COMPETENCIES FOR LIBRARIANS IN CANADIAN RESEARCH LIBRARIES
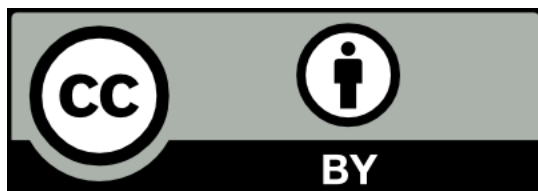
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Introduction

Competency profiles are used by many professions to enhance individual and organizational success as well as to provide a basis for future workforce planning. Competencies are often comprised of listings or groupings of knowledge, skills, and mindsets that define and contribute to professional success. Learning organizations, such as libraries, strive to move beyond adaptation in their environments to engender forms of generative ("active") learning to enhance the capacity to create and develop (Senge 1990). Competency mindsets that cultivate generative learning are viewed as critical as their purpose is to foster learning, growth and development in organizations as a whole, as well as for individuals.

In 2010, the Canadian Association of Research Libraries (CARL) published the first edition of the *Core Competencies for 21st Century CARL Librarians*. In 2017, at the request of CARL's Strengthening Capacity Committee, the CARL Competencies Working Group (CWG) was formed to update the publication for academic librarians working in Canada's research libraries.

The renewed *Competencies for Librarians in Canadian Research Libraries* document has been developed to assist with personal and organizational goal setting while providing a context for recruitment and professional development. The competencies may be applied in CARL libraries for strategic planning or restructuring purposes, or in the development of mission and vision statements. Schools of library and information studies may consult them for curriculum development purposes or to prepare graduates for job interviews. Employers may find them useful for recruitment of new librarians, in training and development, and to assist those transitioning into new roles within the research library.

The *Competencies* represent a range of knowledge, skills (often cited in the document as 'Knowledge of...' or 'Ability to...'), and mindsets (often cited in the document as 'Understanding...') for librarians in research environments. Librarians will learn and develop their own competencies over a period of time and not all competencies will necessarily apply to every position. Individual libraries may want to place more emphasis on select aspects only, depending on their unique environments, the nature of individual academic or research librarian positions in question, or as levels of specialization in the profession evolve. To build flexibility throughout, CARL has taken an aspirational approach in developing the *Competencies* document with firm grounding in the fundamental principles of the profession. The aim is to match a set of aspirational values to the knowledge, skills and mindsets that are required for success in academic librarianship in Canada.

Overall, the goal of the *Competencies* is to better serve our academic and research communities and user groups, and to adapt to a dynamic, constantly evolving research and information landscape. Research and teaching support are increasingly user-centric and responsive to the needs of users from undergraduates to senior researchers. In achieving their respective missions and visions for the future, research libraries are placing an increased emphasis on collaboration, leadership, innovation, and sustainability.

As the environment of research libraries changes rapidly in the 21st century, information technologies have evolved to the point where they pervade everything academic librarians do, and sophisticated tools are widely used. To increase the longevity of this document and its relevance, specific technologies have not been listed.

This guide was designed specifically for use in Canadian research libraries but could be applicable in other contexts and jurisdictions.

Method

The revision of the 2010 *Competencies* adopted an iterative, mixed-methods approach including literature reviews, focus groups and a survey. Reviews of the literature were used to identify current trends in academic libraries in Canada, and internationally. The CWG revised the original 2010 *Core competencies* based on the knowledge, skills and mindsets currently required for professional practice, while keeping a future orientation. This involved consultation with various Canadian academic library directors, library staff and representatives from schools of library and information studies. Two in-person focus groups were held at the 2017 Research in Academic Libraries (ReAL) conference in Vancouver, and the 2018 Ontario Library Association Super Conference in Toronto. Four virtual focus groups were held regionally in Western Canada, Central Canada, Quebec, and Eastern Canada. We circulated a survey to academic librarians and human resources professionals and consulted with school of library and information studies deans. Forty-four librarians participated in focus groups and 52 survey responses were received. Feedback in focus groups and from the survey were compiled and coded using qualitative data analysis software. Following requests for a soft launch, a consultation draft was released In December 2019 and over 35 responses from the community were received. Guided by this feedback, the CWG revised the consultation draft to better reflect the current needs of the profession.

Definitions

For the purposes of this document the following definitions apply:

- Competencies: A competency is a grouping of knowledge, skills and mindsets that define and contribute to success in the field.
- Mindsets: A mindset is a collection of attitudes, inclinations, or habits of mind useful in achieving an outcome. Mindsets do not have defined limits and therefore allow for development and greater mastery over time.
- Principles: A principle is a basic concept, generally recognized as true, that everyone can understand. Principles represent an objective reality that transcends cultures and individuals and does not change over time.
- Skills: A skill is defined as a learned capacity to carry out a specific task. Skills are often gained through formal training and repetition.
- Values: Values are beliefs and opinions that people hold regarding specific issues or ideas, and are ultimately internal, subjective, and malleable.

The Canadian research library of the 21st century is an open and evolving ecosystem of learning and innovation: user-centered, dynamic, research-driven and dedicated to its diverse user communities.

To flourish in this setting, Canadian academic librarians are highly specialized professionals, each with a unique skillset in research and practice and, ordinarily, a terminal degree in library and information studies. They are conscientious and dynamic creators, curators, and stewards of the knowledge created, generated, and preserved by the activities of the research library.

With this statement in mind, the following competencies have been identified:

- **ACTIVE LEARNING & ADAPTATION**
- **COLLABORATION**
- **CONSULTATION & COMMUNICATION**
- **CURATION & PRESERVATION**
- **EQUITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION**
- **ENGAGEMENT & PARTICIPATION**
- **EVALUATION & ASSESSMENT**
- **LEADERSHIP & FACILITATION**
- **VISION & INNOVATION**

These competencies are expanded with associated knowledge, skills, and mindsets, which should be read as illustrative rather than comprehensive.

ACTIVE LEARNING & ADAPTATION

Academic librarians employ fluid approaches to their work and the diverse environments they support and engineer. Predictive and proactive, they anticipate and prepare for future opportunities and challenges with clarity and foresight learned from previous experiences.

Elements of this competency include the following:

- Ability to navigate a variety of working/learning styles, scenarios and organizational cultures, and to choose an effective working/learning style that advances personal as well as organizational success;
- Ability to stay abreast of research in a specific area, to develop a research agenda of one's own, to support colleagues, or to support other work as a librarian within the library;
- Ability to work flexibly and effectively in the face of ambiguity and be open to a changing library culture;
- Knowledge of how information is located, critically evaluated, and assimilated for the creation of new knowledge;
- Knowledge of emerging trends and initiatives in library spaces and buildings, including the ability to anticipate future trends in knowledge organizations and scholarship;
- Understanding how to solve problems and design new methods/procedures when established ones do not suffice or do not yet exist;
- Understanding how to leverage expertise to create new experiences and generate new knowledge for users;
- Understanding change management and innovation principles within the organization that promote a forward-thinking, proactive, curiosity-driven, learning culture.

COLLABORATION

Academic librarians work collaboratively to achieve the strategic priorities of their libraries and universities. Connective and cooperative, they contribute to and sustain the living network of relationships and user communities that define the research library and its fundamental role within the academic environment.

Elements of this competency include the following:

- Ability to actively build and continually seek meaningful relationships with a wide spectrum of users and communities to strengthen capacity and sustain long-term impact;
- Knowledge of the extra-institutional environment (regional, provincial, national and international organizations that affect library organization and operation), and the Canadian and international higher education environments;
- Knowledge of the larger institutional organization, including the parent university's organizational structure, institutional decision making and governance bodies and processes, institutional budget process, and institutional mission, goals and objectives;
- Knowledge and understanding of the importance of critical and scholarly engagement, particularly with those associated with their area of professional, research or subject expertise;
- Understanding the critical importance of developing strategic professional and personal working relationships that are connective, authentic, and supportive;
- Understanding how to work with diverse users at different stages of their personal and cognitive development, including partnering with faculty in learning and instruction and modeling excellent instructional practices within courses, across the curriculum and with campus-wide literacy goals and initiatives;
- Understanding how to develop and support collaborations and partnerships with relevant and diverse groups and research communities, including participation in grant-funded projects and research, both in and out of the library, in pursuit of shared goals;
- Understanding how to apply the strategic directions and priorities of the research library to the benefit of all.

CONSULTATION & COMMUNICATION

Academic librarians intentionally communicate and actively seek input to advance the user-focused purpose, goals, and vision of the research library. They initiate and encourage meaningful conversations and define outcomes that support and enhance the growth of dynamic research, scholarship, and pedagogy.

Elements of this competency include the following:

- Ability to use excellent communication skills in the workplace, including the ability to listen actively, and be open to others' feedback and ideas;
- Ability to manage and resolve conflict in a mindful and respectful, diplomatic way;
- Ability to provide relevant and timely information to all library stakeholders, including scholars, researchers and students;
- Knowledge of the diverse range of expertise, services, collections, and facilities of the research library, and how to support users throughout the research life cycle and in teaching and learning;
- Knowledge of the Canadian copyright environment and an understanding of scholarly and research communication models and practices, including the importance of open scholarship principles and practices and their evolution;
- Knowledge of the concepts and principles of information, digital, and virtual literacy for higher education, including the value of integrating critical thinking, experiential and lifelong learning into teaching and instruction methodologies, and including the principles of meta-literacy in the online academic environment;
- Understanding the cultural and societal importance and impact of academic libraries, including upholding the right to freedom of information, and preserving the outputs of human knowledge;
- Understanding information policy concerns related to privacy, security, authentication, and the rights of users.

CURATION & PRESERVATION

Academic librarians are stewards in the collection and curation of scholarly resources, and provide critical and innovative paths of discovery, interpretation, contextualization, dissemination, and preservation for future generations and communities of users.

Elements of this competency include the following:

- Knowledge of the research data life cycle, including data management planning, data collection/creation, documentation, processing, analysis, deposit, sharing, and reuse;
- Knowledge of legal and ethical considerations associated with research data (e.g. informed consent, ethics approval, de-identification/anonymization, intellectual property, secondary use);
- Knowledge of general and domain-specific repositories for both discovery and deposit purposes;
- Knowledge of data services (data manipulation and curation, creation of standardized metadata, big data, data analysis/visualization, business intelligence tools, data sharing statements/plans), emerging digital preservation infrastructure and data recovery;
- Knowledge of the life cycle of library resources, including scholarly publishing from creation through various stages of use to disposition;
- Knowledge of collections strategies, including the history, concepts, issues, and methods related to the acquisition and disposition of resources;
- Knowledge of the benefits and challenges of intellectual freedom, and enabling it through the development, management and preservation of the scholarly research record;
- Understanding the principles, activities, policies, procedures, and services for open forms of scholarship;
- Understanding best practices, standards and protocols of digital curation, including the selection, collection, preservation, description, organization and archiving principles for digital documentation and research data in various formats;
- Understanding curation and preservation methods for print-based general collections, as well as special collections and archives;
- Understanding how information is organized for easy identification and retrieval, including cataloguing and metadata standards for all formats;
- Understanding repositories, including the basic structure, content and use of repositories intended for campus users.

EQUITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

Academic librarians uphold the principles of equity, diversity and inclusion in their practice and research, and in support of the research library's diverse user communities. Culturally competent, they conscientiously aim to restore, implement and protect diverse ways of knowing and being in the world through all aspects of the practice of librarianship.

Elements of this competency include the following:

- Ability to foster equity, diversity, and inclusion within libraries and with their external communities through attitudinal openness; recognition of white privilege and the various forms of systemic discrimination that exist in our country, post-secondary education, at our institutions and within our profession; and a clear commitment to change.
- Ability to participate with, and encourage the participation of, diverse communities at all levels of decision-making, including leadership;
- Ability to develop and maintain accessible and barrier-free spaces, technology, and resources;
- Ability to foster workforce diversity through commitment to equitable recruitment, retention, and succession planning practices within libraries;
- Knowledge of open and alternative scholarships and methods for expanding equitable access to information for purposes of teaching, learning, and research;
- Knowledge of research ethics in the practitioner, researcher, and service roles;
- Knowledge of the importance of working with Indigenous communities to decolonize libraries and implement the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action;
- Understanding diverse teachings and worldviews, including Indigenous-engaged learning and ways of knowing and being in the world;
- Understanding that acquiring and ethically describing diverse experience and traditional ways of knowing (e.g. oral and Indigenous knowledges, LGBQT+ resources) may require dramatic departures from current and historical library practices;
- Understanding cultural differences and beliefs to enhance personal awareness beyond a familiar culture or cultures, as a necessary step in valuing diverse ways of knowing and being in the world;
- Understanding that all other competencies should be viewed through a lens of equity, diversity, and inclusion.

ENGAGEMENT & PARTICIPATION

Academic librarians demonstrate engagement and commitment to the profession. They take an active part in the varied activities at their libraries and engage effectively with their user communities, researchers, and colleagues.

Elements of this competency include the following:

- Ability to mentor, recruit and retain new members of the profession;
- Ability to negotiate and manage conflicts with the aim of achieving a common goal;
- Ability to interact effectively and collaboratively with diverse student users and researchers;
- Ability to conduct research that is sound and evidence-based;
- Ability to give and receive opinions and feedback in an open, clear and respectful manner;
- Knowledge of the library structure, governance, decision-making processes, advisory committees, budget processes, policies and procedures, collection strengths, and services for students, faculty and community;
- Knowledge of the social, cultural, economic, political, and environmental issues of research library practice, including emergent practices in librarianship;
- Knowledge of the ethics, values and foundational principles of the library and information profession;
- Understanding of the rights and responsibilities related to engagement in research and scholarship, as well as the principles and history of academic freedom in teaching and scholarship;
- Understanding the importance of respect and value for the skills, experiences, creativity and contributions of others;
- Understanding the importance of the role of professional associations for the purposes of advocacy and/or professional development.

EVALUATION & ASSESSMENT

Academic librarians evaluate and analyze the research library's vast array of services, responsively meeting user needs through continuing assessment. They enhance and improve the research library's evolving mission and vision.

Elements of this competency include:

- Ability to evaluate new services and/or resources and engage in risk management;
- Knowledge of the concepts, research methods, technologies and tools related to service, resource, and project evaluation and outcomes assessment;
- Knowledge of the principles of design thinking, accessibility and user experience design, as well as an understanding of educational technology;
- Knowledge of institutional teaching and learning programs, goals and outcomes, as well as evidence-based assessment strategies and tools to effectively connect with user communities;
- Understanding of the University's strategic plan and institutional priorities, which inform the library's priorities;
- Understanding of virtual learning tools and learning environments, including campus learning management systems and how they pertain to the delivery and assessment of the research library's services;
- Understanding the advantages and disadvantages of any action or decision and ability to effectively evaluate to support active and effective decision making.

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LEADERSHIP & FACILITATION

Academic librarians provide and support leadership at all levels to drive and sustain the strategic priorities that contribute to the vital impact of the research library.

Elements of this competency include:

- Ability to demonstrate emotional intelligence and compassion, and to steer and enable critical conversations;
- Ability to vision in a rapidly changing and dynamic academic environment;
- Ability to inspire and empower others by initiating, implementing and supporting innovation, creativity, and risk taking by motivating others to strive for excellence;
- Ability to support and actively encourage the ongoing professional growth and development of all library staff;
- Knowledge of the applicability of varying leadership styles and decision making models;
- Knowledge of strategic planning skills to assess current and future directions in both research libraries and higher education;
- Understanding general management principles, including financial and human resources;
- Understanding the principles of effective personnel practices and human resource development, including an understanding of the organization's policies and guidelines, including any relevant collective agreements;
- Understanding the past, present and future role of the research library.

VISION & INNOVATION

Academic librarians are important partners and practitioners in supporting and developing the genesis of diverse and dynamic knowledge, systems, and services through the ongoing development of and creative engagement with new tools and models of research. Inquisitive, innovative and entrepreneurial, academic librarians bring energy, expertise, and inspiration to the 21st century research library.

Elements of this competency include the following:

- Ability to demonstrate creative initiative in exploring and experimenting with new ideas, technologies and services;
- Ability to channel a vision into appropriate experimentation and workable solutions;
- Ability to handle the complexity and diversity of points of view;
- Knowledge of project management, including planning, organizing, and managing resources to successfully complete specific project objectives within a certain timeframe;
- Knowledge of change management techniques to facilitate acceptance, engagement, and new practice within the work team affected by the changes;
- Knowledge of new programs and entrepreneurial/startup activities as targets for new types of library support;
- Understanding the changes in higher education, the shifting research and scholarly environment, and advances in technology;
- Understanding the rights of users and creators of information in open culture.

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