I am participating in a joint reference/instruction internship at the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Library along with two other interns. This internship is supervised by Marci Hunsaker, Co-unit head of reference, and Tina Peterson, SJSU librarian for information literacy, distance learning, & academic outreach, librarian for occupational therapy & meteorology.

The Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Library is located in downtown San Jose on the San Jose State University campus and is both the library for San José State University and the main branch of the City of San José library system. Opened in August 2003, the King Library is the largest library to be built at one time west of the Mississippi and is comprised of eight floors and 11 acres of space. The combined collections of over 1.5 million items serve over one million visitors a year.

The reference portion of the internship began with tours of the library, particularly the second floor which houses the reference collection, the fifth floor which houses the special collections, and the eighth floor which holds some of the academic collection. We also got acquainted with the reference desk, photocopiers, and computer banks. Finally, I shadowed at the reference desk in preparation for my first shift.

The main reference desk is on the second floor of the library and is staffed by two librarians (one academic and one public) and two support staff, one manning the phone. I have a three hour shift on Sunday afternoons, 1:00 -4:00 p.m. (though I have swapped a bit with another intern due to prior commitments) and so far have only greeted the walk up visitors and not answered the telephone.

Most of the questions I’ve encountered deal with the computers. How do I reserve a computer? How do I print? How do I save something to a memory drive? How can I add money to my Tower card? Some patrons want help finding material in the library catalog. Sometimes they ask about finding a specific author and sometimes they say I’m looking for books about anatomy. This is a bit of a challenge in the King Library since it’s both a public and academic library, the collections are not all in the same place. The public library’s non-fiction collection is housed on the third floor (new items
are on the first floor) and cataloged by the Dewey Decimal System and the university’s non-fiction is housed on floors five to eight and cataloged by the LCC system. But when a patron wants to know where the books on astronomy are, they don’t want a long explanation. Also, because the library’s collection is extensive patrons who think they’ll just get a general idea of where a subject is housed discover that it’s not that conducive to browsing.

I’ve found manning the reference desk to be an eye opener. I seem to take it for granted that everybody knows how to use computers – checking e-mail, writing a Microsoft Word document, browsing the internet – and I’m finding that it’s just not so. Things that I take for granted are not that simple to others and I’m glad that I’m able to help.

The instruction portion of the internship began with observing Tina Peterson instruct a class of McNair scholars in using the library Web site and the databases. She demonstrated how to access the academic gateway, find the page for your major and then the appropriate librarian and databases. Tina also demonstrated some of the library databases.

Our sessions are with the science majors, including health science, nursing, nutrition & food science, and occupational therapy. I assisted Rebecca Feind in library instruction for students in educational counseling and Tina with biology and occupational therapy majors. After the librarian’s presentation we ask the students if they need help with their searches or using the databases. I find this to be particularly fulfilling and I feel that I’m able to really assist the students, explaining how to save sources they find, open Refwork accounts, narrow or broaden their searches, use the thesaurus within databases, and so on. Not all the students want help but those that do are very appreciative.

I look forward to spending more time on the reference desk and participating in additional library instruction.
Internship Log #2  
March 17, 2009

I am participating in a joint reference/instruction internship at the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Library along with two other interns. This internship is supervised by Marci Hunsaker, Co-unit head of reference, and Tina Peterson, SJSU librarian for information literacy, distance learning, & academic outreach, librarian for occupational therapy & meteorology.

I continue to man the reference desk on the second floor of the King Library on Sunday afternoons, dealing primarily with walk up patrons and very occasionally taking over the phones. Most of the questions are still about signing up for computers or study rooms, printing, and using the wireless network.

It seems that high school students are being assigned research papers as both students and parents have been approaching the desk with questions on finding resources on particular topics. One Sunday a couple presented a list of books their daughter needed for a paper due the next day prompting both memories of the days when I left my papers for the last minute and jealousy over the fact that my parents would NEVER have gone to the library for me.

I have a hard time helping people narrow down their subject when they come to the desk and ask for a broad topic such as “Where are the books on algebra?” People sometimes want to be pointed to the general area so they can browse but since the King Library is both a public and academic library with the collections scattered among eight floors, this is not easily done. Searching the library catalog for algebra as a subject retrieves 172 results! When I try to hone in on a more specific aspect I’m met with a blank stare.

I had another frustrating experience while briefly taking phone calls while somebody went on break. A patron was looking for a particular article from the Wall Street Journal from 2007 and had all the necessary information: author, title, date. He had already navigated to the SJPL Web site so I accessed the Articles in Magazines and Newspapers section of the San José Public Library Articles & Databases: General Subject Areas page. I also went to the Wall Street Journal Web site but couldn’t find archives. The transaction was taking a very long time and finally in desperation I went to
Google and searched for the title and author and lo and behold the fourth result was the requested article. The patron was surprised and said he didn’t find it when doing a Google search. I suppose the end result was satisfactory but the journey was long and frustrating.

This past Sunday I had a tricky situation – an SJSU undergrad doing homework for an English class – it was all about finding particular resources or information through the databases and answering questions such as how do you know that the sources you’re looking at online are reputable and worthy. She basically came over to the desk with her laptop and asked me the questions. I didn’t feel right doing her homework for her so I tried to guide her to the appropriate sources to find the answers and showed her how I got there. I hope I handled it okay.

I don’t want to leave you with the opinion that all my time at the desk is spent in frustration. I am able to help people find books in the catalog when they have a subject or know the particular books and also to find articles in the databases and they are usually very grateful and appreciative.

I had several additional sessions of observing and keyboarding for 100W and Occupational therapy with Tina Peterson as well as assisting Rebecca Feind with a class she taught to education counseling majors. Once again, I really found it fulfilling to assist students with their database searches. The culmination was the 100W class I actually taught, assisted by my fellow interns with Tina observing. I was nervous beforehand but once I started I felt calm and tried to follow the routine that Tina does. I think the class went well and it was nice to hear from the class’ professor that she thought I had taught the class many times and didn't know it was my first time.

That was the last library instruction and we had a round-up meeting with Tina and an additional librarian, Ann Agee.

I photographed the control panel for the smartboards, edited the photos, and added them to a handout Tina wrote up about getting started with the smartboards and projector in room 213.

I had an instruction session with Ann Agee on using Captivate in anticipation of a tutorial I will be producing on saving documents from the Ebsco databases. I feel this is a useful tutorial after watching students copy/paste their search results into Word
documents during the library instruction, instead of saving to folders, exporting to Refworks, or e-mailing it to themselves.

I also answered a student's e-mail and explained the difference between primary and secondary sources.

Looking ahead I hope to start working on the tutorial and we are also going to be observing and assisting the librarians at the reference desk. On Friday I will attend an infolit brownbag at the library and my fellow interns and I will briefly discuss our experience with the library instruction we've participated in.