November 7, 2018

Dangerous Liaisons: Brainstorming the 21st Century Academic Liaison

Dr. Antje Mays, University of Kentucky

Available at: https://works.bepress.com/antjemays/33/
Dangerous Liaisons

Brainstorming the 21st century academic liaison

Antje Mays
Director of Collections
University of Kentucky Libraries

Presented November 7, 2018
About this Lively Session

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

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

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

Background
Academic Liaisons – a brief trajectory

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

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

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

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

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

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

- Economic & digital realities:
  - financial
  - digital ecosystem;
  - changing nature of:
    - research,
    - teaching,
    - learning.
Library / Academic Liaison Roles: Large-scale game changers, ctd.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“"No one liaison can do it all”:

- subject expertise and functional expertise.
- distinct yet interdependent.
- team approach rather than individuals.
Liaison Roles – Recommendations, ctd:

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

➤ Move away from “inputs” – for example:
  ➤ Number of sessions taught,
  ➤ Number of books ordered,
  ➤ Number of contacts.

➤ Instead, aim for qualitative context-sensitivity.
Liaison Roles – Recommendations, ctd:

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

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

- Focus on university indicators
  - Increase demand for library as strategic partner in productivity and impact measures.
Common themes from small group discussions

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Live polls – 11 questions in 4 areas:

- **Basics:** organizations, roles, liaison setup – Q.1-3

- **Job description exercises:** current job ads’ description of liaison roles – Q.4-5

- **Reflection exercises on own liaison programs:** strengths, pain points, support, administrative strategies – Q.6-10

- **Closing thoughts:** key takeaways – Q.11
Interactive poll results:

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

- Acquisitions: 9%
- Administrator: 18%
- Collections: 18%
- Subject bibliographer: 15%
- Subject instructor: 15%
- Data librarian: 0%
- Research librarian: 9%
- Vendor: 0%
- Other: 15%
3. Basics: Does your organization have a liaison program?
4. Job description exercise: What important functions are missing?
5. **Job description exercise:**
What stated functions are superfluous / distractions?

- **Selection, collections**
- **De-selection of materials**
- **Supporting technology for the whole library.**
- **There is too much here. What percentage of time on liaison vs technology**
- **General reference desk**
- **Assistance with library technology; development and assessment of policies and procedures**
- **"coordinate with database vendors"**
- **Collection development policies**

Additional notes:
- It's unclear if this job description has any subject/department liaison responsibility. Could be inferred, but it's not clear.
- Too much specialization liaison will end up with heavy instruction load that skews job role for certain time of semester or quarter.
6. Reflection: What are core competencies for liaisons?
7. Reflection: What works well in your liaison program?

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

- High librarian turnover
- Wild West - Other librarians reaching out to liaison programs without informing the actual liaison.
- Liaisons are overworked; much campus growth, same number of subject liaisons even as # of functional liaisons continues to grow. Sustainability!
- Work overload
- Balancing between changing to meet current campus needs and constantly pivoting so quickly that we lose sight of core needs and values
- High workload due to increasing instruction needs
- Lack of mentoring for new liaisons
- Liaison is being asked to represent everything the library does
- Difficulty w teamwork and collaboration, building new relationships w faculty, lack of awareness of new expectations around assessment, outreach, project management/time management and planning
- Different liaisons doing different things and not sharing ideas to collective group.
- Large portfolios, competing priorities, lack of time to excel in multiple areas
- Knowledge
- Not enough time to focus on faculty needs given all my other responsibilities. There is not a culture at my current institution of having close ties with the faculty. Our liaison faculty role is simply another title we have but with no responsibility
9. Reflection: What support do you need for your liaison role?
10. Reflection: How can administrators help liaisons?

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

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

More background research:
Selected readings
Additional Readings

Additional Readings, ctd.

Questions?

Antje Mays
University of Kentucky Libraries