Questions for Government Document Positions
Sample Interview Questions

1. What led you to apply for the Government Documents Librarian position at the University of Missouri?

2. What strengths would you bring to this position? Conversely, do you have any weaknesses? If so, how would you plan to overcome them?

3. Describe your communication style.

4. How has your course work in library school prepared you for this position?

5. What do you see as the major benefits of being a regional federal depository library? Are there any costs?

6. What strategies do you use for keeping up with all the government information available through the Internet?

7. Describe how you would approach a reference question when it is clear that only a portion of the information required is available from government sources.

8. What government agency do you most admire for its publication/information program? Why do you think this agency is an example for others? What agency do you least admire? Why?

9. How would you keep yourself informed of issues related to the federal and state depository programs and government information policy?
10. What is a government documents librarian anyway?

11. Suppose that both Missouri and the federal government were to stop depository distribution of tangible documents tomorrow. Would we still need government documents librarians?

12. How would you go about becoming acquainted with the thirty other depository libraries/librarians in Missouri?

13. In this position, you'll be responsible for the Missouri documents collection. How will you familiarize yourself with this collection, and with the Missouri depository program?

14. What experience have you had in working with faculty, graduate students, and undergraduate students? With the public?

15. How would you go about preparing to work at the General Reference Desk, especially given that you may have to do it only four or five times a semester?

16. Give an example of what you consider to be a particularly successful interaction that you've had with a library patron or group of patrons (at the reference desk, over the phone, in a classroom-setting etc.), and tell us why you think it was successful.

17. How do you deal with patrons who want information and want it now, or those who want answers that don't exist?

18. How do you determine how much time to spend on a reference request? How do you end a reference interview when you've determined that enough time has been spent?
19. Tell us about your experience with bibliographic and full-text databases.

20. If you were to choose a library specialty, other than government documents, what would it be, and why?

21. How do you handle constant interruption?

22. Describe a project or some accomplishment that you're especially proud of.

23. How would you describe your decision-making style?

24. How do you organize your day-to-day activities? Think of a day when you had many demands. How did you schedule your time?

25. What selection criteria would you use to acquire materials from state/national exchange lists and through gifts and purchases?

26. We've run out of space in the government documents stack area on the first floor. What criteria would you use to identify materials to send to our off-site storage facility?

27. Suppose that the library has decided to merge government documents reference with general reference. You've been charged with developing a ready reference collection to support government documents reference through this new merged desk. Name three sources (print/electronic/Internet) that you would include in this collection and why?
28. Suppose you were giving a tour of the library to a group of entering freshman. When it came time to talk about the government documents collection, what would you tell them?

29. Professor Polsby from the Political Science Department has just called and asked you to give an instruction session on public policy sources to her Public Policy 101 class. How would you prepare for this class? What are some of the sources that you would teach?

30. Describe your management/supervisory style. Are you more of a hands-on or a hands-off supervisor and why?

31. What do you find most difficult in supervising people? In being supervised?

32. How would you monitor and assess the work of paraprofessional staff working in the government documents department.

33. Where do you see yourself in five years? Describe your professional goals.

34. If you were to pursue further education or training, what would you select and why?

35. How would you keep lines of communication open between the government documents department and the rest of the reference division, or between documents and other divisions, such as acquisitions or cataloging?

36. How would you market documents to faculty, students and staff? To the residents of Missouri's 9th Congressional District? To the citizens of Missouri, more generally?
37. What do you see as the most important library and professional issues related to the transition from the physical distribution of government documents to remote access via the Internet?

38. Tell us about your experience in technical services work.

39. Tell us about your experience in authoring web pages.

40. The Government Documents Coordinator is on vacation in the Berkshires. You get a call from GPO telling you that the University of Missouri and five other depository libraries in Missouri will be inspected at the end of the month. What do you do?
Here is my draft list of interview questions, arranged in categories.

---Marie

AMBITION

- Starting with your last job, tell us about any of your work achievements that were recognized by others.
- Our library offers support for librarians who wish to seek additional education and training. What sort of training would you be inclined to seek if you were offered this position?
- Would you describe for us one or two of your most important work accomplishments?
- Would you describe for us one or two of the biggest disappointments in your work history?
- What made you decide to be a librarian?
- What appeals to you about this position?
- What element contributes most to your job satisfaction?

WORK STYLE

- Do you do your best work alone or in groups? Explain.
- What were some of the things about your last job that you found most difficult to do?
- What methods do you use to maximize your efficiency at work?
- What are some things about your last job that you found difficult to do?
- Describe a problem person you had to deal with in a work setting. How did you handle it?
- Are you a person who likes to 'try new things' or 'stay with regular routines'? Give an example.
- Name something you did in a past job to contribute to a positive teamwork environment.
- Describe a situation in which you were able to effectively 'read' another person and guide your actions by your understanding of their individual needs or values.
- Describe how you determine what constitutes top priorities in the performance of your job.
- What is your strategy for dealing with competing priorities?
- What would you say your previous employer liked best about your work?
- Which would you rather do – create a web guide or give an instruction session? Why?
- Using examples from previous jobs if possible, describe your attitude toward work backlogs.

CREATIVE PROBLEM SOLVING

- What in your opinion is the biggest challenge facing academic library users today? FOLLOW-UP QUESTION: If you were to take this Gov Docs librarian position, how would you help users overcome that problem?
- What kind of problems have work colleagues or superiors called on you to solve? Tell us about some solutions you have devised.
• Please tell us about one or two times that you used your creative initiative to meet the user needs.
• In your opinion, what element is most crucial for increasing the use of government documents in academic libraries?
• What in general do you think is the greatest barrier to documents use by academic library users?
• In the past, you may have worked in some non-library jobs, or you might have obtained degrees in other fields of study. Tell us how you might use experience, skills and training received in those other areas to enhance your performance in this position.
• What do you think is the most exciting new development in information technology or digital applications for libraries? FOLLOW-UP QUESTION: Can you envision an application of this technology in government documents specifically?
• What do you think are the most important things a library should do to facilitate the use of government documents and to increase access to the materials?
• How do you think undergraduates today differ from those 5, 10 or 20 years ago? In what ways (big and small) should the library adjust to accommodate those differences? FOLLOW-UP QUESTION: How could you help contribute to the library’s adjustment?

MANAGEMENT

• How would those whom you have managed describe your leadership style?
• Tell us about your management philosophy.
• How would you motivate student workers to do a good job?
• What are some things you particularly liked about your last job?
• What do you believe is the greatest asset you have to offer MU Libraries?
• Describe your favorite kind of boss.
• Describe the working conditions that allow you to do your best job.
• Describe your relationships with your last two supervisors.
• Describe a situation in which you were able to positively influence the actions of others in a desired situation.

DOCUMENTS KNOWLEDGE

• Tell us about your work experience in government documents. Did it include
  o Answering reference questions?
  o Creation of user guides?
  o Acquisition/check-in?
  o Cataloging?
  o Collection development?
  o Shelving/Stacks maintenance?
  o Bibliographic instruction?
  o Supervision of student workers?
  o Special projects?
• Name three print government reference sources you couldn’t live without. Please expand on why you choose these three.
• If you could only have only one government documents database, which one would you pick and why?
• Which three federal government websites do you think you would rely upon most in this position?
• Hypothetically assume that library management asks us to move 50% of our paper documents collection to offsite storage. Besides utilizing circulation statistics, what other factors would you use to determine which documents to send away?
• What do you think are the three most important contributing factors to being an excellent documents librarian?
• Tell us more about your knowledge and experience in governmental cartographic collections.
• Tell us what you think are the growth areas in use of digital geospatial data by those in the social sciences. How might MU Libraries' Documents department best plan for expanding demands in those areas?
• What is the extent of your knowledge, experience and interest in foreign documents or United Nations materials?

SKILLS

• Please send us examples of web pages the demonstrate the extent of your web authoring ability. Tell if the examples are completely your own work; if not, explain the parts that you contributed.
• This job requires proficiency in Microsoft Office software. Tell us about some of the most advanced functions you've learned to use in each of these products:
  o Word
  o Excel
  o Powerpoint
  o Access
• This is a question about teaching style. If you were to design an instruction session for the use of government documents specifically, what would you see as the most important elements for the success of such a presentation?
• If you could improve one thing about your presentation skills, what would it be?

CLOSING

• Is there a question we didn't ask for which you had prepared an answer or is there something you'd like us to know that perhaps we did not ask?
• Allow the candidate to ask us questions about:
  o The job position
  o The Government Documents operation
  o MU Libraries (management, work environment, etc.)
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