REPORT OF THE TASK FORCE ON LIAISON RELATIONSHIPS

By

Rutgers University Libraries
Task Force on Liaison Relationships

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A strong relationship between the University Libraries and the wider University community is fundamental to the ultimate success of the Libraries' mission. The heart of the Libraries' mission is to provide library resources and services in support of the research, instructional, and public service programs of the University.

Among the goals in the Rutgers University Libraries Goals (1987) is: "To maintain close and continuous communication and liaison with academic faculties through systematic consultation with individuals, departments and schools."

The Libraries' service philosophy requires librarians to reach out to users in order to: (1) identify their information needs; (2) identify the problems they encounter in attempting to fulfill these needs; (3) convey and demonstrate the range of services available in the library; and (4) bring back to the library an appreciation and understanding of user needs and the methods and tools of scholarship and instruction.

Based on a literature review (see attached references), a survey among RUL subject specialists (see enclosed survey form and results), and discussion by the members of the Task Force on the Liaison Relationship, we submit this report for further consideration. The Task Force recognizes that all librarians have a responsibility for liaison activities but our focus is on the subject specialist, who is on the front line in the liaison relationship.

GOALS AND COMPONENTS OF EFFECTIVE LIAISON RELATIONSHIPS

Library liaison activities include those communication activities that establish and maintain a mutual understanding about library resources and services among librarians, academic departments, faculty and students.

The goals of an effective faculty liaison program are:

I To render direct and effective aid to University research and scholarship and to assist faculty members, as appropriate, in obtaining resources for their research and teaching;

II To enhance effective communications among central library administrators, directors, subject specialists and various library groups;

III To raise the Libraries' visibility on campus through "marketing" library services and to promote the image of the library as the intellectual heart of the University.
The major components of a successful liaison relationship are: a user orientation; effective channels of communication; cooperation between library units; and the continuing development of subject expertise among the selectors.

INDIVIDUAL ROLES IN LIAISON RELATIONSHIPS

Many members of the Rutgers University community have roles to play in library liaison relationships. The nature of an individual's role depends on the position(s) of that individual in the University. In the following, we list those positions and describe the role the individuals in those positions should play in the liaison relationship.

Subject Specialists

Subject specialists are the key element in the liaison relationship. They proactively inform academic users about library resources, operations, services and policies. They also represent the collection/resource needs of the users in the development and implementation of library operations, services, and policies.

Public Services Librarians

Public services librarians inform users about library resources, operations, services and policies. They bring users' perspectives to the subject selectors. When appropriate, they also direct users to subject specialists for further assistance.

Library Directors

Library unit directors foster a library environment where liaison relationships are deemed important and are supported. They encourage liaison relationships when working with University administrators and faculty members. They interact directly with appropriate administrators, such as deans, department chairs, and directors of programs or research centers, to exchange relevant information. They communicate concerns between the central library administration and librarians and relevant faculty.

They handle complaints from faculty members and other University users. This involves analyzing the complaint, supplying information about library services, budget, and personnel, and seeking a solution if possible or at least to produce a better understanding of the situation.
Central Library Administrators

Central library administrators communicate between the Libraries and upper-level University administrators on budgets and policies. They present library needs to the University administration. They gather and distribute information that can best be gathered on a system-wide basis. They provide a backup and resource for librarians in the course of their contacts with faculty. In addition, they communicate major library innovations and policy initiatives directly to the university faculty as a whole.

Members of University Committees (including: New Brunswick Faculty Council Library Committee, University Senate Educational Policy Committee, Committee on Standards and Priorities, Student Advisory Committee, Faculty of Arts and Sciences-Camden (FAS-C) Courses of Study Committee, FAS-C Library Committee, Camden School of Business Library Committee, Camden Deans Council, Newark Campus-Wide Library Committee, Faculty of Arts and Sciences-Newark (FAS-N) Library Committee, FAS-N Courses of Study Committee, Newark Deans Council)

Non-librarian members of University committees that deal with library issues also play an important part in the liaison relationship. They deliver information about the academic process and report on library matters to their constituents. They provide an alternate channel of communication between University users and the Libraries.

ROLE OF RELATED LIBRARY GROUPS IN LIAISON RELATIONSHIPS

The following related library groups deal with issues beyond the library unit and coordinate action between library units.

Selector Groups

Provide a mechanism for facilitating discussions between selectors in different libraries with responsibilities in related subject areas. The groups are responsible for interpreting and implementing collection development policies from a system-wide viewpoint in their areas of responsibility.

Bibliographic Instruction Coordinators Group

The BI Coordinators Group makes contact with administrative offices to provide a forum for bibliographic instruction and
encourages further integration of bibliographic instruction into the curriculum. This supplement the subject specialists' contacts with academic departments.

Standing Advisory Committees

Provide a forum for the free flow of information between librarians and library units in public services, collection development, and technical and automated services issues. The committees helps ensure the entire library faculty is well-informed and involved with library issues of interest to the academic community.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FROM THE TASK FORCE

The Task Force feels that frequent and open communication on an equal footing between the Libraries and academic departments is the best way to establish and maintain effective liaison relationships. Faculty wish to feel that collections in their areas are being developed by bibliographer experts, the more this is demonstrated the better working relationships can be developed and maintained. The roles identified above make clear the responsibilities of various individuals and groups in the liaison relationship. The Task Force offers five recommendations for enhancing a close relationship between Libraries and University community. The Task Force has devised a "toolbox" of suggested methods and proposals to provide some specific means to implement the recommendations.

1. Every year each library shall contact each appropriate academic department and review the channels of communication between the department and the library.

2. Contact with faculty can be made via e-mail, memos, telephone calls, or face-to-face contact (formal and informal). Informal person-to-person contact is an effective way to disseminate academic information to the Libraries and library information to the departments. Such kind of informal occasion could be: working lunches, coffee breaks, holiday parties, graduation celebration, retirement dinners, etc..

3. Subject specialists should, when possible, attend faculty departmental meetings and attempt to get on departmental mailing lists. Subject specialists may visit the faculty in their offices, contact department heads to learn about their problems and academic changes, talk with deans, chairs, liaisons, and secretaries. Contact with faculty
should be in accord with the department culture and should fit the style of the librarian.

Libraries or subject specialists can produce inexpensive but significant house organs such as newsletters, e-mail bulletin board, or faculty library handbooks. Keep them brief, informal, and newsy.

Encourage department chairs and academic administrators to recognize the importance of the liaison relationship and the individual appointed as library liaison as an important resource person. The Libraries may send awards or acknowledgement to the departments and liaisons, or organize special receptions or events to acknowledge the liaisons.

Convince departments that investing time and energy in the provision of library services is worthwhile.

Share common experiences with faculty by attending general cultural and social events and related seminars.

Provide a list of selectors by subject in every library unit to all faculty and academic administrators and inform faculty that the libraries work together as a system, not independently of one another.

Give personal recognition to faculty members on the publication of books, such as a note congratulating them and informing them of receipt of a copy in the library.

Selectors should deliver lectures to individual classes in their subject areas on the use of the library, library automation, online searching, etc., and encourage faculty members to share responsibility in teaching library use to students.

Offer library instruction to faculty and graduate students to keep them conversant with the resources and services available. Conduct open houses for new faculty and graduate students.

Seek opportunities for collaborative teaching projects or grants with teaching faculty members to incorporate BI into their courses.

Continue participating in University orientation programs for TAs, RAs, and international students, and train the students to become bibliographical assistants to the faculty.
Provide special bibliographic services for special research needs, such as: SDI service, table of contents service and current awareness services.

II Integrate the faculty into all stages of the collection development process.

# Make all of the faculty aware that they can and should participate in the selection process.

# Ensure that the faculty is conversant with the Libraries' collection's strengths and weaknesses. Methods of ensuring this are to compile and distribute appropriate journal lists (in cooperation with serials departments), new acquisitions lists, or library research handbooks and topic guides.

# Keep faculty informed on allocation issues. Faculty members should be informed when collection funds are available.

# Encourage faculty members participation in collection decision making on selection of current materials, retrospective purchasing, conversion of materials into other formats such as microfilm, replacement of missing materials, etc. Consult with liaisons on the acquisition of expensive and/or marginal titles.

# Consult with liaisons or appropriate faculty on cancellation or evaluation targeted serials which were originally recommended by them or are in their area. Send a list of specific titles for their consideration. Keep the faculty informed all through the cancellation process.

# Use faculty members as consultants for collection development in their areas of expertise. Send listings of newly published journal titles to appropriate faculty for purchase evaluation.

III The selectors should be familiar with the basic curriculum, the courses of study and supplementary reading required of undergraduates, the thesis topics undertaken by graduate students, and the research interests of faculty.

# Obtain information about academic priorities of sub-fields within academic departments. Identify individual faculty research interests and set-up a profile of appropriate faculty research interests. The data can be obtained through graduate catalogs and the database of the Faculty Annual Survey, and can be supplemented by sending questionnaires to faculty members.
Central Library Administration may establish a standardized form for subject specialists to obtain information from departments to supplement information from the Faculty Annual Survey database. The form should include items such as:

1. size of faculty
2. size of student population: undergrads/grads
3. new programs
4. new courses
5. new faculty
6. new research interests
7. new research centers or labs

Central Library Administration may develop a standardized questionnaire form for faculty surveys. Subject specialists will use the form to set up a profile of faculty research interests. The following items may be included in:

1. professional subject interests
2. current research projects
3. course names
4. other responsibilities
5. foreign languages
6. academic rank

The selectors shall keep current in their subjects.

Selectors can keep current by reading current works in the field or by discussions with faculty.

Keep abreast of faculty research interests, their professional commitments and work with individual faculty on their research, as appropriate.

All librarians and library units shall cooperate in liaison relationships.