



Paraprofessional to Professional: Dreaming, Daring, Doing

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Abstract

This poster discusses one librarian's experience making the transition from paraprofessional to professional including information on:

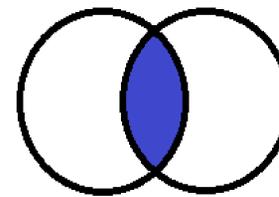
- similarities and differences in academic and consumer health library work
- experiences in transitioning from one role to another
- challenges faced
- advantages an academic library background brings to consumer health librarianship
- preparatory steps for transitioning from paraprofessional to professional



Similarities & Differences

Similarities (or transferrable skills):

- Customer Service
- Communication
- Interpersonal
- Time management



Differences (or challenges faced):

- Patron type is more varied and multi-generational in consumer health
- Reference questions can be more personal and sensitive in consumer health
- Flow of work is more consistent in a medical setting – there is no back-to-school rush or finals week crunch
- One needs to be more self-motivated in a professional role than in a paraprofessional role- there is no supervisor handing out tasks or scheduling your time

Take Risks (Dare)

Deciding to change jobs or transition to a different type of library can be scary. Having a written goal and action plan can help turn what feels like a giant leap into a step-by-step process. Discuss your worries or problems with mentors – having people you trust and admire offering advice and cheering for you is a good confidence builder!



Anticipate Setbacks & Review Progress

It is common to face rejection when you are job searching or trying to transition to another type of library. If your career plans are stalling or not moving in the progression you envisioned, use the roadblocks as growth and learning opportunities. Cultivate flexibility and adaptability (some of those regularly mentioned "desired qualities" in job descriptions) by making the best of your setbacks and looking for silver linings.

Share your goals and plans with your mentors. As you gain more experience, modify your goals and career plan as needed.



Background

- The librarian began working in libraries in 2003 as a student employee in the ILL department at Arizona State University (ASU) Libraries. After becoming a staff member and working in several departments, she finally landed in the circulation department at the science and engineering library at ASU.
- A mentor suggested she apply to library school. After weighing the decision for a year or so, she decided to pursue a library degree deciding on medical librarianship because of her preference for answering reference questions in that area and an interest in the different types of opportunities it could bring.
- After completing her MA in Library and Information Science from the University of Arizona in 2014, she continued to work as a paraprofessional at ASU while looking for health science and medical librarian positions. In August of 2017 she landed her dream job at Mayo Clinic in Arizona as a consumer health librarian.



Advantages Of Different Library Experience

Potential advantages of non-medical library background:

- Familiarity with wide range of reference sources and databases
- Experience dealing with frustrated or angry patrons
- Understanding how to work in team settings with diverse groups

Potential advantages of paraprofessional background:

- Understanding of and appreciation for the processes and work that is done by paraprofessional and technical services staff
- Experience in library settings prepare you for the culture and workflows of library work
- Ability to meet and network with potential mentors

Find A Mentor

The value of mentorship cannot be overstated. Mentors can help you with goal setting and finding opportunities for trainings or job possibilities. They can provide perspective in tough situations and are a valuable resource in resume review and a wonderful source of encouragement. Professional organizations are a good place to find mentors.

Create Goals (Dream)

Setting goals is important in any endeavor. When moving to another type of library or from a paraprofessional to professional position, it's important to articulate what it is you hope to gain by making this transition. Once you have identified your goals and written them down, look for actionable steps to achieve them.



Conclusion (Do)

The transition from academic paraprofessional to consumer health librarian took several years of preparation and work to gain the necessary skills and experience needed to make the jump.

Resources

