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Re-envisioning a traditional liaison library model to accommodate the digital scholarship needs of users

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Introduction

This paper is a case study of the liaison model at the Humanities, Social Science & Education Library (HSSE Library) at Purdue University. In order to integrate new digital scholarship services into the library it became apparent that a re-envisioning of the current liaison model was required.

The perceived limitations were that the liaison positions had become too siloed, so that we were not adequately accommodating collaborations and communication with newer services such as digital humanities, data services, GIS, and other services of interest to the academic community, notably in the realm of scholarly communication.

In order to reach satisfactory solutions, the first task was to identify the strengths of the liaison library faculty in this unit, then to embark on a process of re-envisioning the services. We used a change management model introduced by the Division Head, with full participation of all the liaison librarians. The Division Head, author of this paper, started in this position in August of 2016, and we in HSSE Library proposed the re-envisioned plan to the Libraries administration in early 2017. The implementation and ongoing assessment and modifications of the plan started as of March 2017.

Background

In order to appreciate the challenges in the liaison librarian role today, it is helpful to explore the history of this evolving role. In academic libraries, liaison librarians have traditionally served academic faculty in very siloed ways. In the 1960s the then-current liaison librarian role was described as a reference librarian or bibliographer. A large part of the responsibilities of those librarians was devoted to collection development. In the 1970s and 1980s the focus shifted to include instruction and consulting with users. In the 1990s and 2000s it changed to include more outreach and liaison work with a de-emphasis on collection development. (Corrall, Town, & Ian Hall, 2015)

The role of the liaison librarian has grown so much that it is no longer reasonable to expect that one person can provide expert services in each of the areas of responsibility. (Jaguszewski & Williams, 2013) The duties that traditionally are included in the liaison job description include the subject expert and bibliographer role from the 1960s, although collection development has been significantly de-emphasized with newer collection methods such as approval plans and patron-driven acquisitions. Instruction and user education remain important aspects of the position, and the role of librarians in teaching and learning continues to grow. Instructional design and curriculum development are also areas of expertise that have been added to the role of library liaison, because there is an expectation that library liaisons should be partners with faculty in these areas and that their own classes should include modern teaching techniques such as the use of flipped classroom methodology. More skills are required in using and instructing others in how to use information technology hardware and software. Expectations have also grown in terms of the support for and collaboration in research and publishing. Scholarly communication areas of focus included in the job expectations of library liaison duties include communication and training about alternative forms of publishing, author's rights, copyright, and institutional repositories, among others. Auckland suggests that the following areas of responsibility were lacking in the early 2010s: storage of faculty-produced research, data curation and data management, mandated funding compliance, tools for data manipulation, mining of data, and metadata standards and practices. (Auckland, 2012).

Today many libraries have data specialists on staff, although they are often in their own departments or divisions not associated with liaison librarians. As mentioned, it is clearly not reasonable to expect that all liaison librarians would be skilled to provide this diverse and ever-growing body of support to faculty and students in their liaison disciplines. (Jaguszewski & Williams, 2013) The role of the liaison is no longer standard; libraries are adopting differing models to address these changing demands. Some have expanded the role of the liaisons to include some of these functions and others have created new positions where librarians provide specialized services in data or in digital humanities or in scholarly publishing. Often these new functions are in different units across the same institution, thus further dividing the already complex service model and making it more confusing for library users to navigate resources and service providers.

The re-envisioning of the Humanities, Social Science & Education Library liaison program was not specifically about collection development, however, it became clear very quickly that the one element consistent in all the liaison librarian job duties was collection development. It was also clear that this job responsibility was what divided the librarians in digital scholarship (digital humanities, GIS and data services) who do not perform collection development duties from the liaison librarians who do.

For many decades experts in the field carefully and meticulously acquired collections in academic libraries, and these collections used to reflect the intellectual life of the University. Gerald Beasley, who was appointed as the University Librarian of Cornell University in May 2017, stated the following about the legacy of library collections: “Yes, I love libraries,” Beasley said, “...Great research libraries provide their users with a rich and rewarding experience, and their collections are an authentic foundation for new knowledge.” (Lowery, May 1, 2017) With new collection development practices and less time devoted to collection development, the question arises whether libraries still reflect the academic mission of the University. Beasley acknowledges the long-held belief that the library holds an “authentic foundation of new knowledge,” however, this might no longer be a given in academic libraries. A series of articles published in 2014 in a special issue of the journal *Collection Management* focused on the changes that have been taking place in collection development practices. The authors of the introductory article suggest that academic libraries are in the midst of “transformative changes” but that it does not constitute “a paradigmatic shift in collection management.” (Clement & Fischer, 2014) As part of our re-envisioning, we asked ourselves whether we are indeed fulfilling this mission in terms of collection development and to what extent we remain deeply aware of the current needs and focus of our users. This became one of our goals: to explore our collections within the framework of the changing disciplinary cultures and the vision of the College of Liberal Arts (CLA).

Communication and collaboration had become complex among siloed subject librarians, and newly created outreach positions have been further impaired across library units by the way some of the specialized services are organized. Without effective means of communication and collaboration within library organizations, services are impaired. When collaboration works well, of course it improves the output of an organization, yet many organizations struggle to make collaboration work, even though it has been shown to be a high predictor of success. (Boughzala & de Vreede, 2015) The identification of a lack of communication and collaboration both within the HSSEB Division and as it relates to other library units was one of the motivating factors to challenge the current organizational structure.

Long ago, when the liaison model was first envisioned and the role of bibliographer in specific subject areas was established, it was based on an organizational model of stability and control. Internal focus and integration was considered less important. This model worked for the demands of that time since change happened slowly and was much more predictable. New models are required as change in technology-driven research and teaching are creating new demands on library services. Typical hierarchical library organizational structures are no longer optimal to facilitate nimble change and complex collaborations. A rich body of literature exists on organizational models, such as the clan and adhocracy models that might be better suited for the challenges libraries face today. (Kaarst-Brown, Nicholson, Von Dran, & Stanton, 2004)

The introduction of digital scholarship into the humanities and social sciences poses specific challenges to integrate these new high-demand services into traditional library structures. (White & Gilbert, 2016) Purdue University Libraries entered the field of digital humanities later than some of our peers, hiring our first DH librarian in 2015. The person in this position worked as a functional liaison providing services to the entire Purdue University academic community. The exact definition of this role was not clear since the librarian did not have the title of liaison and did not have any collection development responsibilities, which all other liaison librarians have. The DH

librarian, was, however, part of the Humanities and Social Science Division. With this specialization in DH it became clear that additional silos were being created and that communication and collaboration within the HSSEB Division in the Libraries was not happening in a systematic and transparent way. Collaboration was also required across library Divisions, since digital scholarship functions were being performed across at least nine different units within Purdue Libraries. (See Table 1) A Digital Scholarship Council is currently working to determine the best structure to bridge these departments in the digital scholarship service units.

Current model

In August of 2016 when the author started as the new Division Head for the Humanities, Social Science & Education Library, the model for liaisons called for each liaison to engage with departmental faculty and students in the departments that were assigned to them on *all* aspects of liaison work. Little collaboration was required except for some joint purchases in collection development and the only routine meetings among librarians were primarily about collections. (See table 2) The Digital Humanities Librarian, who had been in the position for less than a year at that time, did not attend these meetings. Purdue University Libraries had already invested in a GIS Librarian and had a robust data unit with librarians working across the sciences, social sciences and humanities; however, as mentioned before, these positions were in different library Divisions. The introduction of digital scholarship (digital humanities; data management; GIS, etc.) into library service units has had a significant impact on liaison responsibilities.

At many institutions, academic faculty recognize what librarians have to offer in the new areas of digital scholarship, however, the value of collaborating with librarians is not of equal interest to academic faculty in other areas of our work. At Purdue University new scholarship needs in the College of Liberal Arts (CLA) were clearly demonstrated when 28 faculty attended a call-out for digital humanities in May 2016, 15 faculty attended a call-out to introduce data literacy training in October 2016, and 40 people (75% CLA faculty and students, 25% Librarians and staff) attended a November 2016 Digital Humanities Symposium. No less than eight faculty invited the Digital Humanities Librarian to participate in their research as a Co-PI. In the Humanities, Social Science & Education Library we only have one librarian trained in digital humanities, and we have no other librarians in the Division trained in data, GIS or other digital scholarship arenas.

This renewed interest from academic faculty to collaborate with librarians is a clear demonstration of the readiness of faculty to recognize the skills of librarians in digital humanities. This recognition of the role that librarians can play in supporting digital humanities was brought home when the author visited the University of Rochester as part of a multi-institutional trip to learn more about digital humanities. The author met with Dr. Morris Eaves, *Professor of English, the Richard L. Turner Professor of Humanities, and the Director of the A. W. Mellon Graduate Program in the Digital Humanities of the School of Arts & Sciences. He said that he never understood what librarians had to offer, except when he needed a book they would order it. However, with the introduction of digital humanities he depends on his collaborations with librarians and appreciates their knowledge in retrieval of information, in organization of information and in application of metadata.*

In her article about the role of the library in digital humanities, Cunningham states that librarians have not traditionally been viewed as research partners (Cunningham, 2010), however, in the case of the Digital Humanities Librarian at Purdue University and at many other institutions this role perception is changing.

There are several shortcomings of the siloed approach to liaison work where each librarian does collection development, library instruction, consultations with faculty, mentoring of students, referrals, troubleshooting, etc. Not all librarians have the same skills and interests to fulfill these required duties equally, and not all subject disciplines lend themselves to an equal distribution of the duties mentioned. For example, one department might have a greater desire or need for classroom instruction than for consultations with faculty. The current arrangement does not take the skills and talents of librarians into consideration to allow them to contribute in their areas of strength. We explored the changes we could make to meet the needs of our constituents in large part based on the goal to optimize the talents of our library faculty.

Changes in the College of Liberal Arts

The College of Liberal Arts (CLA) at Purdue University has changed significantly over the past few years. A new Dean of the College of Liberal Arts was hired in 2015, and he has embarked on a mission to re-envision that College and to reaffirm the importance of a liberal arts education at a strongly STEM-focused university. New programs have been introduced, and a roadmap has been created to move the College forward in the following targeted areas, “strengthen undergraduate education, upgrade graduate education, enhance faculty excellence and expand revenue sources.” (Reingold, 2015-2017) Embarking on a re-envisioning of the Humanities, Social Science & Education Library was further justified based on the changes being made in the College of Liberal Arts at Purdue University. Because of new initiatives such as these being developed campus-wide, we felt strong additional impetus to change; it was imperative that we do so. (Clement & Fischer, 2014)

In order for librarians to be at the table, new conversations about the role of the library cannot only be about digital scholarship services, but must include new conversations about the changing landscape regarding the role of the humanities and social sciences at a predominantly STEM-focused university such as Purdue. An important element that the author took into consideration is the question of accountability regarding our collections. Do we have an accurate picture of the current state of CLA at Purdue University? Are our collections and service models meeting the current needs of the faculty and students in the humanities, social sciences and education? Are we acquiring the books and journals that best meet the research, teaching and learning needs of our constituents? Are our collections reflecting the *current* focus and strengths of the departments we serve? We need to engage our constituents with information about our collections that is empirical and conceptual. It is critical to re-conceptualize our collection development practices to make sure our collection strengths mirror the research and pedagogical needs and nature of the colleges and departments that we serve. Delving deep into the current make-up of the academic departments we serve will then allow us to have meaningful conversations and develop new collaborations to replace those that are not currently up to date.

In order to address these concerns, the author asked the liaison librarians to consider the following questions: “What if we created a position with responsibility to study and map the intellectual development of the academic departments we serve and all liaisons interact directly with this person in new ways?” and “What if each librarian contributes in his or her areas of expertise across all disciplines that the Humanities, Social Science and Education Division serves?” In this model, the siloed approach would be eliminated and liaison and digital scholarship librarians will naturally work more closely together. The author led all the librarians in several four-hour-long meetings as well as a half-day retreat over a period of 6 weeks to discuss these questions and understand the impact. In the meetings, we also identified the strengths of each liaison librarian and acknowledged ways in which those strengths can be optimized while taking the issues of emerging digital scholarship needs into consideration.

Change Management

At Purdue University’s Humanities, Social Sciences, & Education Library, we used a change management and individual-strength-based model to redefine the liaison organizational structure and allow for greater collaboration among liaison and digital scholarship librarians.

This reorganization was implemented using a change management model. Strepeikis and Žukauskas (Strepeikis & Žukauskas 2005) describe some important elements of change management, namely: goal setting for change and for what will remain unchanged; involving employees in the process; developing the plan and communication. Du Plessis and Mabunda (Du Plessis & Mabunda, 2016) emphasize the importance of communication to mitigate resistance to change and to prepare staff for the impact of change. The Humanities, Social Sciences & Education Library re-envisioning implemented a change management model which included goal setting. The first goal was to eliminate the silos that had developed and to find new ways to interact with our colleagues who provide digital scholarship services, most specifically in digital humanities, but also in GIS and data services and other areas such as scholarly communication. To incorporate digital scholarship into the work stream in more seamless ways was the most urgent matter since we know that many faculty in the College of Liberal Arts are eager to work with librarians in this domain. The second goal was to acknowledge the strengths of individual liaison librarians and optimize those strengths while also acknowledging weaknesses that we want to minimize. We worked on thinking creatively and not being constrained by current organizational structures or past practices. A third and very important goal was to understand the College of Liberal Arts at a very deep level and engage in meaningful conversations with them about what the library is and can be in regard to their teaching and research.

Librarians in the Humanities, Social Science & Education Library were participating fully in the change process and had opportunities to discuss and debate and shape the change; we agreed upon a plan for change, and our communication was very clear. Communication started when the author was hired in August 2016. She started meeting with each library faculty member to get to know them and to understand their areas of interest and strength. She also met with the Dean and Associate Deans at the College of Liberal Arts to gain a clearer understanding of the needs of that College. The conversations also included discussions with the Digital Humanities Librarian and with colleagues in the library Divisions providing digital scholarship services. Once the author had a clear understanding of some of the challenges in communication and collaboration and identified the silos that contributed to these challenges, she met with each library faculty member to begin to brainstorm about how arrangements could be changed. These personal, one-on-one conversations laid the groundwork to start building trust and to make it clear that this was a challenge that the author wanted to work on *along with* the librarians on and that it needed to be owned jointly, versus imposing a solution.

With this groundwork and mutual understanding, the series of meetings with all humanities, social science and education librarians commenced. The first two meetings were devoted to understanding the challenge fully and to come to a mutual understanding about the goals underlying this re-envisioning. Each of the librarians had an opportunity to participate in the discussion. The first meeting was not structured, but rather free-flowing. We captured the motivation for embarking on this project. The second meeting was an opportunity to delve deeper into the same question and for questions to surface that had not been fully explored in the first meeting or that had come up since the first meeting. At the end of this meeting we had a mutual understanding of the challenges and of the goals to end the silos and find alternative ways to work together. Librarians expressed concerns that they had about the extent of the change and to explore their own comfort level with possible changes. The biggest concern was the possibility to give up all collection development duties and centralize that.

We met all the objectives of a change management model, having clear goals and communication that involved all staff. We identified what needed to change, to what extent, and what should stay as it is.

In subsequent meetings, we identified the strengths and interests of the librarians and captured those. We debated various possible solutions and, again, made sure that everyone had an opportunity to participate in the discussions. Through this process, we agreed on a new model.

New Model

We agreed on a new model that will meet the requirement to eliminate silos and will optimize the strengths of each individual. In this new model (See Table 2), we created a Collections Ethnographer position to help us look across all disciplines in order to understand both the departments that we serve and the current and changing academic needs of the institution, thus building a collaboration model to allow librarians to work together more effectively.

In this model we also created a Collections Budget Analyst. The librarians in these two new positions are charged to help us understand the strengths of our collections and the distribution of our financial resources related to our collections. These positions are to cut across all the departmental disciplines and to help us understand the current and changing nature of the academic departments, so that we can see where our collections are strong, where they need to be strengthened, and where we no longer need to collect. This model begins to break down the silos, because the liaisons work closely with the Collections Ethnographer and Budget Analyst to bring their current knowledge of the disciplines to the table. Much more dialogue will produce a greater level of collaboration and engagement. This new structure was created not just based on the needs of the University and our library Division, but also based on the specific skills and interests of the librarians. It is important to note that the Collections Ethnographer has a strong interest and publishing record regarding the phenomena surrounding academic disciplines, their intellectual evolution, bibliographic characteristics, and dissemination of knowledge in the humanities and social sciences. In a conversation with him, he stated “the examination of disciplines is grounded in the exploration of disciplinary cultures, which animate academic disciplines. Understanding the cultures of scholarly knowledge generation and its various disciplinary alignments offers an open window to efficacious library collections management. Examination of disciplinary cultures permits wider and richer understanding of academic cultures that have motivated and continue to animate academia. Since academic libraries must contend with competing needs for resources, it is instrumental to gain a sense of how these disciplinary configurations/cultures interact. We must also understand

their respective requirements for collections support, as well as how the library responds to these cultures, their subtle evolution and dissemination of knowledge via publications. As academia is not intellectually static, so too are disciplinary cultures. An understanding of academic disciplines and cultures reveals nuances that will aid in effective, nuanced, and organic response to research and pedagogical collections activities.” The librarian, Jean-Pierre Hérubel, has also published extensively in the domain of disciplinary cultures.

Because of this interesting skill-set and analytical ability, it was very clear that this role will serve the departments very well and will allow us to have a new understanding of the Colleges that we serve.

We recognized that liaison duties must be weighted for each library faculty member and will be dynamic, based on the needs and receptivity of their academic departments. Each library faculty member will contribute beyond their departmental duties in their areas of strength. We will have a liaison who will focus more on teaching information literacy across disciplines, another will extend EndNote training and will, weekly, e-mail instructional material to all departments. The government information specialist will continue to be responsible for government information resources as well as other related disciplines.

One of the goals of Purdue University Libraries is to have closer collaboration with the Archives and Special Collections, so one of our liaisons will work half-time in the Archives. Doing this helps meet the goal and also acknowledges the interest of the librarian in archives and in local and regional history. The digital humanities liaison specialist will provide services across disciplines in the humanities, social sciences, and education. This DH librarian will collaborate closely with the liaison librarians, and is already strongly involved in collaborations with our Archives and our Scholarly Publishing units. We are strengthening our communication with the Data Librarians and staff to facilitate the introduction of data management and other aspects of working with data. We are also reaching out to collaborate more closely in scholarly communication, institutional repository services, GIS, and other forms of digital scholarship.

We have strengths in the library faculty of the Humanities, Social Science and Education that we can optimize in these ways, whereas the former model in which every library faculty member had one or more subject disciplines for which they were responsible in a “siloe” manner did not recognize the strength-based philosophy we are adopting.

This new model allows for more multidisciplinary interaction and collaboration and fulfills the need to integrate new scholarship models, notably those involving digital scholarship, into our workflow.

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Table 2 shows the former liaison model for the Humanities, Social Science and Education Library at Purdue University Libraries. This model requires that each librarian have liaison duties that include collection development, teaching, consultation, curriculum design and other activities associated with the departments they serve.

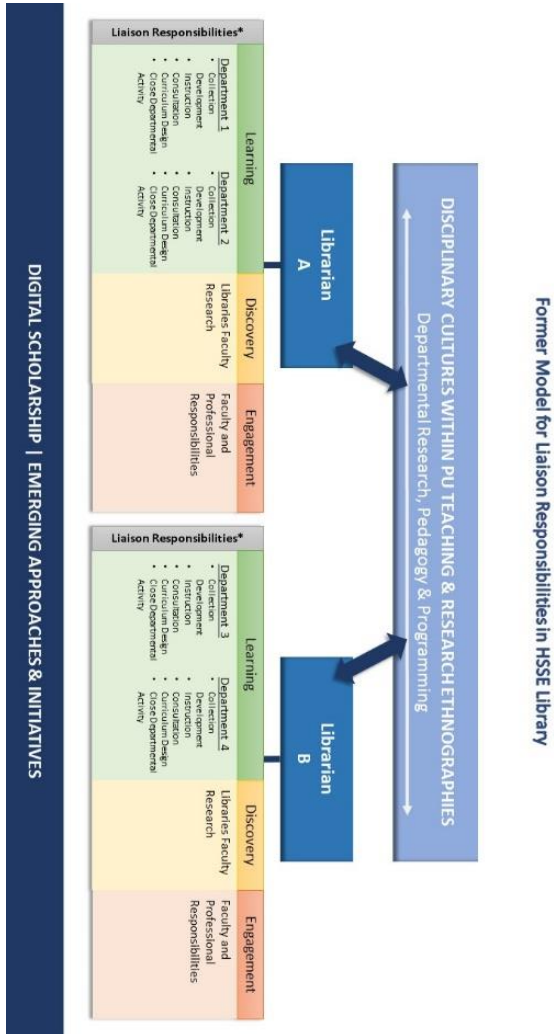


Table 3 shows the current liaison model for the Humanities, Social Science and Education Library at Purdue University Libraries. In this model, collection development duties become more centralized under the direction of two librarians with very specific skill sets, which naturally stimulates more communication and collaboration within the division and across the libraries. It will also open new dialogues with the departments in the College of Liberal Arts.

