

Core Competencies and Music Librarians

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April 2002

The concept of “core competencies” became a central concern of businesses and of libraries during the 1990s.¹ Attempts to define core competencies for companies and libraries and the individuals who work in them were welcomed as a way of ensuring focus as well as standards of proficiency and accomplishment. In the library world, core competencies have been used to provide guidance for professionals in the workplace (and as such have been developed by associations rather than employers) and have been seen by educators as offering a model upon which to base curriculum design. These efforts can produce differing results, if only because the demands of the host institutions differ.

Susan Jurow has claimed that the key to the choices that (academic) librarians have to make in the face of rapidly developing technology is to define “what constitutes the collective knowledge unique to this profession and these institutions that adds value to the services provided to users.”² In this view, core competencies are the attitudes, approaches and actions that make possible the profession’s long-term strategic advantages, that identify the customer benefits, and that are difficult to imitate. Core competencies not only define the present, they also ensure a future for the profession.

Definitions

Given the acknowledged confusion in the literature about core competencies—do they refer to libraries or librarians, to practices or policies, to individuals or groups, to enforceable standards or aspirational goals, to change or maintenance, to values or proficiencies?—the Music Library Association’s Library School Liaison Subcommittee has chosen to focus on individuals, their education and training, and the expectations of users.³ Even with this restriction, the range and depth of potential areas of comment are considerable. In defining “music librarian” we have taken a pragmatic approach, trying to be as inclusive as possible of the varieties of employment situations (academic, public, performance, and radio/tv/film), knowledge requirements, and personal styles. One point is clear: these core competencies do not constitute a legally

¹ See C.K. Prahalad and Gary Hamel, “The Core Competence of the Corporation,” *Harvard Business Review* 68 (May/June 1990):79-91.

² Susan Jurow, “Core Competencies: Strategic Thinking about the Work We Choose to Do,” *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 22 (July 1996): 301.

³ See, for example, Richard Abel, “Fiddling While Rome Burns,” *Against the Grain* 10 (September 1998): 34 ; the core competency of libraries is “the efficient accumulation of knowledge products (books, journals, etc.) and its proficient and energetic supply of those products to its users/market in a ‘user friendly’ manner.” Deborah S. Grealy and Barbara A. Greenman, “Special Librarians Set New Standards for Academe,” *Information Outlook* 2 (August 1998): 17, consider the competencies “comprise a new standard for special librarians.”

enforceable standard of professional practice. They are guidelines for individuals who are interested in becoming a music librarian, for educators of music librarians (for curriculum design, admissions standards, continuing education courses), for employers (in recruitment) and administrators (in evaluation), and for music librarians who are seeking a reaffirmation of their vocation.

Extant Literature and Guidelines

ALA is certainly concerned about the matter of core competencies and, in the report of the Congress on Professional Education held in 1999, recommended that they be defined as distinct from the core values (credo) of the profession.⁴ Task forces were established in 1999 to produce the statements, but only the one for core values has been approved by ALA Council (in 2000). Several of our sister associations have formulated lists of competencies and we acknowledge the assistance that those documents have given.⁵ The Subcommittee has not neglected the prior efforts of MLA's members.⁶ The literature on librarianship and information management has been combed for useful contributions. While several of these articles have focused on the requirements of particular kinds of library work and job qualifications, there are others that have taken a more general approach.⁷ Competencies are similar to a code of ethics inasmuch as they indicate preferred behaviors, but they differ in that they specify practical abilities.

⁴ See *The Report of the Steering Committee on the Congress for Professional Education*, June 1999, prepared for ALA; go to http://www.ala.org/congress/cope_report.html, recommendations 1.1-2.

⁵ Young Adult Library Services Association (a division of the American Library Association), "Young Adults Deserve the Best," approved by the Board of Directors, June 1981, revised January 1998 (<http://www.ala.org/yalsa/profdev/competencies.html>). Special Library Association, "Competencies for Special Librarians of the 21st Century," approved by the Board of Directors, October 1996 (<http://www.sla.org/professional/comp/html>). Association for Library Service of Children (a division of the American Library Association), "Competencies for Librarians Serving Children in Public Libraries," approved by the Board of Directors, 1999 (<http://www.ala.org/alsc/competencies.html>). American Association of Law Libraries, "Competencies of Law Librarianship," approved by the Executive Board, March 2001 (<http://www.aa.net.org/prodev/competencies.asp>).

⁶ For a list of previous publications see Jean Morrow, "Education for Music Librarianship," *Notes* 56 (2000): 655-61 (footnotes 1 and 2); and Judith L. Marley, "Education for Music Librarianship within the United States: Content Analysis of Selected Documentation and Structured Interviews with Selected Practitioners," Ph.D. diss. University of Pittsburgh, 2001.

⁷ See Randy Diamond and Martha Dragich, "Professionalism in Librarianship: Shifting the Focus from Malpractice to Good Practice," *Library Trends* 49 (2001): 395-414; William Fisher, "Core competencies for the acquisitions librarian," *Library Collections, Acquisitions, & Technical Services* 25 (2001): 179-190; Joan Giesecke and Beth McNeil, "Core Competencies and the Learning Organization," *Library Administration & Management* 13 (1999): 158-66.

Relevance to Library Education

The current (1992) *Standards for Accreditation* does not contain a direct statement of core competencies but says this about the library and information studies curriculum:

The curriculum is concerned with recordable information and knowledge, and the services and technologies to facilitate their management and use. The curriculum of library and information studies encompasses information and knowledge creation, communication, identification, selection, acquisition, organization and description, storage and retrieval, preservation, analysis, interpretation, evaluation, synthesis, dissemination, and management.⁸

This is pretty comprehensive, but it does not describe what an individual should know in order to qualify as a librarian let alone what core competencies are! The standards are advisory only, for no licensing authority is vested in library associations. Moreover, they require only minimal congruence with the objectives as set by the profession.

The Subcommittee recognizes that competencies can be acquired through several routes. These comprise, primarily, bachelor's and master's degrees obtained at reputable higher education colleges or universities, as well as continuing education, and work-related experience. In addition to the necessary informational skills, knowledge, and understanding that formal courses can inculcate, the job of music librarian also draws on personal characteristics such as organizational ability, patience, a high level of communication skills, a desire to work with others (whether they be library users or staff members), and a love of music.

Language and Intent

We have chosen to express the core competencies as active statements of necessary skills, behaviors, and knowledge in order to highlight the distinctive contribution that music librarians make and the continuing need for people with those skills. While an awareness of all areas of music librarianship is ideal, attainment of an equal level of competence in all areas is not expected. Jobs require specialization and, as a career as a music librarian develops, emphasizes change. Though the competencies are expressed as goals and do not constitute minimum standards, they do provide a level of expectation not only for practitioners but also for library users, employers, students, and educators.

⁸ Go to <http://www.ala.org/alaorg/oa/standard.html>.

The Core Competencies of Music Librarians

Professional Ethos

Music librarians:

- 1.1. Work to advance the goals of their employing organizations;
- 1.2. Recognize the diversity of musics, library users (the client group), staff and the wider community, and encourage all in their musical endeavors and enquiries;
- 1.3. Are committed to excellence in all areas of service;
- 1.4. Continually assess the effectiveness of provided and potential materials and services;
- 1.5. Are effective communicators;
- 1.6. Participate in the professional community.

Training and Education

Music librarians have:

- 2.1. Course work at the higher education level in music;
- 2.2. The ability to read music;
- 2.3. Education at the graduate level in library and information science;
- 2.4. Knowledge of a language in addition to English;
- 2.5. Experience as a performing artist;
- 2.6. Familiarity with a variety of research methods.

Reference and Research

Music librarians:

- 3.1. Are highly knowledgeable concerning the content of information resources in any format;
- 3.2. Are highly knowledgeable concerning information access;
- 3.3. Develop and employ a variety of information delivery systems, as appropriate to each user;
- 3.4. Constantly evaluate the quality of information sources;
- 3.5. Create indexes, catalogs, finding aids, brochures, exhibitions, and bibliographies (whether print or electronic) to enhance access to local collections or to a body of music or music literature;
- 3.6. Provide accurate answers (within the limits of the source materials).

Collection Development

Music librarians:

- 4.1. Develop collections to meet the needs of users (both present and future) regardless of format;
- 4.2. Keep abreast of changes in the artistic, business, scholarly and publishing aspects of music;
- 4.3. Improve the capability of the library by obtaining access to remote databases;
- 4.4. Ensure sufficient funds are available for acquisition and preservation of materials;
- 4.5. Maintain strong ties with vendors;
- 4.6. Evaluate individual items in collections for continuing relevance;
- 4.7. Participate in digitization projects to ensure the long-term preservation and wider dissemination of material.

Collection Organization

Music librarians:

- 5.1. Ensure that materials are housed and organized to meet the needs and expectations of users and organizations;
- 5.2. Ensure that cataloguing and/or listing meets applicable standards;
- 5.3. Participate in the sharing of catalog data;
- 5.4. Ensure that users have appropriate access to materials;
- 5.5. Ensure that users have access to catalog data;
- 5.6. Work to improve library data systems, with a goal of integrating circulation, acquisition, and catalog information.

Library Management

Music librarians:

- 6.1. Control the budget for all aspects of their libraries, including staff, acquisitions, maintenance, and information and audio technology;
- 6.2. Create both short and long term plans to ensure optimal use of facilities, materials and services, and provide the necessary vision for accomplishing change;
- 6.3. Hire, train, supervise and evaluate staff in an environment of trust and respect;
- 6.4. Ensure that staff continue to receive training by providing access to continuing education and other opportunities for improving skills and knowledge;
- 6.5. Identify and obtain sources of funding, both from within and outside of the organization;
- 6.6. Provide leadership not only within the library but also in terms of information provision to the organization of which their library is a part;
- 6.7. Seek partnerships within and without the organization that will assist with accomplishing missions and goals;
- 6.8. Ensure that there are no barriers to access.

Information and Audio Technology and Systems

Music librarians:

- 7.1. Are familiar with developments in hardware, software, and networking, and the integration of systems and media;
- 7.2. Recommend, plan, implement and evaluate the installation of relevant information and audio technology and systems;
- 7.3. Use information and audio technology to enhance services and information delivery.

Teaching

Music librarians:

- 8.1. Educate users (actual, virtual and potential), administrators, and donors through all appropriate means, including paper, email, websites, classes, demonstrations, presentations, individual consultation, radio, television, recordings, performances, exhibits;
- 8.2. Work with faculty and teachers, performers, and listeners to design curricula and assignments that are effective, to create interesting performances, and to aid life-long learning;
- 8.3. Promote the effective use of all technologies;
- 8.4. Provide guidance on the materials, services, and information to which users have access.