Dangerous Liaisons

Brainstorming the 21st century academic liaison

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About this Lively Session

Part 1
- Academic liaison roles – a brief trajectory
- Academic liaison roles – current issues
- Research from ASERL ARL Liaison Institute (April 2018)

Part 2
- Interactive exercises with live polls, un-conference-style:
  - Job description exercise,
  - Reflection exercise: liaison duties, strengths, pain points, and Takeaways for you and your home libraries.
  - Live poll compilations emailed to session participants,
  - Conference paper: https://works.bepress.com/antjemays.

Part 3
- Closing slides: Selected readings of leading liaison literature.
Part 1

Background
Academic Liaisons – a brief trajectory

- Early roots:
  - Subject bibliographer: Acquisitions, Collections
  - Subject expert: Reference, Instruction

- Evolving over time:
  - Proliferation of research and publications
  - Rise & growth of information literacy

- Growth of friction points:
  - Expertise, many roles -> how to balance?
Academic Liaisons – current issues

- subject expertise – traditional focal areas:
  - Subject knowledge: deep expertise; affinity from related field
  - Collections: development, management, deployment
  - Vendor knowledge (best source by subject/region)

- growth areas ➔ expertise needed ➔ task creep:
  - Collections + Assessment + Accreditations + Reviews
  - Reference + Instruction + Information literacy
  - Research consultations + data services
  - Outreach + strategic collaborations
  - Blurred lines: overlap, turf, who manages what…
New ARL ASERL Research

- ARL ASERL Liaison Institute, Georgia Tech, April 27-28, 2018
- brought together several research strands in a series of interactive sessions, building upon liaison literature.
Library / Academic Liaison Roles: Large-scale game changers

- Economic & digital realities:
  - financial
  - digital ecosystem;
  - changing nature of:
    - research,
    - teaching,
    - learning.

From Keynote by Anne Kenney (University Librarian Emerita; Cornell University and Interim Director, ARL), ASERL-ARL Liaison Institute, April 27, 2018
Library / Academic Liaison Roles: Large-scale game changers, ctd.

- **Global engagement:**
  - Universities as global entities,
  - International campuses & student experiences,
  - Global research.

From Keynote by Anne Kenney (University Librarian Emerita, Cornell University and Interim Director, ARL), ASERL-ARL Liaison Institute, April 27, 2018
Library / Academic Liaison Roles: Large-scale game changers, ctd.

- Collaborative imperative:
  - Nodes in worldwide network,
  - Interdependence,
  - Operating at scale.
Library / Academic Liaison Roles: Large-scale game changers, ctd.

- **21st century information professional:**
  - Some members of the academy view libraries as antiquated.
  - **Our challenge:** raise expectations, deliver expertise, services, and resources.
  - ➔ strategic differentiators in academic success.

From Keynote by Anne Kenney (University Librarian Emerita, Cornell University and Interim Director, ARL), ASERL-ARL Liaison Institute, April 27, 2018
Library / Academic Liaison Roles: Large-scale game changers, ctd.

Inadequacies in current liaison approach:

(1) program stasis,
(2) turf issues,
(3) inside-out view: what works for the library, not considering the evolving university & users.
(4) communication challenges: “the last mile”
   the weakest link in the chain determines overall success.

From Keynote by Anne Kenney (University Librarian Emerita, Cornell University and Interim Director, ARL), ASERL-ARL Liaison Institute, April 27, 2018
Liaison Roles – Recommendations:

- Partner across campus -- examples:
  - Institutional research & planning,
  - Sponsored programs,
  - Campus office of research,
  - Patents & inventions,
  - Centers of teaching excellence,
  - Similar areas with cross-campus reach.

From Keynote by Anne Kenney (University Librarian Emerita, Cornell University and Interim Director, ARL), ASERL-ARL Liaison Institute, April 27, 2018
Liaison Roles – Recommendations, ctd:

- Develop intervention strategies:
  - Knowing **when** to do something is as important as knowing **what** to do.
  - **Timing:** sense of “right approach” at the “right time” stems from familiarity **and** regular collaboration.
Liaison Roles – Recommendations, ctd:

- Identify pain points and needs – for example:
  - Outreach to at-risk students.
  - Tap into university’s student success goals.
  - Fostering information-evaluation skills.
  - Engaging international students.
Liaison Roles – Recommendations, ctd:

► “No one liaison can do it all”:
► subject expertise and functional expertise.
► distinct yet interdependent.
► team approach rather than individuals.

From Keynote by Anne Kenney (University Librarian Emerita; Cornell University and Interim Director, ARL), ASERL-ARL Liaison Institute; April 27, 2018
Liaison Roles – Recommendations, ctd:

- Move away from “one-offs”:
  - concentrated on “impacts at the department or disciplinary level”.
  - Use online tools & templates
  - Mine data to target specific faculty points (e.g., where they publish, their research areas)
  - No “one size fits all”
  - meet faculty & students in their spaces.

From Keynote by Anne Kenney (University Librarian Emerita, Cornell University and Interim Director, ARL), ASERL-ARL Liaison Institute, April 27, 2018
Liaison Roles – Recommendations, ctd:

- Move away from “inputs” – for example:
  - Number of sessions taught,
  - Number of books ordered,
  - Number of contacts.
- Instead, aim for qualitative context-sensitivity.
Liaison Roles – Recommendations, ctd:

- Develop criteria for capturing “outputs” of liaisons to measure our impact:
  - Quantify goals, track progress.
  - Align actions with academic success measures:
    - Map liaisons to departments.
    - Define goals → align activities with goals.
    - Define success (ORCID registrations? Learning goals?)
    - Faculty and NIH public compliance mandates.
    - Research support requests.

From Keynote by Anne Kenney (University Librarian Emerita; Cornell University and Interim Director, ARL), ASERL-ARL Liaison Institute, April 27, 2018
Liaison Roles – Recommendations, ctd:

- Focus on university indicators
  - Increase demand for library as strategic partner in productivity and impact measures.

From Keynote by Anne Kenney (University Librarian Emerita, Cornell University and Interim Director, ARL), ASERL-ARL Liaison Institute, April 27, 2018
Common themes from small group discussions

- Reduce, de-emphasize, stop doing -- examples:
  - inputs (orders, classes taught, etc)
  - antiquated procedure & task mechanics
  - Common themes: time-consuming, low return.

- Do more, start doing:
  - Emphasize the intellectual enterprise, align learning outcomes
  - Partnerships → intellectual collaborations → sustained relationships
  - Actively go to users, meet them where they are: formally and informally.
  - Sustainable support through online tools.
  - Marketing & outreach.
  - Common themes: strategy, impact, feasibility, sustainability.
Common themes, ctd

Self-assessment for liaisons:
- Keep customer profiles.
- Gather meaningful outcomes data with qualitative rigor.
- Surveys, and partner with departmental colleagues for survey distribution.
- Informal conversations with faculty.

Administrative support for liaisons
- Open communications about job functions’ relevance to changing times.
- Invite liaisons to write out their job in 5 years → help them get there.
- Celebrate small victories, especially in early-stage new types of campus-library links.
- Head off turfism: value contributions, encourage collaboration / respect.
- Beware of vague job descriptions. Avoid fluff.

Common themes:
**Do’s:** clarity, positive support.  
**Don’ts:** equivocation, inconsistency, bad data.
Major Themes from Liaison Institute:

- Everyone is struggling with similar issues.
  - Growth of volume and range of duties.
  - Task mix straddles organizational/divisional lines.
    - bifurcation, fragmentation.
    - discomfort with ambiguity.
    - evaluation of effectiveness?
    - balance between duties?
- Localized ideas and examples, but no common best practices.
- Solutions rooted in local conditions.
Taking the discussion home – an example:

- Exploring core competencies for liaisons with my library faculty colleagues
Part 2

- Interactives:
  - Analysis exercises
  - Reflection exercises
  - Mentimeter live polls
Interactive exercises & reflections

Live polls – 11 questions in 4 areas:

- **Basics:** organizations, roles, liaison setup – Q.1-3
- **Job description exercises:** current job ads’ description of liaison roles – Q.4-5
- **Reflection exercises on own liaison programs:** strengths, pain points, support, administrative strategies – Q.6-10
- **Closing thoughts:** key takeaways – Q.11
Interactive poll results:

The next 11 slides show session participants’ responses from the interactive Mentimeter live polls.
1. **Basics: What type of organization are you with?**

- **Academic library 2-4 year**: 5
- **Academic library - research**: 2
- **Corporate library**: 1
- **Government library**: 0
- **Vendor**: 0
- **Other org type**: 0
2. **Basics: What is your role?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acquisitions</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collections</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject bibliographer</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject instructor</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data librarian</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research librarian</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vendor</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Basics: Does your organization have a liaison program?

Yes: 14
No: 0
4. Job description exercise: What important functions are missing?
5. Job description exercise: What stated functions are superfluous / distractions?

- Selection, collections
- De-selection of materials
- Supporting technology for the whole library.
- There is too much here. What percentage of time on liaison vs technology
- Assistance with library technology; development and assessment of policies and procedures
- "coordinate with database vendors"
- General reference desk
- It's unclear if this job description has any subject/department liaison responsibility. Could be inferred, but it's not clear.
- Collection development policies
- too much specialization liaison will end up with heavy instruction load that skews job role for certain time of semester or quarter
6. Reflection: What are core competencies for liaisons?
7. Reflection: What works well in your liaison program?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mutual respect</th>
<th>Autonomy for liaisons</th>
<th>Relationships with professors</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>attending departmental meetings.</td>
<td>internal structure for liaison</td>
<td>(New) team structure works to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty respect librarians as</td>
<td>training and communication</td>
<td>people’s strengths and allows us to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teaching/information professionals</td>
<td>Subject and functional teams</td>
<td>meet emerging needs of users</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willingness to explore/build a new</td>
<td>working together for training,</td>
<td>instruction - increasing;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>liaison program that meets needs of</td>
<td>communication, projects</td>
<td>working with faculty,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>various stakeholders. We are in early</td>
<td>A ministration support</td>
<td>Subject expertise combined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stages... new job descriptions, etc</td>
<td></td>
<td>with functional expertise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecting with department admin</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>assistants to open (figurative) doors.</td>
<td></td>
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8. Reflection: What are pain points in your liaison program?

- High librarian turnover
  - Wild Wild West - Other librarians reaching out to liaison programs without informing the actual liaison.
  - Liaisons are overworked; much campus growth, same number of subject liaisons even as # of functional liaisons continues to grow. Sustainability!

- Work overload
  - Liaison is being asked to represent everything the library does
  - Balancing between changing to meet current campus needs and constantly pivoting so quickly that we lose sight of core needs and values
  - Difficulty w teamwork and collaboration, building new relationships w faculty, lack of awareness of new expectations around assessment, outreach, project management/time management and planning

- Lack of mentoring for new liaisons
- Different liaisons doing different things and not sharing ideas to collective group.
- Large portfolios, competing priorities, lack of time to excel in multiple areas
- Knowledge
  - Not enough time to focus on faculty needs given all my other responsibilities. There is not a culture at my current institution of having close ties with the faculty. Our liaison faculty role is simply another title we have but with no responsibility
9. Reflection: What support do you need for your liaison role?

- Collaboration
- Faculty support
- New teaching pedagogy
- Training for new areas
- Administration support
- Time for professional development
- Training
- Structure
- Colleague support
- New approach
- Clear priorities
- Prioritization
- Time
- More liaisons to share workload
- Training in new functions
- A separate outreach role
- Communication templates
- Less time on reference desk
- More ICT support
- Time for role
- Desire from faculty
- More liaisons
- 14
10. Reflection: How can administrators help liaisons?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hire more of them!</th>
<th>Reward</th>
<th>Prioritize</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional development (time and financial resources)</td>
<td>Have a real list of expectations</td>
<td>Understanding roles, prioritize importance of liaison work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide educational opportunities</td>
<td>Provide clear goals, objectives, and priorities</td>
<td>Talk more openly about priorities and how to balance responsibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hire additional prioritization</td>
<td>Advocate for training, consider workload, try to encourage strengths, and discuss/implement change management and how to handle change</td>
<td>Include liaison work consistently in annual review process - both in goal setting and recognizing excellent work in this area. Recognize that even as a secondary responsibility, it's a lot of work. Provide space to do this work.</td>
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Have just one unit with responsibility for liaison duty instead of librarians having to do it along with core functions and any other duties.
11. Closing thoughts: What key takeaways and ideas from this session will you try in your home institutions?

- Yes, we’re doing the same things as other ARLs (no one else has the answers either)
- Survey faculty for needs.
- Shift from quantitative measures to qualitative in liaison assessment. Continue to identify ways to provide support and training. We’re doing a lot of the best practices mentioned, but our liaisons still feel underprepared and overworked.
- Be open, intentional, mindful about liaison roles and work and admin support.
- Share finding as we revamp our liaison program—communicate concerns to administration liaisons share similar concerns.
- Review changing roles and rethink appropriate structure.
- Being more cognizant of the pressures on liaisons and help support their growth in areas where they may not feel comfortable.
- Advocate for manageable expectations, and focus efforts efficiently.
- Celebrate / recognize liaison work and “wins!”
Part 3

More background research:
Selected readings
Additional Readings


Additional Readings, ctd.

Questions?

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