

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

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1. Introduction

The focus of this paper is a case study of the liaison model at the Humanities, Social Science and Education Library at Purdue University. In order to fully 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 and there was not adequate accommodations for collaborations and communication with newer services such as Digital Humanities, Data, GIS, Scholarly Communications and other services of interest to the academic community. In order to reach satisfactory solutions, the first task was to identify the strengths of the liaison library faculty in this unit and to embark on a process of re-envisioning the services using a change management model with full participation of all the liaison librarians with the Division Head. The Division Head and author of this paper started in this position in August of 2016 and we proposed the re-envisioned plan to the administration of the Libraries in early 2017. The implementation and ongoing assessment and modifications of the plan has started as of March 2017.

2. Background

In order to fully appreciate the challenges inherent in the liaison librarian role today, it is helpful to explore the history and the evolution of this role. In academic libraries, liaison librarians have traditionally served academic faculty in very siloed ways. In the 1960s the 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 and 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 and 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 patrons 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 and 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 the use and instruction of 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, data mining, 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 before, 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 all disciplines. (Jaguszewski & Williams, 2013) The role of the liaison is no longer standard and 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 and Education Library liaison program was not specifically about collection development, however, it became clear very quickly that the one element consistent in all the 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 Librarians) who do not perform collection development duties from the liaison librarians who do.

For many decades collections were carefully and meticulously acquired in academic libraries by experts in the field 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, says 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, May1, 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 suggests 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 the question 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 culture and vision of the College of Liberal Arts (CLA).

Communication and collaboration had become complex among siloed subject librarians and new outreach positions that have been created and is further impaired across library units due to how some of the specialized services are organized. Without effective means of communication and collaboration within library organizations, services are impaired. When collaboration works well it positively affects the output of an organization. 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 within the HSSE Division and among other library units was one of the motivating factors to challenge the current organizational structure.

When the liaison model was first envisioned and the role of bibliographer to 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. The typical hierarchical library organizational structures are no longer optimal to facilitate nimble change and complex collaborations. A rich body of literature exist 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 and hired the 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, was, however, part of the Humanities and Social Science Division. With this specialization in DH it became clear that additional siloes were being created and that communication and collaboration within the Humanities and Social Science Division in the library was not happening in a systematic and transparent way. Collaboration was also required across divisions since Digital Scholarship functions were being performed across at least nine different departments. (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.

3. Current model

In August of 2016 when the author started as the new Division Head for the Humanities, Social Science and 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 meeting among librarians were on issues of 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 departments across the libraries. The introduction of digital scholarship (digital humanities; data management; GIS, etc.) into library services units has had a significant impact on how liaison responsibilities have traditionally been conducted.

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 and Education Library we only have one Digital Humanities trained librarian 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 to me when the author visited the University of Rochester as part of a multi-institutional trip to learn more about digital humanities. I met with Prof. Morris Eaves, *Professor of English and Richard L. Turner Professor of Humanities and Director, A. W. Mellon Graduate Program in the Digital Humanities of the School of Arts & Sciences* and 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, organization of information and the application of metadata.

In her articles 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.

The effect of the siloed approach to liaison work where each librarian does collection development, library instruction, consultations with faculty, mentoring of students, referrals, troubleshooting, etc. has several shortcomings. Among these are that not all librarians have the same skills and interests to fulfill these required duties equally and that 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 a large part based on the goal to optimize the talents of our library faculty.

4. 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 in the College of Liberal Arts was hired in 2015 and he has embarked on a mission to re-envision that College and to re-affirm 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 and Education Library was further justified based on the changes being made in the College of Liberal Arts at Purdue University since libraries do not always embark on strategic changes based on new initiatives being developed campus-wide, 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 Science 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 and Social Sciences? 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. Re-conceptualizing our collection development practices to make sure our collections strengths mirror the research and pedagogical needs and nature of the colleges and departments that we serve is critical. 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 that are not currently up to date.

In order to address these concerns, the author asked the liaison librarians to consider the following question. “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 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 four hour-long meetings as well as a half-day retreat over a period of 6 weeks to discuss this question and understand the impact. In the meetings, we also identified the strengths of each library liaison and

acknowledged ways in which those strengths can be optimized while taking the issues of emerging digital scholarship needs into consideration.

5. Change Management

At Purdue University Libraries in the Humanities and Social Sciences Division, we used a change management and 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 Zukauskas (Stripeikis & Žukauskas) describes five 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 and Education Library re-envision implemented a change management model which included goal setting. The goal was to address the siloes that had developed and to find new ways to interact with our colleagues who provide digital scholarship services, and most specifically in Digital Humanities, but also in GIS and Data 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 and also to acknowledge weaknesses that we want to minimize. Our goal was to think creatively and not be 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 and Education Library were participating fully in the change process and had opportunities to discuss and debate and shape the change; a plan for change was agreed upon and communication was very clear. Communication started when the author was hired in August 2016 and she starting 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 get a more clear understanding of the needs of that College. The conversations also included discussions with the Digital Humanities librarian and with colleagues in the departments providing Digital Scholarship services. Once the author had a clear understanding of some of the challenges in communication and collaboration and identified the siloes that contributed to these challenges she met with all library faculty to begin to brainstorm about how this 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 with the librarians on and that it needed to be owned jointly versus imposing a solution.

With the 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. It was not a structured meeting, but rather a free-flowing meeting where 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 were not fully explored in the first meeting or that 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 break down the siloes 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 and we agreed on a new model.

6. New Model

In this new model (See Table 2), we created a Collections Ethnographer position to help us look across all disciplines and to understand the departments that we serve and the current and changing academic needs of the institution and built a collaboration model to allow librarians to work together more effectively.

We agreed on a model that will meet the requirement to break down silos and will optimize the strengths of each individual. In this model we create a Collections Ethnographer position and a Collections Budget Analyst. These two librarians 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 as 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 the 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 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, 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 Herubel, has also published extensively in the domain of disciplinary cultures. Because of this very unique and 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 weekly e-mail instructional material to all department. The government information specialist will continue to be responsible for government information resources as well as other related disciplines.

One of the goals of the University Libraries is to have closer collaboration with the Archives and Special Collections and one of our liaisons will work half-time in the Archives, which helps meet the goal and also acknowledges the interest of the librarian in archives and local and regional history. The Digital Humanities liaison specialist will provide services across disciplines in the Humanities and Social Sciences. The DH librarian will collaborate closely with the liaison librarians, and is already strongly involved in collaborations with our Archives and 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 communications, 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 want to optimize, but the former model in which every library faculty member has subject disciplines for which they are responsible in a “siloeed” 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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Tables

Table 1 shows the organizational structure of Purdue University Libraries and the red-circled units all perform Digital Scholarship functions.

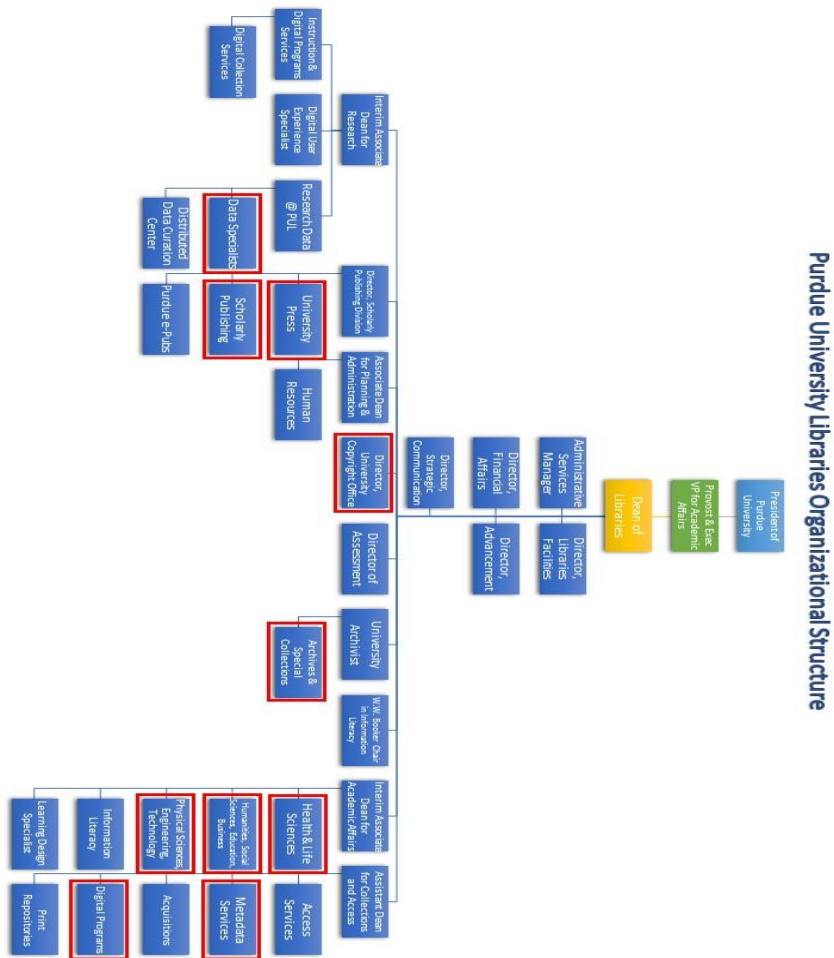


Table 2 shows the former liaison model for the Humanities, Social Science and Education Library at Purdue University Libraries. This model require that each librarian have liaison duties that include collection development, teaching, consultation, curriculum design and other activities associated with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

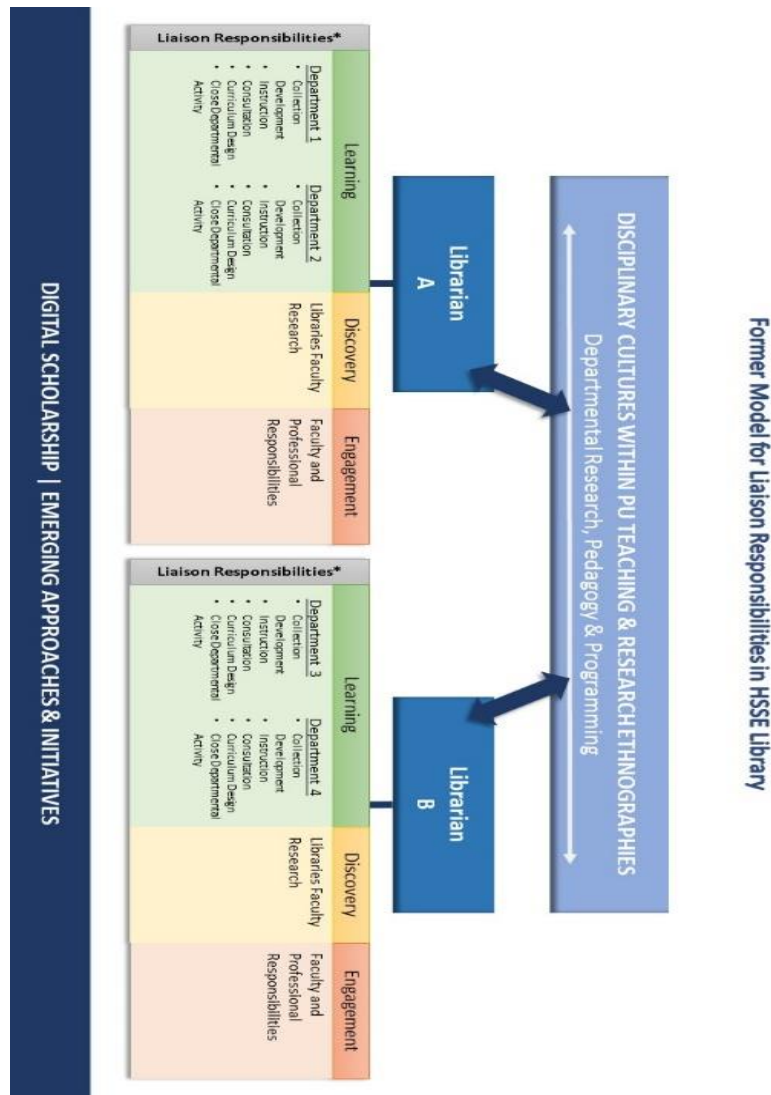


Table 3 shows the current liaison model for the Humanities, Social Science and Education Library at Purdue University Libraries. In this model, collection development duties become more centralized under the direction of two librarians with very specific skill sets, which naturally stimulates more communication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

