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IST 511

Assignment: Interview with a Library Administrator

For this assignment I interviewed [REDACTED] Library Director/[REDACTED] at the FBI Library in [REDACTED]. The interview took place on Tuesday September 14, 2010. It was a crisp and fluid interview that ran just under 30 minutes. [REDACTED] clearly has a great passion for [REDACTED] work. I was asked to give [REDACTED] a level of anonymity. Serious! Very cloak and dagger. Check out the confidential, blacked out information!

Where did you go to school?

Master of Science in Library Science from [REDACTED], Master of Arts English from [REDACTED], [REDACTED] Undergraduate degree.

What kind of work were you doing prior to the FBI?

I have a mix of experience between research and academic libraries with the majority of my time prior to the FBI was in academic librarianship at [REDACTED].

How long have you been at the FBI?

15 years.

Could you please speak a little more to your professional experience?

I started out in academic libraries then moved to public libraries then back to academic libraries before moving to the FBI. This was a great path because academic librarians are very good at understanding long term needs of researchers and public librarians seem to deal more with a 'need it now' clientele. This is very relevant here as people often NEED it now.

What about your day-to-day experiences?

We support the FBI Academy. This includes new agents, National Academy students, foreign students, and our own in-service staff. Usually we have about 1000 students. We are the library for the FBI and are open 24/7 to serve our clients. In addition, we also serve 34,000 employees in 56 field offices, as well as state and local law enforcement partners upon request. A lot of different client bases with a lot of different needs.

What are the most common requests you get?

Students are required to write papers and we help them with research in their topic area. We also help those who have been out of school get re-acclimated to the academic environment and get back into research.

We are a hybrid – half regular library and half special collections. We have over 50,000 open source offerings in one 4-story building. This consolidation, in addition to our computing hardware, makes it very easy for our users to quickly find what they're

looking for.

We also get calls from the field for research. This includes case and operation work as well as university questions.

There's really quite a range of requests. We're very different from other federal libraries because we work with students.

How many books, journals, digital items, and databases do you have on public access?

There is nothing secret or restricted. Everything is open access.

Can you speak about long-term planning at the library?

I'm pretty lucky in that I have a computer engineer working for me. [REDACTED] a very techie person who is extremely helpful and knowledgeable and influential in technology directions we need to take. [REDACTED] recently completed her MLIS and brings to the library scope a new and fresh perspective. She's currently working on revamping our website, among other things.

People always wonder why everything isn't electronic. In many cases it's because the sources just aren't offered. The intel community needs these books. Criminal justice and intel communities help in keeping it up to date.

What are some of the greatest challenges you face?

Law enforcement and criminal justice is reactive. We're not a SWAT or HR or hostage rescue squad, but we have to compete with them for resources and with outspoken partners.

Converted people who know what libraries do are our best advocates but getting that message across to non-enlightened users is toughest.

People need to be shown our functions. It's like me doing a medical operation – I couldn't do it if I wasn't shown by a surgeon. People don't fully understand what libraries do.

Funding in terms of materials is good although staffing could be improved. The federal government often takes staff for other things.

Greatest triumphs?

We were just accredited as a law enforcement agency for training. People from all over the USA came to review us for the accreditation process, saw what we did and not just gave us the accreditation, but listed us a best practice organization.

In general we're very up to date. All around. Have great ratings.

What's the most interesting thing that's happened during your tenure?

Bob Mueller (my boss), made the decision that we needed to become a more intel driven organization. The intel program started then to train agents. This was a completely new program for us and we had to add a lot of material very quickly. This shook up a couple things (managing resources – including space).

A lot of construction is going on now to accommodate these changes.

Where do you see the profession going?

The functions of a librarian will always be there. Possibly and introduction of e-learning. We're testing Kindles and e-readers and e-books but are not impressed. We're trying to see if that's the future but I don't think for libraries it's relevant. Technology is it. Definitely thinking ahead. The profession will be there a matter of us making our value known.

What is/are the most important skill(s) for librarians today?

Have to be adaptive and creative and have a sense of humor. It's a change environment and you have to have those skill sets. You must have an interest in finding the answer and often do more with less.

It's hard to explain to a non-librarian. People who aren't willing to put the energy into it shouldn't do it. People should care.

Commitment is the most important thing.

Ok to post to my blog?

Yes but don't use my name.