

Sailing Together at the University of Miami: How New Campus Partnerships Are Leading to the Transformation of Librarian Roles in Learning and Research

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**SAILING TOGETHER AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI:
HOW NEW CAMPUS PARTNERSHIPS ARE LEADING TO THE
TRANSFORMATION OF LIBRARIAN ROLES IN LEARNING
AND RESEARCH**

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Abstract

Since 2014, the University of Miami Libraries (UML) has formed a series of strategic relationships with campus partners to advance the University's priorities for teaching, learning, and research. Engagement with Undergraduate and Graduate Education, College of Arts and Sciences, and Academic Technologies has led to the development of new and expanded programs and services to support student learning. These programs include a Learning Commons in Richter Library that co-locates and coordinates key academic services for students, a Library Research Scholars program that offers librarian-mentorship experiences for undergraduates working on projects of their own design, and a peer-to-peer research consultation service that replaces the traditional reference desk model. To increase support for faculty, UML has also formed a partnership with the University's Office of Research; consequently, librarians are now participating on interdisciplinary research teams funded to address grand research challenges. To design, plan, and implement such experimental programs, librarians have made use of participatory-planning and community-building strategies, redefined their job roles and responsibilities, and sought out professional development opportunities to increase their skills. In the process, librarians are expanding their focus on collaboration, mentorship, and program development. The impact of new partnerships includes greater visibility of librarians on campus, increased student use of library spaces and emerging services, and deepening integration with the University's strategic priorities.

Introduction

At the University of Miami Libraries, we are partnering with non-library units on campus to explore ways to improve learning and research for students and faculty. These partnerships – with such administrative offices as Undergraduate and Graduate Education, College of Arts and Sciences, Academic Technologies, and the Office of Research – are expanding and adjusting the roles we have traditionally played in the academy. In the last several years, the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) has developed a specific focus on this challenge, sponsoring Library Liaison Institutes in various cities around the country [“Reimagining the Liaison Librarian,” n.d.]. At the University of Miami Libraries, within the field of liaison or subject librarianship, we are seeing a gradual, but inevitable shift away from twentieth-century activities of reference, instruction, and collection-building to twenty-first-century activities including community-building and facilitation, program development, mentoring, communication and resource-linking across disciplines, and teamwork. In our services, we are emphasizing the value of engaged, extended encounters over transactional encounters. Instead of providing definitive answers to straightforward questions, we are increasingly conversing about strategies, tools, and resources to apply to complex needs with no certain answers. Importantly, we remain connected, we believe, to the deep roots of librarianship as a profession: listening to others and then engaging in a process of careful, respectful inquiry to discern what is truly needed. In order to facilitate and ensure learning and research, we are discovering anew the significance of in-person conversations with students, faculty, and researchers. In essence, we are discovering where the human presence is still essential, and where the digital world and automation are most usefully applied.

The metaphor that comes to mind for this exhilarating work is sailing together in uncharted waters towards an unknown destination. So, perhaps, it is not a coincidence that we have traveled to the wetlands of Western Australia from the swamplands of Southern Florida to join you in conversation about this topic. Navigating the profound changes in twenty-first-century higher education from the vantage point of the university research library is not unlike sailing on a large vessel during turbulent weather and without certainty of the destination. May libraries and librarians continue to be the calm, serene “heart of the whirlwind,” [p. 35] as librarian Lawrence Clark Powell [1985] once wrote, even as climate change promises to challenge the firmest of our assumptions about security and stability.

The changes in the ways we are doing our work involve significant commitments from both library leaders and the librarians working directly with faculty and students. Library leaders need to have conversations with their peers on campus that open new possibilities and opportunities for others. They must also provide appropriate resourcing to support the new programs that emerge as a result. Librarians must be open to experimentation and non-siloed thinking – that is, thinking beyond the needs of the individual department or unit in which they reside. Both leaders and employees need to adopt a mentality of ongoing

learning, which requires letting go of the myth of perfection. To support one another, appropriate professional development and skill-building opportunities must be available to all – both emerging leaders and librarians.

Both of us have benefited from the professional development support offered to librarians by our research libraries. We are graduates of a professional development / leadership program called the Leading Change Institute (LCI) ["Leading Change Institute," n.d.], organized by the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR) and EDUCAUSE. The institute is: "...designed for [mid-career] leaders in higher education, including CIOs, librarians, information technology professionals, and administrators, who are interested in working collaboratively to promote and initiate change on critical issues affecting the academy." The program describes the fellows as people who are: "willing and eager to explore different models and take risks. They have a commitment to, and talent for, leadership within higher education. They understand and appreciate the environment outside their immediate surroundings; they strive to build bridges between people, departments and institutions; they are critical thinkers and dynamic and creative problem-solvers." So, with humility, we hope to embody all these qualities in our remarks below!

The LCI program is held over one intensive week each summer in Washington, D.C. Kelly graduated in 2013, while working at UCLA, Lisa graduated in 2016, while employed at UML. In the program, we each learned that one of our key roles as leaders in libraries is to support those we lead as we navigate rapid changes together. We are helping people learn to be flexible and adaptive, open to uncertainty and ambiguity, even as we ourselves humbly discover the places where we can get stuck along the way, too. And when this happens, we turn to our peer network for support and encouragement and help charting the next move. We would like to describe some of the partnerships and new programs that are driving our changing activities, and the ways we are responding.

University of Miami Libraries' Learning Commons

The UML Learning Commons [n.d.] began as an idea in conversation between the UML Dean and the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS). Each had an independent practical problem that they needed to resolve and they saw a way to work together to develop a solution. The Libraries' first floor was filled, in part, with compact shelving housing bound periodicals that were no longer needed due to digitization, and the Dean of CAS was looking for a new home for the Writing Center and Math Lab, both of which would benefit from greater accessibility to students and the extended hours of the library. But the deans were not simply interested in relocating the Writing Center and filling an empty library space, they wanted to create a collaborative program supporting learning that would draw on a variety of University programs, strategically co-located within the library. The Dean of Undergraduate Education and the Chief Academic Technology Officer joined the Steering Committee, as well. Together, they developed a charge for the Learning Commons: create a flexible space, service model, and staffing structure to support learning through the co-location, coordination, and enhancement of existing academic services.

The Learning Commons is the result of collaboration with a growing number of academic service providers that report to the larger university entities described above. These service providers include the Camner Center for Academic Resources (a peer tutoring program), Academic Technologies (providing technology support), Writing Center, Math Lab, and Modern Languages Lab. Core library partners include a Peer Research Consultants program, Creative Studio (providing digital media equipment loans and support for 3D printing, poster printing, etc.), and Digital Scholars' Lab (GIS, Data, etc.). The participatory-planning process to design the vision, mission, and service model for the Learning Commons was facilitated by Brightspot Strategy in 2015. The process was guided by a Steering Committee that included the Dean of Undergraduate Education, Chief Academic Technology Officer, and Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. This process resulted in two reports: a User Research Report [Brightspot Strategy, 2015] and a Service, Staffing and Space Strategy Brief [Brightspot Strategy, 2016] that continue to provide guidance and inspiration to the program. The articulated vision and mission statements are, as follows:

Vision Statement

The Learning Commons aims to help students become effective and independent learners with the ability to identify, critically analyze and apply relevant information and technologies as well as the skills necessary to communicate across disciplines and cultures.

Mission Statement

Offer opportunities to work individually and collaboratively, learn from peers and experts, discover and explore resources and ideas, and create and experiment. Provide an inviting, comfortable, and technology-rich environment.

A first phase renovation of the Learning Commons, completed by architect GALvarez, was finished in 2018. This phase includes a Consultation Zone with twenty-four “consultation stations” accessible to all partners, two glass-enclosed Flexible Learning Spaces with retractable walls (for workshops and events), open user seating, writable surfaces and mobile boards, and shelving housing browsable new books.

In the first year post-occupancy, the Learning Commons provided more than 11,000 answers to research questions, 5,000 expert writing consultations, 2,500 peer-tutoring sessions, and language tutoring in eight languages. More than 800 students were helped by expert tutors in Math, and thousands of students participated in workshops. For a more comprehensive look at the data see 2017-2018 Key Usage Statistics <https://my.visme.co/projects/ojxv7441-voql9kzr39vk2x1w>.

What are the librarians' roles in this program? Librarians lead the Learning Commons' community, convening bi-monthly meetings of all service providers, organize tours and orientations, develop programs and workshops for students and faculty, and conduct assessment and reporting to the Dean of Libraries and Steering Committee. Librarians also lead several participating units in the Commons, including research services (Peer Research Consultants), Creative Studio, Digital Scholars' Lab and others.

Mentoring and Peer Research Programs

The idea for the Library Research Scholars Program emerged in conversation between UML Dean Charles Eckman and the University's Senior Vice Provost and Dean of Undergraduate Education William Green in 2014, and was formally inaugurated in 2015. This particular program offers University of Miami undergraduate students a librarian faculty-mentored learning experience involving active engagement with the Libraries' research collections and service programs. A signature feature of the Learning Commons, the program gives undergraduate students an opportunity to build upon their own interests, develop transferable skills, and create an intellectual product that is shareable with others. Each student accepted into the program participates in a year-long, four-part experience:

- 1) Orientation: Students take part in a focused orientation program, meeting with key librarians and staff in order to understand the nature of the Libraries' work. The program includes introductions to departments within the Libraries, such as Special Collections and University Archives, Digital Production, and Cataloging and Metadata.
- 2) Mentorship and Work Experience: All students are matched with a librarian, who serves as a mentor and supervisor. The program requires ten hours of dedicated time per week in the Libraries during the fall and spring semesters. This time includes a weekly cohort session that all Library Research Scholars attend. Students are paid hourly.
- 3) Deliverable: In consultation with a librarian, each student develops a project that results in an intellectual product. The focus of the project can be any topic of interest to the Library Research Scholar and related to Library collections and services in some way. Students develop their project idea in a scaffolded process – beginning with the development of an initial research question and culminating in a detailed project plan that includes an annotated bibliography – that

supports the acquisition of information literacy skills. Following the completion of the planning process, the students create the project in a supportive atmosphere with their peer cohort. Students deposit their final project proposals and annotated bibliographies ["Library Research Scholars Program Collections," 2017, 2018] into the University's Scholarly Repository.

- 4) Recognition Event: At the conclusion of the academic year, a capstone event is hosted at Richter Library in which students describe their experiences and projects. The families and friends of the Scholars are invited, along with UM faculty, administrators, and donors.

Since the program's inception, eighteen undergraduate students have been accepted into the program – averaging four to five students per year. In the first year, only Honors students were eligible to apply, but – in response to students' requests – we expanded the program to allow any student to apply. Library Research Scholars can participate at any stage of their undergraduate experience. Awardees have included first-year students to seniors, and their majors range from the sciences and social sciences to the arts and humanities. Typically, their individual project ideas lie outside their primary disciplinary focus; that is, the students often like to experiment with a topic beyond their formal curriculum and view their participation in the program as an opportunity to do something exploratory and new. Topics have included everything from green architecture to local history, from hip hop music to the emergence of craft breweries in South Florida. Project formats have included: curating a library exhibit, authoring an online research guide, curating materials for an archive, and composing a dramatic play. In surveys conducted at the end of each year, students have reported that the most valuable aspects of the program include the opportunity to develop a close relationship with a librarian over the course of a year, learn about the library as an organization, and develop their own ideas without judgement or pressure of a grade.

Building on the success of this program, the Adobe Library Research Scholars Program was inaugurated in 2018. The program is designed to amplify the impact of the University's decision to make Adobe Creative Cloud freely available to all students. By making creativity tools and technologies as freely available to students as productivity tools and technologies, the University is emphasizing the importance of improving students' creativity skills, as well as their digital and information literacies. Thanks to a generous endowment provided by Adobe Systems Inc., two undergraduate students are selected each year to serve as Adobe Scholars in the UML. The students participate actively in the existing Library Research Scholars Program, receive specialized training from experts associated with the Libraries' Creative Studio, and develop an audiovisual and/or multimedia intellectual project. In this inaugural year, both students made use of Adobe Spark, a digital presentation tool, and conducted research to realize their projects.

What are the librarians' roles in the Library Research Scholars program? Librarians administer the application process, including advertising and selection, match the chosen students with mentors spread throughout the organization, facilitate weekly cohort sessions, lead cohort sessions on individual topics, assist students with trouble-shooting challenges, plan the end-of-the-year celebration program, ensure that project documentation is deposited in the Scholarly Repository, and conduct assessment to improve the program. Two subject librarians currently co-manage the program. More than a dozen librarians have participated in the program as mentors and others have led individual sessions to introduce students to library services and departments. Librarians have expressed appreciation for the opportunity to spend extended time working with students, unlike briefer encounters in reference transactions or one-shot instructional sessions.

The Peer Research Consultants Program developed as an outgrowth of the Library Research Scholars Program. Students who had been Library Research Scholars were interested in working in the Libraries and sharing what they had learned, and we wanted to create new opportunities for them and others to engage with their peers as "research consultants." Librarians are now training undergraduate and graduate students to be the first layer of research support in the Learning Commons, replacing the traditional reference desk. Although these students may not have the deep disciplinary knowledge of a subject librarian, we have found that they can be trained to help students with their basic research needs. Unlike the traditional model of a reference desk, the Peer Research Consultants (PRCs) sit in welcoming,

comfortable consultation stations with laptops ready to help students who are seeking assistance with research questions. Students can book half hour or hour-long appointments with PRCs, using a campus-wide scheduling software that integrates student class schedules and academic advising. Whether they are staffing an information table at New Student Orientation or in the Consultation Zone in the Learning Commons, PRCs are more likely to be approached by students than a librarian.

Whereas in the past, librarians had spent hours at the reference desk, primarily answering directional questions or helping with jammed printers, a librarian now has the responsibility for designing and managing the Peer Research Consultant Program as a whole, gaining valuable supervisory and mentoring experience by writing job descriptions, creating and conducting training, and guiding and assessing student performance. Meanwhile, librarians continue to conduct one-on-one research consultations with students, staff, and faculty, either over email, in their offices, or in the offices of disciplinary faculty.

Supporting Faculty Research and Interdisciplinary Teams Working on Societal Problems

To increase support for faculty, UML has also formed a partnership with the University's Office of Research; consequently, librarians are now participating on interdisciplinary research teams funded to address complex societal problems. This partnership occurred as a result of a conversation in January of 2017 between Kelly – in her role as Associate Dean for Learning and Research Services – and Susan Morgan, Associate Provost for Research Development. Susan told Kelly about the unit's launch of a new interdisciplinary research grant program called U-LINK. Kelly responded by suggesting that librarians might be able to partner with the interdisciplinary teams to learn about their experiences and how the Libraries could assist. Susan thought it was a promising idea, and the collaboration began. Because the first set of teams had already been selected, Kelly needed to quickly match librarians with each team. The matches were made in time for the librarians to participate in a kick-off event on "Science of Team Science" (SOTS) for all of the teams. Topics of the interdisciplinary research projects have included climate change, childhood poverty, and online extremism.

Because of the speediness of the formation of the collaboration, some librarians understandably struggled initially with how to integrate with the teams, and the teams were not always sure of the librarians' roles. Now, in our second year of the collaboration, we corrected for this challenge. Teams were asked to invite a librarian to join the team and engage directly with them. This has changed the dynamic positively. Approaching our third year, we have also corrected for a need to define the nature of the librarians' roles more concretely, so as to inspire opportunities that might not be immediately evident. The following is a description of the U-LINK librarians' program that we have developed to share with the interdisciplinary research teams:

U-LINK librarians are all UM librarians who, in addition to their core duties as subject librarians, digital scholarship librarians, or medical librarians, are team members who partner with researchers to advance interdisciplinary research. U-LINK librarians tailor their roles and activities to the needs of the team and the particular sets of expertise and experience they bring. U-LINK librarians contribute to the team effort by:

- finding and accessing information resources (scholarly publications, data sets, databases, etc.).
The librarian is prepared to:
 - conduct literature reviews
 - create online bibliographic guides for the team and/or community engagement purposes (see example: <https://sp.library.miami.edu/subjects/PublicHealth-new>)
 - lead sessions or workshops for the team on specific resources
- connecting team members to librarians and others experts with skills and knowledge related to:
 - statistical software
 - data, data management plans, and data analysis
 - qualitative and quantitative research methods

- research software (SPSS, R, SAS, Stata, NVivo, etc.)
 - GIS software (ArcGIS, etc.)
 - emerging technologies (digital media, 3D printing, AR/VR/MR, etc.)
 - presentation and recording technologies (One-Button Studio, podcasting, etc.)
 - digital publishing strategies, platforms, software, and tools
 - archival and preservation strategies
 - resources in other disciplinary areas, and
 - rare and unique materials in relevant disciplines
- arranging for access to team meeting spaces, technology, and presentation spaces in libraries
 - advising on collaboration tools and technologies
 - providing additional perspective, alternative approaches, and insights in team communications

U-LINK Librarians may also facilitate engagement with members of the community, share knowledge about grant and funding opportunities, and contribute specialized areas of knowledge, such as particular research methodologies or language expertise. In conversation with the U-LINK Librarian, team members may discover even more points of connection and opportunities to collaborate.

Librarians on all three campuses (Medical, Marine & Atmospheric Sciences, and Coral Gables) are participating and meet once a month to share ideas, challenges, and inspiration. Four librarians in Lisa's department are members of U-LINK teams, including Lisa herself. Librarians participate in the aforementioned SOTS training and attend all team meetings and outings. Participating in these teams has been a growth experience – librarians have never before been part of projects where they did not already have a predefined role. This uncertainty is exhilarating for some, unnerving for others. As a liaison librarian team leader, Lisa is coaching librarians on how to deal with uncertainty and how to assert their membership on their teams. Another result of collaboration with the Office of Research is that Susan invited Kelly to serve on the U-LINK Action Team that reviews and ranks the grant applications, thus, ensuring that the Libraries have a voice in the selection process itself.

The roots of this collaboration with the Office of Research stretch back to 2015-2016, when we developed a simple experiment called the "Conversation Project" [Tsang, n.d.]. We asked for willing liaison librarians to engage their faculty members in substantive conversation using the following questions as prompts:

- What are the challenges you are facing as a researcher and teacher? How is the field changing?
- What are emerging areas of emphasis for the department?
- What are your hopes for library support?

Martin Tsang, then a Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR) Fellow at UML, spearheaded this initiative and presented on this project at national conferences about the future of liaison librarianship hosted by ARL. [A trained anthropologist, Martin has now become a curator in UML's Cuban Heritage Collection.] In the initial experiment, more than a dozen librarians participated and approximately fifty conversations took place. To link our librarians to the work happening at the national level even further, Lisa led a UM delegation of liaison librarians to Atlanta for an ARL Library Liaison Institute. Our sense is that the work of the "Conversation Project" establishes the groundwork for the U-LINK partnership with the Office of Research that later emerged. Planning and implementation of a Faculty Research Commons [n.d.] on the third floor of Richter Library, where the liaison librarian and digital scholarship librarians offices are located, will provide additional opportunities for our partnership with the Office of Research to evolve.

Conclusion

Librarian roles are changing as a result of these new programs that have emerged primarily out of dean-level strategic conversations with non-library units on campus. Librarians are spending less time answering reference questions, creating online bibliographic guides, teaching one-shot instructional sessions, and selecting resources to purchase for collections. Librarians are spending more time collaborating with new campus partners to deliver coordinated services (Learning Commons), develop co-curricular opportunities for students and peer-to-peer assistance programs (Library Research Scholars, Adobe Scholars, and Peer Research Consultants), and participate on interdisciplinary research teams. Positive results include greater visibility of librarians on campus, increased student and faculty use of library spaces and emerging services to support learning and research, and deepening integration with the University's strategic priorities.

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