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LIS 630:01- Computer Related Tech Info Mgmt

Interview- Technology Administrator

I was born and raised in Virginia where my dad always took me to the Radford Public Library. Located in Pulaski County, this library was first established in 1941 with a beginning budget of $1,200. Their mission statement is as follows: "To educate, enlighten, and enrich our community." In addition to general encouragement from my family, attending this library as a child was what motivated me to become a librarian and helped me develop a passion for books and reading. I got in touch via email with Duncan Hall, the Technology Services Coordinator at the Radford Public Library. Their service population at this library is 17,228. Duncan showed me the library's five-year strategic plan, (2017-2022) which included four technology-specific goals:

1. Create more in-depth computer classes for patrons

2. Explore the possibility of establishing a library-specific domain that is independent of the city

3. Use technology as a vehicle to promote library services, collections, programs, etc.

4. Explore alternative public computer options in order to reduce the number of thin client computers currently in place with the ultimate goal of improving patron experience in using public computers

It was interesting to see a library so openly focused on technology-specific goals; the local libraries in North Carolina that I am more familiar with do not have these types of goals outlined, at least not on their websites. I also glanced over Radford's Internet Acceptable Use Policy, which explains the library's stance on both acceptable and unacceptable use of library resources. They note that while all individuals have the right to unrestricted access, parents are ultimately responsible for monitoring their children's use of resources. Users must also agree to a list of terms before they are permitted to use the internet.

I learned that, according to Duncan, his most important responsibility as a Technology Services Coordinator is to help staff and public use the library's technology collections and devices. This reminded me of one of the proverbs mentioned in our articles: "Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime." Duncan mentioned how libraries have a wealth of digital resources available to the public, but users often need help navigating and using them. Without that assistance, they may be inaccessible. By teaching the public how to use various forms of technology, staff can also develop and foster stronger relationships with library patrons. Duncan also stated that his least important responsibility is to offer computer classes: he noted that while many patrons requested that computer classes be offered, attendance was very low. This could be due to time or budget constraints. If classes are only offered during normal business hours, people are not able to attend because they are working. Additionally, if computer classes are offered after normal business hours, people may not want to sacrifice time they would normally spend with their

families. This is a struggle that libraries must face when deciding appropriate times to offer such classes. Duncan explained that he has taken a more one-on-one approach and offers technology instruction by appointment to those who request assistance. In terms of staying up to date with technological advances, Duncan mentioned that he tends to monitor other nearby libraries and take cues from them. He noted that he always tries to keep library applications in mind when hearing about emerging technologies. His typical process for exploring new technologies goes as follows:

Discovery >> Research >> Discuss with circulation staff >> Formulate plan for implementation >> Ultimately discuss with Library Director

In one of our readings, Mavodza discussed the importance of keeping the end user in mind when implementing new technologies (133). Librarians have to get into the correct mindset and think like a user, and I believe Duncan exemplifies that thought process very well. He mentioned that when planning new projects, he prioritizes by what would be most useful to patrons on an immediate basis. He highlighted one example of 3-D printers vs. Wi-Fi hotspots: 3-D printing is currently a popular service being utilized in many libraries, but Duncan noted that they would not be of as much value to the community because they are already available at nearby universities. They are also very expensive and take up a lot of space. In comparison, Wi-Fi hotspots are prioritized because they are immediately accessible and useful to patrons. Oftentimes, librarians must make decisions regarding which options are best for patrons, while keeping budget and library needs in mind, as well.

Advocacy is another major responsibility for both librarians and technology administrators. Duncan explained that when proposing a new technology project, he critically evaluates and addresses how the specific project will impact library patrons and resolve issues they may have. He said that the mission of libraries has dramatically shifted over time from the provision of books to a more general "granting access" to information. He makes an effort to link projects back to the goal of connecting the public to the information they need. I think this is an excellent mindset to have when making major decisions. Librarians should first consider what is best for users rather than what is best for the library, and they should advocate as such.

I am brand new to the IT world, so I was very interested to learn Duncan's policies for network security. He explained that at the Radford Public Library, their network is protected largely as being a part of the Radford City Government's network. I remembered that one of the library's long-term technology goals was to explore the possibility of establishing a library-specific domain that is independent of the city.) Because of this partnership, Duncan is not officially in charge of network security. However, he does work closely with the city's IT department for issues such as antivirus, computer management software, etc. One specific responsibility he mentioned was the control of access to public computers so that they may be wiped after each. I assume this could be for both security and privacy reasons.

We also discussed the different types of skillsets that new library professionals should possess if they aspire to work with library technologies. At his position, he frequently interacts with the public and is responsible for providing direct support to both staff and patrons on a daily

basis. He mentioned that along with general comfortability and familiarity with technology, the most important skills are patience and clear communication. He also said that is it important to be comfortable with statistics due to the time he spends analyzing usage of different e-resources, online circulation, web clicks, etc. To draw from our readings and discussion, I remembered a job posting for a Data Services Librarian at Mississippi State University. One of their preferred qualifications listed an advanced degree in applied statistics, or a PhD in natural sciences or social sciences. In conclusion, he stated that because libraries typically run web servers, they have somewhat complex network administration needs in order to keep everything secure and functional. Staff members have to be knowledgeable in a wide variety of technology areas, to say the least. I think it was interesting to compare the skills that Duncan mentioned with those listed in online job postings. I noticed that he did not mention programming, scripting languages, or anything about website development, which was surprising since these were so frequently mentioned in our discussion. Overall, it was great to hear about librarianship from a more technological perspective; it is always really cool to be able to speak with someone who is already in your ideal career.

I did have a few follow-up questions after conducting this interview and comparing results with our readings, which I submitted to Duncan shortly after our initial interview:

1. "*Patrons frequently ask for computer classes, but basically never attend them.*" **Why do you think that is?**

2. Can you discuss the most recent technology that you have implemented? Do you consider this a successful implementation?

3. "*3-D printing is a popular service for libraries these days, but it wouldn't add much value for our community because it is already available at the nearby universities.*" **Are these university 3-D printers accessible to library patrons or limited to university staff/students?**

4. One of the library's technology goals is to explore the possibility of establishing a library-specific domain that is independent of the city. **What are the advantages and disadvantages to not being under the network umbrella of the city?**

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