

Editorial Board Thoughts:

Metadata Training in Canadian Library Technician Programs

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The core metadata team at my institution is small but effective. In addition to myself as Coordinator, we include two librarians and two full-time metadata assistants. Our metadata assistant positions are considered to be similar, in some ways, to other senior assistant positions within the organization which require or at least prefer that individuals have a library technician diploma. However, neither of our metadata assistants has such a diploma. Their credentials, in fact, are quite different.

In part, this difference is driven by the nature of the work that our metadata assistants do. They work regularly with different metadata standards such as MODS, DC, DDI in addition to MARC. They perform operations on large batches of metadata using languages such as XSLT or R. This is quite different in many ways than the work of their colleagues who work with the ILS, many of whom do have a library technician diploma.

As we prepare for an upcoming short-term leave of one of our team members, I have been thinking a great deal about the work our metadata assistants do and whether or not we would find an individual who came through a librarian technician program who had the skills and knowledge we need a replacement to have. And I have also been reminded of conversations I have had with recently graduated library technicians who felt their exposure to metadata standards, practices, and tools beyond RDA and MARC had been lacking in their programs.

This got me thinking about the presence or absence of metadata courses in library technician programs in Canada. I reached out to two colleagues from MacEwan University—Norene Erickson and Lisa Shamchuk—who are doing in-depth research into library technician education in Canada. They kindly provided me with a list of Canadian institutions that offer a library technician program so I could investigate further.

Now, I must begin with two caveats. One, this is very much a surface level scan rather than an in-depth examination, although this is simply the first step in what I hope will be a longer term investigation. Second, although several Francophone institutions in Canada offer library technician programs, I did not review their programs; I was concerned that my lack of fluency in the French language could lead to inadvertent misrepresentations.

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Canadian institutions offering a library technician program (by province) are:

Alberta

- MacEwan University (<http://www.macewan.ca/wcm/SchoolsFaculties/Business/Programs/LibraryandInformationTechnology/>)
- Southern Alberta Institute of Technology (<http://www.sait.ca/programs-and-courses/full-time-studies/diplomas/library-information-technology>)

British Columbia

- Langara College (<http://langara.ca/programs-and-courses/programs/library-information-technology/>)
- University of the Fraser Valley (<http://www.ufv.ca/programs/libit/>)

Manitoba

- Red River College (<http://me.rrc.mb.ca/catalogue/ProgramInfo.aspx?ProgCode=LIBIF-DP&RegionCode=WPG>)

Nova Scotia

- Nova Scotia Community College (http://www.nsc.ca/learning_programs/programs/plandescr.aspx?prg=LBTN&pln=LIBINFTECH)

Ontario

- Algonquin College (<http://www.algonquincollege.com/healthandcommunity/program/library-and-information-technician/>)
- Conestoga College (<https://www.conestogac.on.ca/parttime/library-and-information-technician>)
- Confederation College (<http://www.confederationcollege.ca/program/library-and-information-technician>)
- Durham College (<http://www.durhamcollege.ca/programs/library-and-information-technician>)
- Seneca College (<http://www.senecacollege.ca/fulltime/LIT.html>)
- Mohawk College (<http://www.mohawkcollege.ca/ce/programs/community-services-and-support/library-and-information-technician-diploma-800>)

Quebec

- John Abbott College (<http://www.johnabbott.qc.ca/academics/career-programs/information-library-technologies/>)

Saskatchewan

- Saskatchewan Polytechnic (<http://saskpolytech.ca/programs-and-courses/programs/Library-and-Information-Technology.aspx>)

My method was quite simple. Using the program websites listed above, I reviewed the course listings looking for 'metadata' either in the title or in the description when it was available.

Of the fourteen (14) programs examined, nine (9) had no course with metadata in the title or description. Two (2) programs had courses where metadata was listed as part of the content but not the focus: Langara College as part of "Special Topics: Creating and Managing Digital Collections" and Seneca College as part of "Cataloguing III" which has a partial focus on metadata for digital collections. Three (3) of the programs had a course with metadata in the title or description; all are a variation on "Introduction to Metadata and Metadata Applications". (Importantly, the three institutions in question - Conestoga College, Confederation College, and Mohawk College - are all connected and share courses online).

So, what do these very preliminary and impressionistic findings tell us? It seems that there is little opportunity for students enrolled in library technician programs in Canada to be exposed to the metadata standards, practices, and tools that are increasingly necessary for positions involved in work with digital collections, research data management, digital preservation, and the like.

Admittedly, no program can include courses on all potentially relevant topics. In addition, formal course work is only one aspect of training and education that can prepare graduates for their career; practica and work placements and other more informal activities during a program are crucial, as are the skills and knowledge that can only be developed once hired and on the job.

Nevertheless, based on the investigation above, one would be justified in asking if we are disadvantaging students by not working to incorporate additional coursework focused on metadata standards, application, and tools, as well as on basic skills in manipulation of metadata in large batches.

scripting languages or equivalent combination of education and experience. Master's desirable." I edited our statement to more clearly allow a *combination* of factors that would show sufficient preparation: "Bachelor's degree and a minimum of 3-5 years of experience, or an equivalent combination of education and experience, are required; a Master's degree is preferred," followed by a separate description of technical skills needed. This increased the number and quality of our

applications, so I'll remain on the lookout for opportunities to represent what we want to require more faithfully and with an open mind.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the table, students and recent grads are uncertain how to demonstrate their skills. First, they're wondering how to show clearly enough that they meet requirements like "three years of work experience" or "experience with user testing" so that their application is seriously considered. Second, they ask about possibilities to formalize skills. Recently, I've gotten questions about a certificate program in UX and whether there is any formal certification to be a systems librarian. Surveying the past experience of my own network—with very diverse paths into technology jobs ranging from undergraduate or second master's degrees to learning scripting as a technical services librarian to pre-MLS work experience—doesn't suggest any standard method for substantiating technical knowledge. Once again, the truth of the situation may be that libraries will welcome a broad range of possible experience, but the postings don't necessarily signal that.

Some advice from the tech industry about how to be more inviting to candidates applies to libraries too; for example, avoiding "rockstar"/ "ninja" descriptions, emphasizing the problem space over years of experience,¹ and designing interview processes that encourage discussion rather than "gotcha" technical tasks. At Penn Libraries, for example, we've been asking developer candidates to spend a few hours at most on a take-home coding assignment, rather than doing whiteboard coding on the spot. This gives us concrete code to discuss in a far more realistic and relaxed context.

While it may be helpful to express requirements better to encourage applicants to see more clearly whether they should respond to a posting, this is a small part of the question of preparing new MLS grads for library technology jobs. The new grads who are seeking guidance on substantiating their skills are the ones who are confident they possess them. Others have a sense that they should increase their comfort with technology but are not sure how to do it, especially when they've just completed a whole new degree and may not have the time or resources to pursue additional training. Even if we make efforts to narrow the gap between employers and job-seekers, much remains to be discussed regarding the challenge of readying students with different interests and preparation for library employment. Library school provides a relatively brief window to instill in students the fundamentals and values of the profession and it can't be repurposed as a coding academy. There persists a need to discuss how to help students interested in technology learn and demonstrate competencies rather than teaching them rapidly shifting specific technologies.

REFERENCES

1. Erin Kissane, "Job Listings That Don't Alienate," <https://storify.com/kissane/job-listings-that-don-t-alienate>.