ACADEMIC LIBRARY
MEDICINE HAT COLLEGE – Anne Scott

A typical workday for me in the Vera Bracken Library of Medicine Hat College would be a combination of work in both technical and public services. Typically, I would spend most of my day cataloguing a variety of materials for use by students, instructors, other library staff and the general public. Each of the librarians and library technicians on staff take a two hour shift on the Information/Reference Desk so that is the public service part of my day.

When I am cataloguing, my work is largely dependent on priorities so that during fall and winter semesters the greatest priority is to catalogue materials intended for student or instructor use. Sometimes a new program will be added to the college's calendar and we will concentrate efforts on making materials available to support that program. For example, this past fall the college began teaching a new Bachelor of Education degree and we have been purchasing and adding materials to develop a Curriculum Collection for the Education students. In the past we have added special collections to the library including music scores and maps. These are seen as special projects that are usually undertaken in the summer months when there are fewer students on campus. Often these collections are catalogued differently than our usual materials and this makes the project interesting and challenging.

Working at the Information/Reference Desk can include dealing with hardware and software problems at the library's 20 drop-in stations, 35 classroom stations or the 10 reference stations. We also help students find answers to complete their assignments or help them begin their research in order to write papers. A certain amount of individual instruction is given to help students to use journal databases, the library catalogue or even the internet. We frequently get asked for help in citing reference sources in proper bibliographic format. As part of the Reference team we give tours of the library to classes of students as well as groups of people from the general public. The usual facilitative questions are asked such as, for help in finding a certain classroom or college department or for help in finding a book on the shelves.

I enjoy working in the college library because it allows me to work independently (cataloguing) as well as work as part of a team (reference). The interaction with the students keeps your perspective fresh and keeps you on your toes where technology is concerned.

I think one of the most important attributes a library technician should have in a college library setting is to be approachable. Students are sometimes hesitant to approach library staff because they think they are interrupting us or think they have a stupid question. But if the initial contact is positive then that student will be more likely to approach library staff again and that leads to the library being used more frequently and more efficiently. I also think it is important to be flexible, to be able to take each situation and quickly assess the best way to deal with it. In a reference situation, it may require instruction, or directions or an explanation of how something works, keeping in mind that the student should be constantly moving towards working independently. In a cataloguing situation, how will this material be best utilized by students or instructors and how can it best be described so that it will be retrievable and therefore used by students or instructors.

My primary duty is to catalogue materials that are added to the library collection so that they can be easily and quickly retrieved when needed. When working on the Information/Reference Desk my primary duty is to help patrons use the library's resources. Spending time on the Information/Reference Desk definitely helps me to be a better cataloguer.

The soft skills that I have found most useful from my library technician education are the interpersonal qualities that help me to be approachable, flexible and objective when dealing with any public service duties in my job. The hard skills that I use from my college program are the cataloguing basics and reference interview techniques.

I think there have been many technological advances which have pushed library technician opportunities forward. A PC was practically non-existent when I began work as a library technician but progress has forced us to become proficient at using technology to perform almost every library function from ordering and cataloguing library materials, to finding reference sources electronically and even communicating with other library staff. If library technicians stay current with technology then we are able to provide libraries with our expertise in using technology to the libraries' best advantage.

Most of the fun tasks at our library involve interacting with the students. In September it starts with taking student ID photos which are also their library cards. Those first few days of college are filled with long line ups but the students are usually excited to be starting their programs so it can lead to some "fun" moments. Giving library tours can also be humourous if you have a lively group. The college hosts a couple of theme decorate/dress-up days during the school year and the library participates fully which the students appreciate.

Although cataloguing itself can be repetitive it can also be a challenge if the materials being catalogued are varied.

I think the most challenging task is working with constantly changing technology and trying to stay current with it to best serve patrons.

Periodically, all of our library staff joins together to take inventory of the collection. It is a daunting task but we try to lighten it up a bit by working in teams, searching for "treat" coupons in the stacks and having pizza lunches. We usually all participate in shelf reading too.

I try to keep up with changes by reading library journals, talking to other library technicians at other libraries or at conferences and attending conferences as often as I can.

Our roles have changed partly because of the role that technology plays in our jobs. There is more sharing of resources between libraries especially in cataloguing. For example, historically each library spent time cataloguing from scratch each item purchased for their collection and now libraries share bibliographic records which enable them to get materials onto the shelf faster. Library Technicians can be solely responsible for libraries which may not have been the case many years ago.