

**Valerie Darling**  
**5000 - Career Development Project Summary**

**Project Overview**

For my project, I wanted to interview three different types of information professionals about issues within the information science field. Out of the three I reached out to, two agreed to meet with me and be recorded for this project.

First, I met with Elizabeth McArthur, Digital Equity and Strategic Technologies Librarian at BiblioTech in San Antonio, Texas. We discussed issues relating to digital equity in San Antonio, technology issues one has when you're an entirely digital library, as well as the many hats one wears when working in a library.

Then, I met with Leslie Stapleton, Archives and Special Collections Manager at Texas A&M University - San Antonio. We discussed some issues that arise from being a university archive housed off-site and how difficult it can be to get students into the library.

**What I Learned from Elizabeth McArthur**

Speaking with Elizabeth McArthur was very enlightening. McArthur is one of six full-time librarians at BiblioTech, the country's first all-digital library. She received her Masters in Library Science from Emporia State University while she was living in Kansas but she is originally from Uvalde and now currently lives in San Antonio. She has been at BiblioTech for a few years and says that as the library has grown, so have her job duties. Though technically the Digital Equity and Strategic Technologies Librarian, she, like many other librarians, has to wear many hats. She is in charge of reviewing policies and procedures and is in charge of BiblioTech's webpage as well as being second in command. Part of her job and part of BiblioTech's core values is ensuring digital equity across San Antonio. One way in which BiblioTech addresses the digital divide is by renting out a hot spot. Interested patrons may come to one of three BiblioTech locations and borrow a hot spot for up to two weeks at a time to access the internet at home.

Though I knew San Antonio has a very high percentage (25%) of residents without access to the internet, I was unaware of some of the government regulations and provider-access that contribute to this problem. I think when we were speaking, there were a lot of catch-22 moments. You try to tout the benefits of having a digital-only library. You tell patrons you can access books, magazines, audio files, videos, and more by simply acquiring a digital library card. However, 25% of patrons cannot access these services from their own home. They must physically go to a BiblioTech location to get a card and download books and audio files using the library's internet. This negates the ease and convenience of accessing digital-only media. However, the locations of BiblioTech were taken into account when building. The three physical locations are in underserved areas of town to help give to those communities who are less likely to have internet access at home. Now, BiblioTech can expose these communities to

digital technology that are essential and aid in living life nowadays - things such as paying bills online, writing a resume, applying for jobs, and more. But again, in these communities, these services may only be done at the BiblioTech location and not in their own home. In a world in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, internet access seems even more essential. Children are being expected to learn school curricula online. Not only do 25% of these children not have internet access but the likelihood that their caretakers are well versed in the technology used is also very unlikely. BiblioTech is trying to remedy the situation with online subscriptions to platforms such as LinkedIn Learning and more. McArthur says that these services are very popular and help residents build their resumes, learn new skills, and feel more confident with technology.

The American public library system was one of the things that McArthur was proud of. She loves the idea of allowing citizens to access content, information, materials for free and that libraries overall are a welcoming place. However, one of her frustrations was the marketing, or rather lack thereof, when it comes to libraries overall. Libraries across the board need to do better about telling people who *don't* use the library about the services and programming they offer. Many times, once you go into the library you see flyers for events, get to know the staff, and become a repeat customer. But what about everyone who doesn't go to the library? How can libraries bring them in and tell them that they have something for them - whether that's a DVD, a printer, or programs to learn LinkedIn.

When asked about what skills she thinks are most important for a librarian to have now, she said that the ability to wear many hats was important. With that comes the willingness to continually learn. She said that when she did her MLS degree, it was very theoretical and that it was her volunteer work and experience in other jobs that helped her in the library field. In the beginning part of the interview, she also told a story about the importance of customer service skills. McArthur mentioned that no matter what, librarians are customer service oriented and that we should remember that, no matter what we are tasked to do. Other skills mentioned were being open-minded, flexible, being able to network, and learning how to manage people. McArthur stated that unless you're going to work in some very technical aspects of the library, you're going to working with people and will more than likely be in charge of some as well.

### **What I Learned from Leslie Stapleton**

Leslie Stapleton was so much fun to interview and you can tell someone who genuinely loves her job. Stapleton is the Archives and Special Collections Manager at Texas A&M University - San Antonio (TAMUSA). Prior to her appointment at TAMUSA, she worked at the Daughters of the Republic of Texas (DRT) Library at the Alamo because of her love for genealogy. Being that TAMUSA is a relatively new school, the archive collection wasn't put together until 2013. Stapleton had been brought on to manage, grow, and design the space in which the collections would be housed. It is currently not housed on campus and we spoke a bit about issues that creates for students interested in viewing these collections. Currently housed at the Bexar County Archives downtown, Stapleton said that parking was the biggest issue for those who want to visit. When I visited, there was major construction and so I had to park blocks

away at a meter. She says that parking is definitely the biggest issue students face when interested in the collection.

Not very familiar with archives and the process, I asked why she believed that the collection from the DRT library should be housed at TAMUSA and not say, the special collections section of the public library system. She told me that as a special collection of a university library it would get a level of security and protection that the public library might not be able to give it. However, she mentions how it shouldn't just go to any university. For example, University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) is an established school with special collections of their own. Giving the DRT collection to UTSA would have been anti-climatic and might have meant that the collection was just put next to other collections without any ceremony. Getting the DRT collection for TAMUSA was mutually beneficial because it offered the collection the protection it deserves and puts the new, small library on the map. Stapleton says as the university continues to grow and more professors and students reach out to her with collections or items they might be interested in, she will look for those materials. Right now, however, because her background is Texas and San Antonio history, she has been focusing on acquiring items that fit into that category. When asked how she goes about acquiring materials, she said, in a word - networking. Sometimes because of her connections, people will come to her and ask if she wants to house the collection.

Stapleton also walked me through the technical process of acquiring these documents. I was unaware of how someone would "give" materials to someone and she said that they usually get a Deed of Gift. There are also various rights they can give with the materials. Families or organizations do not need to give intellectual rights and may even retain the copyright while still giving the materials to the archive.

When I asked about what skills Stapleton thought were important for an up-and-coming librarian she said that attention to detail was a very big deal. She also said that in her line of work many people call because they are doing family histories and they are so excited about their findings that they may want to tell you their whole journey and you must be patient and willing to listen. Using this same scenario, tact is also another very important skill. If you're busy and someone is just going on and on, you need to be able to tactfully get them to ask their question and get back to your work. She also suggested working or volunteering at different libraries so that one may learn the way different libraries run. She said that it's important to be able to see what kind of career path or what kind of librarian you'd want to be.

Stapleton also had a very interesting story about a lawsuit that happened between the DRT and Texas concerning the collection. She told the story as her biggest ethical dilemma she has had to deal with as a librarian. It was something that had not occurred and I really appreciate her for telling it to me and explaining what the implications could have meant.

## **Project Improvement**

Some things I think I could have improved upon were my questions. I didn't think to ask any basic background questions though I did get answers from them because the conversations turned that way organically. Though both of them were really great interviewees, I think it might have helped them if I had given them a list of questions beforehand so that they could have

some statements already prepared. Originally, I had planned on interviewing a third librarian who was well versed in metadata and cataloging but who was unable to interview. I wish I would have found another librarian in the same field to interview.

### **Action Plan**

- **Network**

I learned from both librarians that networking is very important. Being able to network can not only help me as I try to find a permanent position in an information center but can also be very beneficial to the company or organization that I work at.

- **Volunteer**

Both librarians told me that I was more than welcome to volunteer and/or come back and observe them for "A Day in the Life". I think that volunteering is a great way to see which types of jobs I might be interested in doing in the future. It is also a great way to network and meet new people.

- **Advocate**

I learned a lot about the digital divide in my hometown and I will definitely be more cognizant of it as I move forward. With that awareness also comes advocating for the importance of services.

- **Learn**

McArthur felt that having managerial skills would have been beneficial to her role. I plan on looking for webinars/courses/lessons on the basics of managing so that should the time ever come, I can be prepared.

## Appendix A

Interview with Ms. McArthur and ask about the challenges and issues of the digital divide in San Antonio.

- For those not familiar, can you please explain BiblioTech and what makes it different from other libraries.
- You're the Digital Equity and Strategic Technologies librarian. Can you please explain what your job entails.
- Digital equity is very important throughout the US but in San Antonio (Texas) in particular where about 25% of residents do not have internet access at home. Are you from San Antonio originally?
  - If yes
    - Why do you think SA is lacking in digital equity, especially because we are a metropolitan area?
    - Did you notice the digital divide growing up?
  - If no
    - Where are you from and what was the state of digital equity in your home town?
    - What strikes you the most about SA being ranked so low in digital equity?
    - Were you surprised by the statistics?
- How has our low rating impacted your role as a librarian?
- How has our low rating impacted the goals for BiblioTech as a whole?
- In December of last year, the city of SA launched a digital divide survey. It was in conjunction with Bexar County, but was BiblioTech a part of that endeavor?
- What is one thing that frustrates you about your work?
- What is one thing that makes you proud?
- What is one thing that people find surprising about libraries/librarians?
- How do you think BiblioTech, its digital presence and its physical locations (which are located in internet deserts) have helped citizens in SA?
- What kind of background experience would someone need to get a job similar to yours?
- What kind of skills do you think is important for librarians to have now to ensure that they are well-rounded and good job candidates?
- What are some issues you foresee happening in the future when it comes to digital libraries/digital divide?
- Is there anything you would like to add that I haven't asked about?

## Appendix B

Interview with Ms. Stapleton about archiving and special collections work at a rapidly-growing non-traditional university.

- You are the Archives & Special Collections Manager for TAMUSA. Can you please tell us what that means and what your job entails?
- Can you please tell us how long you've been at TAMUSA and a little bit about your professional background?
- The university is relatively new and therefore doesn't have its own library building, in the future will these materials be moved to a permanent location on campus?
- You don't actually work on the TAMUSA campus, what, if any, issues do you find arise because you're not as readily available as someone might like?
- Many of the special collections are very Texas-focused, why do you think it's important for TAMUSA to be in charge of these collections, as opposed to the Texana Collection at Central Library?
- Can you tell us how the process for acquiring materials?
- Who digitizes the materials once they are acquired? Do you digitize everything or is there a process for selection?
- This position is obviously very technical but can you please tell us some soft skills that are important when doing this type of work?
- What is one thing that frustrates you about your work?
- What is one thing that makes you proud?
- What is one thing that people find surprising about libraries/librarians?
- What kind of background experience would someone need to get a job similar to yours?
- What kind of skills do you think is important for librarians to have now to ensure that they are well-rounded and good job candidates?
- What are some issues you foresee happening in the future when it comes to archiving and special collections?
- Is there anything you would like to add that I haven't asked about?