In Their Own Words

We asked former RSAs to give us their thoughts on how the RSA position prepared them for post-college life. We were pleased to see that the position successfully provided opportunities to develop their professional and leadership skills.

Communication Skills

“Communicating clearly, problem solving quickly, being professional with colleagues and patrons, and being able to multitask efficiently are all tasks that I have used in grad school and during my clinical rotations... Although the library setting is very different from the current various clinical rotation settings in grad school, I have found that the skills I developed and refined during my years as an RSA have helped me with the way I interact with my patients, address unexpected issues in the clinic, and provide clear communication in therapy and in patient reports.”

Research and Leadership

“Without this position I would be inadequately prepared to conduct my own research and answer my own questions... I would also say that my leadership skills were improved because of the leadership inherent in serving at the desk alone after hours. By this ownership, I mean that when no one else is in the library, for whatever reason, people come to the RSAs as de facto leader... I am extremely grateful for the job I had at the library – it truly made me into a better worker, more intellectually savvy, and gave me lasting friendships in and out of the workplace.”

Equipped to Succeed

“First, the position is semi-autonomous... We are equipped to answer most any question a patron may have... Second, with a degree of autonomy, you become more disciplined. I finished small projects or homework during my downtime, instead of playing on my phone for example. Lastly, the position is customer-centric. Not only do you interact with a range of people, but you also learn to understand what is being asked and to communicate an answer clearly.”

Value to the Library

- RSAs participate in focus groups for new library products
- Reference Desk staffed during all open library hours
- Student vocational preparation supports the mission of the university
- Improved patron relations by providing multiple access points to reference services

Train, Train, Train

- Two-hour intensive training workshop with reference librarians (food, games and prizes!)  
- One-to-one peer training at the desk with an experienced RSA (builds confidence)  
- Optional mid-semester training session for new procedures  
- A comprehensive and searchable wiki for FAQs and procedures (essential for training)  
- Reference transactions are reviewed often to catch errors early and ensure quality statistics

Prepare Them For a Career

RSAs undergo a rigorous interview process, comply with a strict appearance policy, are trained to ensure patron privacy, and are served as leaders to their peers.

They gain practical customer service skills that are applicable to any job.

The position is treated like a “real job” in a professional working environment.

Develop Their Skills

- Formal and informal mentorship by librarians  
- Experienced RSAs develop their leadership skills by training new RSAs  
- Special duties are assigned to individual RSAs – ordering and stocking supplies – managing RSA email account – assisting with collection development

Recruit & Interview

- Position is posted in Student Employment  
- Current RSAs can also recommend candidates  
- Applicants complete a skills test to assess speed and accuracy in comparing and checking names and numbers (20-45 min)  
- Applicants with a sufficient score are interviewed (30 min)

Create Job Description

- Answer questions at the Reference Desk (in-person, phone, chat)  
- Refer in-depth research questions  
- Assist users with computing, printing, copying, and scanning  
- Log reference transactions  
- Check out markers and headphones  
- Work with IT Services to solve issues  
- Enforce code of conduct and resolve patron problems  
- Give closing announcements

Hire Well

- Strong preference is given to applicants with library research skills  
- Availability is greatly considered (RSAs must work at least 10 hrs/wk and have some evening/weekend availability)  
- Freshmen, sophomores, and grad students may be long-term hires  
- Final candidates sign policy forms (e.g. job responsibilities, dress code)

Reference Desk Transactions

July 1 - December 31, 2015
in person, phone, chat, email
Total Transactions: 6,756

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