspend judgment of other group members whose opinions you may not share. In many professional situations, groups are assembled without input from the group members themselves. Groups are often
assigned their tasks – such as coming up with a solution to a funding situation or implementing or expanding a service – by members of management, and do not always have the option of choosing with whom they are going to work. It is therefore necessary that group members be able to work together for the purpose of supporting the institution’s goals.

Furthermore, while it is ideal that group members in professional settings achieve consensus when presenting their reports or findings, it is not always possible. Consensus is desirable in that agreement among all the group members is more likely to result in a cohesive and therefore persuasive presentation, which is especially important when advocating for library services or other programs that would support a library’s mission. However, if consensus is not possible, one possibility could be for groups to present a multitude of viewpoints as possible options for achieving a distinct goal. This may not be possible, however, and requires a great degree of skill on the part of all group members. The important thing when working together is to make sure that all members of the group have the opportunity to contribute their ideas and expertise at some point during the process, and to have these contributions recognized even if those ideas are not utilized in the final presentation.

As mentioned in the opening paragraph, it is the rare information professional that works alone. However, independent information professionals (IIPs) are entrepreneurs who decide for a variety of reasons to start their own businesses that make use of their information and research skills. Many IIPs are sole business owners, but have no less a need to create presentations for their clients. These presentations include reports that provide the results of their research in easy-to-understand formats. Additionally, when IIPs conceive of the ideas for their businesses, they must also advocate for themselves, particularly to potential investors or when requesting small-business loans. This requires
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the need to create a professional and clearly laid-out business plan that demonstrates the strengths and potential of their entrepreneurial plan.

Evidence and Criteria for Selection

1. LIBR 204 – Information Organizations and Management – The San Francisco Public Library

Office of Outreach Services

This group project was created with three classmates and was a follow-up to a case study in which we studied the issue of homeless users of public libraries by focusing on the San Francisco (Calif.) Public Library system. This assignment called for the creation of a strategic plan by which we would address the issues raised in our case study. Our plan called for the creation of an Office of Outreach Services that would provide access to information about social services needed by homeless patrons. In addition, this project addressed the fact that librarians are often put in a position where they have to assess a homeless patron’s psychological state and whether the patron requires information assistance or social services, as well as try to assess whether or not the patron in question poses a safety risk to the librarian, library staff, or other users. As librarians are usually not trained for these tasks, having an Office of Outreach Services provides a place to which librarians can refer homeless patrons, and in which the staff are trained to address their service needs, be they needs for shelter, job training or other social services. The strategic plan identifies operational goals and objectives, potential staff for the Office, stakeholder groups both inside the library and out in the community, as well as a timeline for implementation, and budget that identifies potential funding sources. All meetings with members of the group took place via Skype, which allowed us to communicate in real time. The contributions I made included researching
actual past budgets for the San Francisco Public Library, creation of needs assessment tools, collaboration on the strategic planning initiatives and general editing of the paper.

This evidence demonstrates my ability to collaborate with a group of colleagues to create a plan that advocates for the solution to a problem within a library by both assessing needs and identifying possible solutions. It incorporates information and data that the management of the library would need to consider when making a decision regarding implementation of the plan. In addition, it demonstrates my ability to use technological means to conduct live meetings, which are necessary for group planning efforts.

Note: I received permission from three of the group members to be identified by name for purposes of this competency statement. I was unable to obtain such permission from the fourth member who therefore will remain anonymous.

2. LIBR 204 – Information Organizations and Management – Advocacy Project Presentation

This presentation was created as a follow-up to the strategic plan in which our group outlined the Office of Outreach Services to address the needs of homeless patrons in the San Francisco (Calif.) Public Library. The presentation was originally created using PowerPoint presentation software and was intended to be presented at a meeting in which stakeholders and potential contributors to our plan would be in attendance. The purpose of this presentation was to present the core aspects of the Office of Outreach Service’s mission, needs and current sources of funding in as simple and direct a manner as possible that would advance our goal of receiving funding for our stated needs.

This evidence demonstrates my ability to create professional presentations that clearly state the purpose, goals and needs of a plan to expand service for a particular group of library users. It also demonstrates my ability to present salient pieces of information that best represent the overall
message of the strategic plan in a way that is easily understandable and accessible to a group of
listeners that does not possess expertise in the matter under discussion, though they are in a
position to provide financial support that is crucial to the plan’s implementation.

3. LIBR 250 – Design and Implementation of Instructional Strategies for Information Professionals –
Module 3: Voices From the Sea – A Knowledge Building Center

This was a group project in which two of my classmates and I designed a knowledge-building
center (KBC) that makes use of the features afforded by an online learning management system
(LMS). The goal of this KBC was to create an online environment in which students could partake
in a collaborative project to learn about whale songs. The website was created using Google Sites,
which is a free, online website creation platform. Our group’s site contains multiple pages that are
organized according to purpose, and includes links to online resources that allow students to both
find information and share ideas. The site incorporates information and curricular requirements
outlined by the California State Board of Education. In addition, it incorporates collaborative
lesson plans designed by Dr. David Loertscher (our professor for this class) in collaboration with
Carol Koechlin and Sandi Zwaan. These lesson plans were designed to promote information
literacy for students. Each member of the group submitted his or her own report on the project,
describing our personal reflections on the process of collaboration. We also included the log of our
efforts. My contribution to the project included creating a section of the lesson plan in which
students compare and contrast the similarities and differences between humans and whales, setting
up meeting times via Skype, which included orienting my classmates as to its use, and creating a
Google Docs page in which we could each simultaneously record the log of our progress.
This evidence demonstrates my ability to collaborate with others, and details the personal processes involved in this effort. It also demonstrates my ability to understand the need to address crises that arise, and to work to support the member of the group undergoing the crises to ensure that she had the space to deal the crisis while simultaneously underscoring that her contributions to the group were still important. This evidence also demonstrates my recognition of the different roles that people play in collaborative efforts, and the fact that we are able to contribute to the creation of a professional presentation.

Note: I requested received written permission from my classmates to identify them by name for the purposes of this e-Portfolio.

This evidence was my final assignment, which called for the creation of a business plan for a potential personal research business. The goal of this class was to learn about the world of the independent information professional (IIP), with a particular focus on the part of the IIP’s professional life that is related to marketing and planning of his or her business. IIPs who are sole business owners are solely responsible for every aspect of their business. They determine what their target markets will be and what products and services they will provide to these markets. They are responsible for all aspects of planning the business, from the design of their logos and ordering supplies, to the creation of presentations and reports that summarize the findings of their research for clients. The business plan is an outline that anticipates the markets the IIP will be targeting, the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that must be addressed to ensure that the plan is viable, methods of marketing and staying competitive (such as products and services, and communications with potential clients) and most importantly, a sound budget. All of these are
important especially if the IIP is applying for a small-business loan or seeking investment. A well-prepared business plan, in addition to being a guidepost for the business, can also be a way of persuading banks and potential investors of the soundness of the business. The business plan I created was based on information learned in lessons throughout the semester, as well as a model provided by the Small Business Association. In it, I outlined my intended markets, products, services and methods of communication, as well as the guiding principles behind my business.

This evidence demonstrates my ability to create a presentation based on established professional principles and methods that can be used in a real-world business setting. The skills used in creating such a plan can be adapted to a variety of settings that call for planning and advocacy, including those involving group participation.

**Conclusion**

The information professional rarely works in silo, nor does he or she devote all of the hours in the library or professional setting. Information professionals are often engaged in planning of new services and must advocate for those services, be they services for a library’s users or an independent information business. This requires skill to ensure that needs and plans are effectively communicated to stakeholders in the proposed plan, particularly those whose decision-making roles are crucial to the success of such a venture. Planning also requires collaboration to ensure that everyone is involved in the process has their ideas heard and are recognized for their contributions. Teacher-librarians are, in a sense, advocates for the students to whose education they contribute. They too require the ability to collaborate with faculty and administration officials and to communicate their views to ensure that they are able to contribute to the students’ learning. Being able to work with others and communicate
effectively – be it with co-workers, administrators, teachers, students or library patrons – is key to ensuring that users information needs continue to be met.