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Library Site Visit #1

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As I start my final semester in library school, I have come to realize how important it is to have good customer service skills. It is important to listen to whatever customer you’re interacting with and to try to decipher what they are looking for. It is a hard task, but, being able to listen to reader’s advisory questions, in my opinion, can make or break a good librarian. In this first site visit, I went to the Spokane City library (after this referred to the City library or SPL). It important to note this distinction because there is also Spokane County library, also located in the city of Spokane. The City library is located in downtown Spokane and it is the main branch for the city libraries. This paper will look at the staff, the resources, and displays at SPL as well my experience and overall rating of the library on their reader’s advisory ability.

SPL is three story building located in historic downtown Spokane, Washington. The bottom floor currently houses their meeting rooms, bookstore and computer lab. The second floor is the main floor of the library, where the reference desk, circulation, movies, and non-fiction are located. The third floor is where the fiction books are located. At the top of the stairs, upon entering the second floor, the reference desk is located in the middle of the very large, open room. The circulation and checkout counters are to the right. Locating the reference desk is very easy because there is a large sign hanging overhead.

The resources that SPL has for finding books were not publicized in form that I saw at the library itself. However, on their website (http://www.spokanelibrary.org/index.php?page=downtown), there are two tabs that could be useful. One is “research” and one is “reader’s corner”. You can access the SPL’s website from inside the library at one of the many computers set up around the second floor.

The staff the SPL was available and friendly. However, there were times when I was observing that it was busy and even a time when the librarian answered a phone called, asked the caller if they could be put on hold, did so, and never answered the caller back. That was a little disconcerting. I think at a busy time when I went (noon to one pm) on a Saturday, it would better to have two librarians on duty but unfortunately I understand why this is not possible and do not blame the librarians for either. The librarian that was working the desk for the good majority of the time when I was there was very helpful to whomever came to ask a question.

I decided, since I need some ideas for this class for some of the genres I do not normally read in, to ask for book recommendations about that. The first librarian I talked to when I walked up to the desk was just leaving but she did ask me what I previously had read in terms of genres. I said historical fiction and/or crime and suspense and she was able to give me one series. However she did not explain or show me any resources or how she arrived at that series. She did mention that is also not an area she reads a lot in. She then told me that the person coming to relieve her did read a lot in that area and might be able to help me more. I explained what I was looking for and while the librarian was able to give me about nine author suggestions, again she did not really use any resources. It was just mostly off the top of her head. The authors she did give me, she explained that they had either an historical element to them, or felt like they did so that this might appeal to me. After I had written these authors done, I thanked her and went down to observe. Compared to what is explained in Stephanie Maata’s book, *A Few Good Books*, my experience started off in a good way, with the librarians asking about my interests (Maata, 2010, pp. 82). But after that, it was not a conversation like Maata suggests.

The observation part of this site visit was hard because there were not a lot of places to sit down and write while still being able to hear the conversations. I found the closet spot I could and sat down to listen. Most of the questions that the librarian was answering were general reference questions like “where are these books” or “where are the copy machines” etc. There was question however, that stood out to me, as sort of a reader’s advisory type question. An older gentleman came up and was asking for a book about a solider in the First World War but did not know the title. The librarian could not find anything that seemed to fit. The man said that it was a popular English book but had not heard of the author but thought maybe it was something like E.M. Forrester. Between the librarian and man, the book was finally figured out and that it was titled The Good Solider. The man thanked the librarian and went off to find the book.

Overall, I really liked the space that SPL has in their downtown branch. It’s very open and there is a ton of natural light when I love. Coming from a small town library, the downtown branch of SPL seems huge! There were also two things related to this that I noticed. The first of these is that there were two police officers chatting with the reference desk and/or walking around the building. This was something that was a new experience for me. The second is that, during one of the interactions with the reference librarians, is that she mentioned that the SPL is able to do inter-library loan from either the county library or another branch of the SPL. Again, coming from a library that does not participate in inter-library loan, this was a nice change. Also coming from a small library, the SPL’s collection at their downtown branch alone seemed huge to me. I definitely would come back if I lived in Spokane. However, because of the overall interaction with the reference librarians, I give them 4.3 out of 5. I think they were helpful but they could have been a bit better.

**References:**

Maata, S. (2010). *A few good books*. New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers.

Spokane Public Library website: www.spokanelibrary.org/index.php?page=downtown