

## **AC 2009-149: COLLABORATION WITH FACULTY: WHAT THEY DON'T TEACH YOU IN LIBRARY SCHOOL**

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# **Collaboration with faculty: What they don't teach you in library school**

## **Abstract**

For a new librarian, it can be challenging to make connections on campus in order to fulfill liaison duties and foster new opportunities for collaboration. Fostering partnerships can be particularly difficult if the library has no pre-existing relationship with an academic department.

This paper will review collaboration with faculty from the perspective of a new librarian. The case report will provide new and veteran librarians with effective methods and approaches to collaborating with faculty, such as creating unique opportunities to network, becoming more visible, and creating lasting partnerships on campus.

## **Introduction**

It can take a new librarian years to establish productive relationships with faculty in order to succeed at the liaison work required by academic librarianship and which support career advancement. The portions of the library school curriculum that address collaboration and networking do not sufficiently prepare the new librarian for the challenges he or she will encounter in the real-work environment.

Networking and becoming more visible, thereby promoting not only yourself but library services as well, can be integral to your success on the job. Extending your outreach efforts campus-wide, increasing your visibility, and creating new opportunities to collaborate and network with faculty will support your position as a liaison, and enhance your portfolio for promotion and tenure.

This paper will present the author's own personal experiences as a new librarian working in the academic engineering library field for the last four years. The author will recommend strategies and approaches for both new and experienced librarians to initiate and/or improve their existing collaborative efforts with faculty. It will conclude with a list of recommendations, including how best to facilitate this transition from school into the workplace, and will suggest ways to support the new librarian's collaborative efforts. Lastly, it will present ideas for using collaborative web technologies that can create technology-enhanced liaison activities.

## **Background**

The Sexton Design & Technology Library is one of five libraries at Dalhousie University, in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. It is located on the Sexton Campus, and serves the faculties of Engineering, Architecture, and Planning.

The Sexton Campus has a rich history, spanning over 100 years. A small campus, with approximately 1,900 students, it makes up about twelve percent of Dalhousie University's total enrollment of approximately 16,000 students. The Sexton Campus began as an independent institution. In 1907 the Nova Scotia Government passed the Technical Education Act and established the school as the Nova Scotia Technical College. Later renamed the Technical University of Nova Scotia, the school amalgamated with Dalhousie University in 1997, and was designated the Sexton Campus. Physically disconnected from the rest of the University, the campus culture is informal. The library shares space on the Sexton Campus in a building with the engineering departments. The proximity of the library to the departments it serves places the library in an advantageous position and is unique within Dalhousie's library system.

Librarians at Dalhousie are part of the faculty union, hold the rank of Professional Librarian and are subject to the tenure process. Professional librarian ranks are Librarian I, II, III, and IV. Professional librarians are evaluated for reappointment, promotion and appointment without term based on the following: effectiveness of performance, ability to apply the principles of librarianship, ability to relate to users and staff, teaching ability, contributions to the library system, the profession, and professional development. For professional librarians working in public services, information literacy, and collection development, fostering connections and collaborating with faculty in order to build specific programs is crucial to success on the job, and supports the career portfolio required for promotion.

For the purposes of this paper, a "new" librarian is defined as someone who graduated from a library program within the last five years. The author graduated from Dalhousie University's School of Information Management with a Master of Library and Information Studies in 2005. She completed a two-year internship at the Sexton Library and started working there professionally upon graduation. She is one of three librarians on the Sexton Campus. All of her subject specialties fall under the Department of Process Engineering and Applied Science, and include: Biological Engineering, Environmental Engineering, Chemical Engineering, Food Science, and Petroleum Engineering. Her liaison duties include reference, research, collections, information literacy, and more recently, coordinating promotion and outreach activities for the library.

## **Collaboration**

"Alliance, partnership, networking, relationship, teamwork, collaboration, coordination, cooperation, liaison, building bridges-no matter what you call it, these words describe creating connections with the rest of the campus community."<sup>1</sup> Cook goes on to describe collaboration as

a more structured relationship that is created to solve a common problem. Collaboration goes beyond coordination by adding a structure that ensures a desired alliance actually

meets its goal. Coordination involves working individually toward a common goal, whereas collaboration involves a more formalized structure.<sup>1</sup>

Librarianship is a profession that thrives on collaboration. Librarians are constantly connecting and cooperating with others because a collaborative spirit permeates the profession.<sup>2</sup> Much of your success with liaison work as a new librarian depends on how well you collaborate with faculty.<sup>3</sup> Academic librarianship now puts more emphasis on information literacy and rapid technological change, and librarians have taken a more active role in the education of college students.<sup>1</sup> Their liaison work should address more than just collection development, and should include research consultations, and partnerships in research and teaching.<sup>4</sup>

Librarians need to focus on collaborations with faculty that lead to mutually beneficial outcomes such as promotion of library resources, increased library usage, and higher quality research. Ultimately, these outcomes will lead to success with day-to-day liaison duties, and to the development of peer-level relationships with faculty. “Factors that support successful collaboration include shared understanding of goals, mutual respect, tolerance and trust, competence for the task at hand by each of the partners and ongoing communication.”<sup>5</sup>

### **Library School Curriculum and Networking**

“Networking is an important type of connection that primarily consists of the exchange of mutually benefited information.”<sup>1</sup>

While in library school the author always felt a certain disconnect with idea of networking as it relates to collaboration with faculty and liaison work. The school curriculum did not include it. Library school networking activities were informal. She participated in a program called Professional Partnering, a mentoring program that offers students the chance to pair up with library professional; however it was not mandatory to participate. During her internship at the Sexton Library, she was not required to network with faculty. Networking between librarians and teaching faculty happened behind the scenes. Practical, albeit informal, networking experiences as a student were centered on the job hunt and meeting other librarians.

Although informal experience with networking can be a basis for a more formal type of connection<sup>1</sup>, in library school, it would have been beneficial had more emphasis been placed on the importance of networking and collaborating in a liaison role, and why it is vitally important to your success on the job. “To be an effective collaborator, you must learn to think of yourself as a networker.”<sup>6</sup>

## Challenges in the Workplace as a New Librarian

In the workplace, librarians are faced with the responsibility of creating connections and working collaboratively with faculty. “In collaboration endeavors, a librarian has to be the introducer and the catalyst, as many faculty are not aware of existing options.”<sup>5</sup> It has been a process of “learning by doing”<sup>7</sup> that demands enthusiasm for self education.<sup>5</sup>

Although you can apply what you learn in library school about networking with peers and fellow professionals, in the work place the experience is very different. In library school, the learning experience is collaborative and opportunities for networking already exist; in the work place, you have to initiate those connections yourself.<sup>8</sup> A study of new librarians transitioning into the workplace found that one area frequently mentioned as an area of difficulty is establishing effective relationships with faculty. Survey respondents identified outreach to faculty and library instruction as areas that presented difficulties. It is probably not a coincidence that neither are commonly included in library training or orientation programs.<sup>9</sup>

One of the biggest challenges the author faced as a new liaison librarian was her unfamiliarity with how to approach faculty. Without a mentoring program, and lacking documentation or a guide to liaison work provided by the employer, new librarians are often left to learn much of the job informally, on his or her own initiative.<sup>9</sup> Although she spent her library school internship at the Sexton Library, and had acquired the subject knowledge before she began working there professionally, she was still relatively new to engineering and was brand new to librarianship and liaison work. Subject liaison work “poses a great challenge for beginners just coming out of the library school. Many new reference librarians have studied database searching, reference interviewing, and even collection database searching, but most schools do not offer a course specifically on the subject of liaison work.”<sup>7</sup>

Out of the five programs that the author is responsible for, only two had established a significant relationship with the libraries before she arrived. Her peers in the library guided her with regard to which ones to target, and offered advice concerning where to locate information regarding pre-existing programs. However, it was necessary to identify gaps and target programs that did not have a relationship with the library at all, had haphazard arrangements or had experienced unsuccessful attempts at collaborating with a subject librarian in the past.

When she first arrived on the job, her own expectations of what she should be able to accomplish in a short period of time were very high. She had no prior knowledge of the best ways to create connections and co-workers, though willing, were not always available to offer guidance. This proved to be a further challenge. In the first months after beginning her liaison position, faced with the task of integrating information literacy programs, she realized that a more helpful approach would be to alter the prevailing perception of what a library liaison can reasonably

accomplish. With this in mind, she worked towards building relationships with faculty by informing them of how her liaison work was going to be conducted, while at the same time meeting their individual needs.

### **Overcoming Challenges and Making Connections**

Working proactively and with enthusiasm contributes greatly to successful collaborations with faculty. On the Sexton Campus of Dalhousie University, it is true that “proactivity rather than negativity facilitates networking, coordination and collaboration.”<sup>5</sup> This, along with taking an informal approach to collaboration, benefits liaison work. The culture at the Sexton Campus is such that informality works more effectively; therefore, “informal communication can have greater impact than formal forms.”<sup>7</sup>

Maintaining a high level of professionalism enables the liaison librarian to gain credibility with faculty and strengthens connections with departments. Taking advantage of opportunities to collaborate can build and enhance working relationships within your academic institution, thus increasing opportunities for faculty to discover what librarians have to offer.<sup>8</sup>

The following strategies have proven helpful in fostering successful collaboration with faculty:

#### **Strategies for Preparing for Collaboration**

- Get to know your teaching faculty.
  - Send an email, or drop by their office.
  - Make an appointment with appropriate department heads to discuss the possibilities, and get on his/her regular departmental meeting agenda.
- Familiarize yourself with subject specialties/faculty research interests/publishers.
- Foster two-way communication.<sup>7</sup>
- Focus on the repeat customer, slowly expanding information literacy programs.
- Focus efforts on previously targeted programs, and expand those.
- Gain credibility with faculty through reference and research assistance-present yourself as the subject resource expert.
- Initiating is the key to creating opportunities.
- Never say no if someone else initiates.
- Start small, and don't take on too much too soon or expectations will run even higher.
- Realize that some connections will take time to establish and continue improving those.
- Experiment with collaborative web technologies.

## **Interpersonal and Communication Strategies**

- Teach people to treat you as they would any member of their department. Establish peer relationships with teaching faculty.
- Give everyone individualized attention (includes faculty and students); become their go-to. This will increase the number of referrals for classes, and grad student visits.
- Maintain a positive attitude and enthusiasm for libraries, instruction and reference.
- Show genuine interest in students, and student success.
- Explore different avenues of communication<sup>7</sup>, find out what individuals prefer.
- Take risks, and be persistent and assertive. Don't be afraid to say no, and then suggest alternatives.
- Establish boundaries with teaching faculty. Inform them how you would like to work with them. Find out what is mutually beneficial.

The following are the three primary strategies the author uses to encourage and foster collaboration with faculty. These have helped her to develop long-term relationships as peers.<sup>3</sup> When you network with faculty in these ways; you increase your personal contact and build rapport. These strategies will lead to greater opportunities for collaboration.<sup>6</sup>

### **A. Creating Opportunities to Network and Collaborate**

- Develop more in-depth relationships with faculty to open doors for instructional opportunities.<sup>3</sup>
  - Assist in the development of assignments for information literacy courses.
  - Never turn down an opportunity to guest lecture.<sup>5</sup>
- Attend faculty meetings, and student conferences.
- Participate in campus-wide activities and mingle.
- Invite faculty to contact you for research assistance. Be a “personal librarian.”<sup>6</sup>
- Never say no to an invitation to an informal lunch, or coffee.
  - Socialize with faculty to foster a more collegial and peer-level relationship

### **B. Becoming More Visible On and Offline**

Putting a face to the library is one way to become visible on campus. Informal communication is more effective in this regard. In some cases email is effective, but this “can reduce the possibility of establishing collegial relationships due to the absence of face-to-face meetings.”<sup>5</sup> “You can only do so much with publicity, sooner rather than later, you will have to meet your customers face-to-face.”<sup>10</sup> You can't always count on your faculty members coming into the library; therefore, you will have to leave the library and go to them.<sup>10</sup>

## Offline Presence

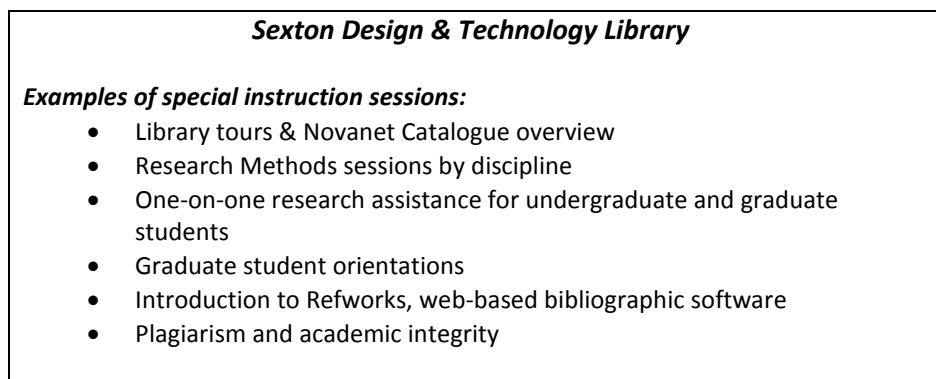
- Attend parties, campus events, extracurricular activities (lunches, drinks, student banquets).
- Attend a graduate student conference, or thesis defense.
- Get on the department meeting agenda every year to remind people who you are and what you do.
  - Approach new faculty members.
  - Educate faculty about what you do, and how you can work with them.
  - Go armed with an elevator speech, and a business card-sized handout outlining what you can do for them and their students (see Figure 1 (front), and Figure 2 (back))
- Always initiate conversation when you see your faculty members.
- Participate in campus-wide activities, and volunteer outside the library.
- Market your services to faculty outside the library with a pamphlet (see Figure 3), and follow up with an email or phone call.
- Invite faculty to your information literacy sessions.

## Other departments the author collaborates with on and off campus:

- Dalhousie University Communications and Marketing
- Communications and Marketing Manager, Faculty of Engineering
- Communications Officer, Dalhousie Libraries
- Dean of Undergraduate Studies, Faculty of Engineering

## Online Presence

- Increase your visibility through online collaborative environments such as *Facebook* and *Libguides*.
- Educate faculty about online environments, and alert them of new online features, for products such as *Libguides*.
- Send regular emails alerting faculty to new products and services.



**Figure 1**



**To arrange an instruction session, please contact me:**

**Sarah Jane Dooley**

Biological, Chemical, Environmental, Food Science and Petroleum

E-mail: sdooley@dal.ca

Phone: 494-3428

**Figure 2**

### ***Sexton Design & Technology Library Subject Specialists***

#### **What does a subject specialist do?**

- Maintains a Subject Guide web page on the Library's website  
Includes: links to journal indexes and abstracts, full text databases, e-journals, user guides, key reference sources, and selected web sites
- Selects books in their subject areas for the library's collection
- Assists library patrons with research queries at reference desk
- Instructs students in research methods and library resources and services

#### **What can your subject specialist do for you and your students?**

- Integrate information research with your curriculum
- Assist in defining student research topics
- Improve student work based on high quality information and solid research
- Ensure consistent use of documentation styles, while raising awareness of academic integrity

#### **Some examples of special instruction sessions include:**

- Library tours
- Introduction to Refworks, a web-based bibliographic software
- Plagiarism and academic integrity

To arrange an instruction session, contact your subject specialist.

**Figure 3**

### **C. Creating Lasting Partnerships On Campus**

Participation in campus-wide activities creates social opportunities and can foster collaboration as well. As librarians, we are in a unique position to become more involved by taking a leadership role.<sup>4</sup> Participating in these activities can also have a great impact on tenure and promotion.<sup>2</sup> Moore suggests the following:

...that you seek opportunities to interact with faculty outside of the library's hallowed walls, whether through task teams, or university-level committee work...you have an obligation to your library, to your university, and to your profession to demonstrate that you understand pedagogy, that you can add significantly to their students' research processes, and that you are their peer.<sup>3</sup>

Last year, the author was approached to participate in the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration of the Engineering School. She was asked to coordinate the displays for the weekend-long event. She agreed to become Chair of the Displays committee and thus gained experience with event planning and had the opportunity to work with colleagues from outside of the library. This experience helped to solidify her connections with faculty and fostered new connections with the Communications and Marketing Manager and administrators in the Faculty of Engineering. Subsequently, her partnership with the Communications and Marketing Manager for engineering has proven of considerable advantage with library promotion and outreach activities. This relationship continues to evolve.

#### **Recommendations**

Any library making a new hire should have a program in place to guide the new librarian through the first year or so of employment. A lot of what you learn about networking and collaborating with faculty is learned on the job; therefore, it would be very beneficial if a formal mentoring program existed. "In addition to collaborating with teaching faculty, formal mentoring programs and informal mentoring relationships with other library professionals can also play a powerful role in the work experiences of new hires."<sup>8</sup>

One method for creating more realistic expectations for new librarians is to establish a training program that presents a realistic understanding of what the job entails. Libraries "need to develop good strategies to help the new librarian deal with these surprises as they arise in the first several months of employment."<sup>9</sup> A more structured program that incorporates a series on collaborating with faculty as it relates to job performance could benefit both the new librarian and the library.<sup>9</sup>

Libraries could take the following recommendations into consideration in order to improve the experience of a new librarian transitioning from library school to a collaborative role as professional liaison librarian:

- Provide documentation for new librarians outlining the needs of the faculty, and include recommended readings.
- Create a set of guidelines and realistic expectations of new librarians.
- Remember that collaboration needs to happen among peers before it can be expanded outside the library. More experienced librarians should set a good example.
- If a mentoring program for new librarians does not exist in your workplace, consider formalizing one.
- Encourage new librarians to participate in a mentoring program through a national association such as ASEE-ELD, or SLA.

### **Other Recommendations**

#### **For The Library School Curriculum**

- Collaboration needs to be addressed in the curriculum, in the context of networking outside the profession and within the workplace.

#### **For Teaching Faculty**

- Once a connection is established, make an effort to maintain it.
- Work with your subject librarian to establish expectations.
- Think about how you could expand existing library programs.
- Keep in touch with your librarian on a regular basis.
- Spread the word! Tell your colleagues about a successful connection with your subject librarian.
- Keep an open mind when it comes to incorporating collaborative technologies into your library programs.

### **The Future of Collaboration: Exploring Web Technologies**

Because of the increasing importance of the liaison role of subject librarians, collaboration between librarians and teaching faculty will continue to grow. Our work will include more partnerships.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, this type of collaboration will change as technology evolves and presents innovative ways to network together.<sup>6</sup> Collaborative and social networking web technologies have the potential to foster new networking and collaboration opportunities between librarians and teaching faculty.

Utilizing several avenues of communication to reach out to faculty, such as RSS or blogs or online tutorials can be effective.<sup>7</sup> These online networking environments provide endless opportunities to increase a librarian's visibility on and off campus. The author's exploration into social networking technologies such *Facebook* as a means to connect with faculty and students has been an effective communication tool. *Facebook* adds to the variety of ways faculty and students can connect with you and the library. Making these types of connections possible increases her visibility on campus, and could potentially offer another way to collaborate with faculty. In the future, the author would like experiment with creating class groups within *Facebook*. Creating a *Facebook* fan page for the library is another way to increase your visibility on campus.

New web applications such as *Libguides* are making library resources even more accessible, and when given the opportunity, her faculty have been collaborative by suggesting content for them. *Libguides* could potentially offer another opportunity for collaboration with faculty if access were made available to them. For example, a faculty member and a liaison librarian could work together to create content for a specific course.

Dalhousie Libraries makes its Libguide widgets available through Blackboard Learning System (BLS) where faculty can choose to have their subject Libguide appear on their course pages. This is another example of how technology can be used to increase the visibility of the subject librarian and library resources. The onus is on the librarian to initiate this kind of innovative online collaboration. Educating teaching faculty about such tools could spark their interest and lead to a successful and unique collaborative project.

## **Conclusion**

During the last four years, the author has learned a lot about making successful connections with faculty. "Ongoing and effective communication is the lifeblood of a vibrant liaison program. Strive to foster two-way communication."<sup>7</sup> She has successfully improved faculty-library relationships, and increased her number of teaching and research assistance opportunities. Collaborative projects are now initiated by her teaching faculty because they know what to expect from her. These opportunities have enhanced her career portfolio and were no doubt a factor in her successful reappointment and promotion to Librarian II in the summer of 2007. The ongoing development of her liaison work will strongly support her application for appointment without term, and promotion to Librarian III in the fall of 2009.

The author learned most of what she knows about networking and collaboration since she began working professionally. Overcoming challenges, and establishing her own connections with departments, have been hard work, especially for someone lacking prior knowledge of how to conduct liaison work.

It would be beneficial if networking and collaboration as they apply to working with faculty were addressed in library school. Although “networking” was a popular activity in library school, it was not apparent to her then how important a role it would play in performing liaison work as an academic librarian. This recommendation extends to the workplace. If a mentoring program or documentation outlining expectations for a new librarian was available at the beginning of their liaison work, it could greatly ease the transition into the workplace, and enhance their work portfolio for promotion consideration.

Maintaining a high level of visibility on campus, creating opportunities to network and forging lasting partnerships with faculty are the key elements of a successful program of collaboration. The author markets herself as a valuable compliment to their work, and has earned their respect as a peer in that regard. She fully expects that the relationships she has established will strengthen and evolve, as will her exploration of new technologies that offer new and different ways to collaborate with faculty.

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