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## Liaison Librarianship

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## CHAPTER 6

# Liaison Librarianship

John Glover

After reading this chapter, you will be able to:

- describe common qualifications and responsibilities of liaisons in order to determine whether liaisonship is suitable for your needs and interests;
- articulate skills and expertise requisite for liaison work in order to evaluate your ability to provide services most effectively;
- establish a plan to gain relevant skills and expertise in order to compete successfully for liaison job openings;
- connect with faculty in their areas of responsibility in order to facilitate new outreach and deepen existing relationships;
- develop and assess support and outreach initiatives in order to identify gaps and provide greater support for patrons; and
- appraise liaison work in order to advocate for promotion/tenure.

## Introduction

Liaison librarian positions often share features that may look similar in list format, but which can in practice vary tremendously from institution to institution. Key questions to ask in understanding individual liaison positions advertised via venues like the ALA JobLIST include:

- Which units, departments, or schools will be your responsibility? Will you share responsibility with other units inside the library or for interdisciplinary programs?
- Where is the position physically based? In a central, subject, or department library?
- Is collections work discussed, including budgets or types of materials?
- Is the position located in a division focused on reference, instruction, or outreach? One focused on collections or scholarly communications? A separate unit with a “matrix,” reporting to different supervisors for different duties?
- Is the position part of a team/pod of librarians with similar disciplinary responsibilities?
- How many other liaison librarians work at the institution? This, along with the range of their assignments, can indicate the level of focus of your work.

- Does this position have a stake in strategic initiatives at the library that are aligned with the currently paramount concerns in academic libraries?

## Qualifications

A cursory reading of advertisements for liaison librarian positions might lead you to conclude that such positions vary little because they suggest a similar range of qualifications sought in candidates. Perhaps more than with some other types of librarian position descriptions, it's important to pay attention to distinctions between the "requireds" and the "desireds." The distinctions between what the library considers essential, as opposed to nice to have, can offer valuable clues about the position and how it fits into priorities of the library.

A commonly sought qualification for liaison positions is subject area knowledge, typically embodied in some sort of degree in the subject area. Depending on the institution, this can range from a bachelor's degree to a doctorate. How narrowly defined the requirement is may correlate with the specificity of the position ("American History Librarian" versus "Humanities Reference Librarian" versus "Liaison to Classics, Economics, and Kinesiology"), the extent to which the library feels deep subject knowledge is necessary in order to perform the duties associated with the position, or whether the library is desirable enough as an employer to command higher levels of education.

Some liaison positions require a subject degree, some a library degree, some both, but almost none require neither. The question of whether a liaison librarian should have a subject degree, and of what level, is not unlike the question of whether academic librarians should be required to have MLS-type degrees. The differences between "subject librarian," "area studies librarian," "liaison librarian," and myriad other titles can be small or large, but all of them are tied to areas of knowledge, and some institutions may, for a range of reasons, opt to hire focusing on a subject degree rather than the library degree, though in such instances, libraries, archives, or museum studies credentials will not be a hindrance and should not dissuade you from applying for a position.

Developing subject knowledge is an ongoing process, not "one and done." You may have opportunities while interviewing to indicate how you keep abreast of developments in the subject area(s) relevant to the position. This process will continue after you land the job, in terms of learning the landscape at the institution, and it will continue thereafter for as long as you have a position where subject area expertise is relevant. Typical strategies for current awareness range from use of RSS, hashtags, or similar technologies; attending subject area conferences; identifying and following key journals in your field(s); regularly perusing tables of contents and abstracts of those journals; studying vendor catalogues; following the online presence of influencers in the field; and pursuing relationships with subject area experts who can directly or indirectly inform you of current developments.

A basic qualification for undertaking liaison work is understanding the work of liaisons. While seemingly oxymoronic, this awareness is lacking more frequently in candidates than one might expect. Below you'll find some discussion of typical liaison responsibilities, but it behooves anyone engaged in this kind of work to study the activities of currently working liaisons. This can be carried out indirectly via analysis of one or more liaisons' scholarly activity, curriculum vitae, and web presence, or directly via one-on-one interaction. You may have a position as a library school student or intern that affords you ready access to liaison librarians, but whether or not, consider reaching out to one or more liaisons for an informational interview to get their perspectives on their work, patrons, etc. Individual liaisons' perspectives will vary, though you may detect similarities among liaisons serving similar disciplines or working at the same institution, but by triangulating, you can get a useful picture.

### ↳ Try This:

- Identify librarians holding your dream jobs at this time, at mid-career, and at the end of your career. Scout their CVs and list the qualifications you would need to develop to do these jobs.
- Locate ten to twenty job descriptions of interest to you, cut and paste the duties, responsibilities, and/or qualifications from their full descriptions, and dump the contents into a word cloud generator.
- Conduct an informational interview with a currently working liaison librarian and ask which skills she considers most important for day-to-day work, as well as how she keeps her skills up to date.

## Responsibilities

As you read earlier in this book, the nature of library work in the academy is evolving. So, too, is the academy itself, as well as the physical and virtual environments that the library occupies, and liaison librarians have necessarily evolved as well. That said, there are enough similarities, or appearance of similarity, that you may, if you are a liaison long enough, be variously referred to as “the Physics Librarian,” “a Reference Librarian,” “one of the Outreach Librarians,” “a Research Bibliographer,” or “a Public Services Librarian” while never once changing jobs.

All of the potential job titles a liaison may have, however—and even though each of those jobs may have notable differences, or one have evolved from another—does not mean that there aren't similar duties that accrue to the positions. Most liaisons do some combination of facilitating communication between the library and one or more subject area units; general or subject-focused reference or research support; general or subject-focused library instruction; collections work; creation of print, digital, or display content to support the above; or programming or event running.

The kind of work that gives the name to this type of librarianship is only rarely used in daily conversation by most people: “liaising.” (Side note: the word “liaison” is pronounced differently from place to place, and I’ve heard it variously pronounced as LEE-eh-zahn, lee-EH-zahn, LYE-EH-zuhn, and otherwise.) Liaising consists of communicating between your academic unit, including its constituent members, and the library. Different liaisons pursue different tools for this, but generally some combination of targeted email, print or electronic newsletters, and various kinds of in-person contact.

Liaisons regularly engage in one kind or another of reference work in some combination of all the usual media (desk, chat, text, phone, teleconference, etc.). Depending on the institution, this may be subject-specific, not, or both. Many liaisons provide some form of deeper support for research with pre-scheduled or on-call consultations, serving patrons at all levels, from novice first-year researchers with broad methodological questions to experienced, award-winning faculty researchers who have come across knotty problems. As subject experts, liaisons may occasionally be consulted for projects or questions with a connection to your area of expertise, from the smallest of personal projects that colleagues are pursuing to major initiatives involving your college or university’s administration.

Instruction responsibilities held by a liaison generally include some combination of subject-specific library instruction, general library instruction, and workshops of one kind or another. This instruction may go by the name of “information literacy,” “bibliographic instruction,” or other terms, depending on the institution, how the library has or has not adopted ACRL’s *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*, etc. Liaison librarians may engage in depth with for-credit courses in various ways, from pursuing various levels of embedding to co-instructing to being sole instructor of record.

Collections work takes place in different ways at different institutions. In some libraries, liaisons are principally responsible for building collections (print, digital, or otherwise) in their subject area(s), whereas in others they have an advisory or collaborative role with one or more collection development librarians. Collections work can entail use of a range of tools, approval plans, working groups, etc., but for the liaison it provides excellent opportunities. On the one hand, it can increase contact with patrons who have collections needs, and on the other, it can provide another venue for liaisons to use their expertise to create value in advance of need for patrons in their areas.

Many liaisons engage in some form of programming work, whether as part of departmental initiatives or tied directly to their subject areas. This can include organizing rotating displays of materials from the general or special collections or materials created by students or faculty. Events involving single speakers or panel discussions may or may not fall into the purview of given liaisons, but if so, can provide an opportunity to demonstrate library engagement with vital topics on campus. Other events of a more hands-on/workshop type, from unconferences to zine-making, can also fall into this category.

Liaison librarians' responsibilities may also vary based on institutional offerings outside of the library. Is instruction in LaTeX, a markup language frequently used for preparing scientific documents, something to be taught by librarians, a student organization, or a writing center? Should psychology graduate student researchers network with one another at a bar, in a grad student lounge, or at a research speed-dating event at the library? Should undergraduate music composition students learn about Creative Commons from their faculty, at a clinic put on by the library, or via a LibGuide on the subject? Are English faculty members interested in digital humanities served by a campus digital scholarship lab, or workshops at conferences, or is their liaison going to talk with them about where to get XML training?

These examples give some idea of the sorts of responsibilities that liaisons may have that don't automatically belong in one "territory" or another on campus. Taking on responsibility for offering such services is something generally done after consultation with your supervisor, fellow liaisons, or sometimes library administration. Whether you, personally, are able to offer it may depend on your current workload or skill set and on library strategic priorities. Note that taking on interesting or novel services does not necessarily mean that your workload is going to be adjusted to compensate, and it's important to consider your work-life balance before proposing new services. Whatever you are considering trying, consider running a pilot program to determine feasibility and factors relevant to sustaining the service.

### ↳ Try This:

- Read up on some libraries with strong liaison programs and study their lists of services and/or mission statement. Where do liaisons show up in the library's overall mission? What are liaisons supposed to do there?
- If you are currently a liaison, consider what areas of responsibility you would like to have that you currently do not. What would you have to learn how to do, or what kind of knowledge would you have to develop in order to perform successfully?
- Study future-of-academic-libraries projections, such as the ACRL 2030 Scenarios, and consider where liaisons fit into them. If you don't see them there, what would you have to do in order to develop your position into something that works for the future?

## Building Skills and Expertise

The skills and expertise needed to be effective as a liaison vary somewhat in depth from institution to institution, but typically they are of the same type. Occasionally a given liaison position may have duties outside the usual scope of other liaison

positions, or may lack a particular function or duty that is located elsewhere in their library, but liaisons generally engage in similar activities of the type described above.

An obvious place to look for skills and expertise in this area should not go unmentioned: library school. If you're reading this prior to going to library school, be aware that some schools have courses on, for example, business information, advanced humanities reference, or something along these lines, but not all do. Courses taught by practicing librarians in this area are, in my experience, generally of greater value than those taught by full-time LIS professors, whose expertise may be thorough and wide-ranging but often at some remove from current practice.

The pre-eminent source of professional development for post-degree librarians is the conference. At the conclusion of this chapter, you will find a longer discussion of conferences for liaisons, library-based or subject-area-focused, as well as advice on how to identify relevant ones for you. Leaving aside their role in affording opportunities to present, etc., conferences offer:

- workshops where attendees can gain or deepen skills
- informative sessions about new projects, research, or trends
- formal and informal opportunities to benefit from experts and/or colleagues' expertise
- showcases in various formats of the state of the art in liaison activities
- connections with vendors, publishers, designers, authors, etc. whose wares may be germane to your patrons
- previews of coming scholarship, publications, events, and more

Another way to build expertise in your subject areas is to do some work on it. This may be easier for liaisons in some areas than in others. Pursuing some kinds of scholarship in literary studies or history, for instance, may not require the access to materials or facilities that characterize much work in nuclear engineering or social work. That said, however, can you volunteer to code some data if you're the librarian for sociology? Participate in a focus group if you're the librarian for business or advertising? This kind of work can provide both a feel for and empathy with the needs of your patrons, as well as an understanding of where library resources come into play. Your liaison department contacts may or may not understand your perspective in this, and at times may consider some of the work in which you wish to engage as "below" your status as a librarian.

An often-overlooked set of skills, which can have a greater or lesser impact, depending on the model in use at a given institution, is the cluster of soft skills that constitute "customer service." This blend of behaviors, attitudes, and practices can be learned in many different venues, and it's undeniably important to win over patrons and convince them of the value of your and the library's services. Many people—including many academics and many librarians—rankle at drawing analogies between academic work and one of the building blocks of service industries, but this distaste is misplaced and inappropriate in the twenty-first century. Many

patrons are coming to academic libraries these days with extensive exposure to Wikipedia, Google, etc., and much less library exposure than anyone reading this has had. Their inclination to use libraries may be even less than in 1986, when Constance Mellon first described “library anxiety,” the idea that there are people, tools, and structures designed specifically to facilitate their success in a discipline at the library may be entirely new to them. This does not mean we should adopt “hard sell” methods or misconstrue our own place in the academic knowledge ecosystem, but developing and maintaining soft skills can dramatically improve our ability to connect our patrons with the resources that will enable them to excel.

It’s worth your time to explore a range of mode of delivery for your skill development. Some kinds of interaction and guided learning are more feasible in a one-hour conference workshop, others in an online presentation. Whatever mode of learning suits you best, or is most feasible for your particular situation, consider researching the instructor at least briefly to determine whether a given learning opportunity is a valuable use of your finite time. Does she have very current expertise in the area which she’ll be discussing? Do the pre-event publicity or reading materials reflect both knowledge and audience awareness?

### ↳ Try This:

- Identify three professional development opportunities, available remotely or in your geographic area, where you can develop new or expanded skills germane to liaison work.
- Consider what skills from adjacent or related fields to librarianship you could bring to the liaison environment, looking at syllabi and curricula to get ideas.
- Identify one skill you want to develop progressively in the next year, and put at least monthly slots on your calendar to work on this skill in increments of not less than thirty minutes.

## How to Build Relationships with Faculty

Essential to building relationships with your people is meeting them. How to do that is a matter of personal preference, as well as local culture. A useful first step is often to reach out to the chair or head of a department/unit/program and introduce yourself. A well-formed, not over-long email can be a good first step to this. If the chair has an administrative assistant or secretary, consider reaching out to that person first.

Whomever you are writing, it’s useful to include a sentence or two about your background and role at the university. How much of yourself to bring to an introduction versus how much of what the library offers for them (“I see that you study corkscrews, and we just subscribed to *Oenological Problems Quarterly*”) is some-



thing that you will get a feel for as your skills develop. That said, one of the key things that you offer to patrons in your areas is something like an “inside track” to useful knowledge and tools. Leading with information that reflects knowledge of the faculty member’s needs and the library’s strengths will help lay the foundation for ongoing (or at least future) interactions.

Because resources are never infinite, and because you will never, ever have enough time to do all of the things that you want for your faculty, you will at some point make use of one-to-many outreach. There are many ways to do this, but standard channels include custom email groups, departmental mailing lists, print or digital newsletters, talking to faculty at one of their faculty meetings, or use of multifunctional communications software such as Hootsuite or MailChimp. Such methods inevitably run the risk of falling below a given faculty member’s attention threshold or, in some cases, the vigilance of email spam traps. Sometimes you may find it useful to follow up with faculty members to whom a particular bit of news will be important if you’re unsure they got the message, but it’s important to be judicious in such follow-ups, so as not to become part of the background noise.

Many liaisons hold some sort of “office hours” for patrons in their liaison departments. How best to do this will vary locally, but usually it involves scheduling regular times during the semester when you will be available for your patrons for consultations and the like. Sometimes this may be in a spare office over in a liaison department, and sometimes it may be at a spare table in an atrium or other space where your students and faculty regularly pass. This kind of service can be useful in offering a point of contact for your people that is more on their turf, and it may prove less intimidating—or simply more convenient—than coming to the library.

Another arena useful for increasing contact with faculty is attendance at events in or sponsored by your departments. These may include brown bag lectures by faculty, graduate student professionalization events, campus lecture series, local symposia, or more things. Such gatherings afford more opportunities to be in contact with your people; even if you have no formal role at the event, undoubtedly someone will have something to say about the library, or be reminded in seeing you of something library-related they wanted to discuss with you.

More generally, it’s worth saying that relationships with your faculty grow from contact. Formal contacts are useful and fit nicely onto bulleted to-do lists, but a wide range of types of contact can help to maintain and deepen the relationship. Did a junior faculty member in one of your departments get tenure? Send a congratulatory email, or perhaps even a handwritten note. Did the chair of the biggest program you serve just publish a new monograph? Tell them how happy you were to see it next time you bump into each other on the quad or at the student union. If nothing else, send an occasional email checking in and saying you hope their quarter is going well and to drop a line if you can do anything for them. Such contacts may lead to course-integrated instruction, a new deposit in the institutional repository, or simply a mental note subsequently leading to an invitation to a department meeting.

Socializing with your patrons, particularly faculty, can be extremely valuable. Thus far, I have never had a social interaction with one of my faculty members that has not touched on *something* about the library. Sometimes it's as simple as the faculty member commenting on liking the appearance of and pointing their graduate students toward a newly remodeled space in the building. Other times it's an off-handed mention of problems accessing an article, which subsequently led through a chain of problem reports and email to improved access to a particular journal or publisher's journal holdings for the university community.

How sociable to be with your patrons is a good topic to discuss, at least in broad strokes, with your supervisor. Is it appropriate to buy dinner for a faculty member? How about an alcoholic beverage? Coffee for a graduate student? Can you seek reimbursement for any of the above? Likewise, it's a good idea to get a feel for your library's inclinations about social media before friending literally every one of your departments' faculty on Facebook or other social networks, to say nothing of students. Be aware that you may, as part of your contract, have obligations that come into play during interactions with faculty *or* students—everything from mandatory reporting of potential honor code violations to quandaries if you hear unsavory rumors. Speaking personally, I have become friends with a number of my patrons, and our social ties, whether formed over coffee or lunch, have both enriched our lives and facilitated any number of the kinds of exchanges of information that are the bread and butter of liaison work.

### ↳ Try This:

- Visit your liaison departments' websites and/or social media presences. Look at their calendar of events and identify one event this semester that you can plan to attend.
- Take a census of faculty in your liaison departments. Where, if anywhere, are they on social media, in a professional or semi-professional capacity? If you don't already have an account there, establish one and at least check in on their public posts.
- If early in your career, ask fellow liaisons at your institution to share some sample communications with faculty there. What can you copy or adapt for your faculty?

## Assessing Faculty Support and Outreach Initiatives

Unlike instruction or access services librarians, liaison librarians and those who oversee them have not yet settled on a metric to assess liaison work. Methods have long existed to measure library patron satisfaction, attendance, etc., but a rigorous

determination of liaison effectiveness in outreach and supporting faculty is harder. Liaison work is not always well-suited to true before-and-after measurement, but that doesn't mean that liaison work cannot be evaluated. Many libraries or librarians use some combination of the techniques listed below to get a picture of how well liaisons are doing.

Library-wide assessment initiatives often have elements that can gauge patron satisfaction with offerings in their subject areas. One such is LibQual+®, a “web-based survey offered by the Association of Research Libraries that helps libraries assess and improve library services, change organizational culture, and market the library.” In addition to measuring user satisfaction, which can be tracked to academic units, free text response options allow patrons to provide comments, and sometimes they will mention satisfaction or dissatisfaction with individual library staffers by name. LibQual+® may involve incentives for respondents but is not mandatory, so while it can provide some quantitative and qualitative data, it does not guarantee comprehensive, representative responses from patrons, let alone for any particular subject area.

Surveys, broadly defined, can be of great value in assessing liaison activities. Whether these are tied to instruction sessions, subject-based library programming, or simply are general surveys of your departments, they can measure satisfaction, help guide planning for future offerings, as well as determine whether patrons' needs are being satisfied in the liaison's primary area of activity. As discussed, different institutions conceive of liaisons somewhat differently, or differently at different times. For those who teach more, assessing learning via quizzes or similar metrics can be helpful. For those whose work is more closely tied to collections, surveying faculty for their opinions about collection quality may be valuable. For those who may be embedded in department curriculum planning, surveying faculty to determine their understanding of the librarian's contribution may be useful.

Even more subjective, perhaps, than free-text responses on surveys are voluntary testimonials. That said, liaisons are often well-placed to provide services to patrons who are at a point of deep need, coming through with information, advice, or other assistance that requires one or more of: subject knowledge, resource awareness, technological or bibliographic skill, and sometimes diplomacy. Our patrons are often themselves expert researchers who have “hit a wall” in their own work and who may already have sought assistance from general help services in the library, colleagues, or otherwise. Sometimes patrons will express gratitude for you (by name or not) through tweets, blog posts, comments in footnotes or acknowledgments, email to supervisors, or comments to library or university administrators. Such testimonials can be uniquely valuable for assessment, as well as for promotion and/or tenure.

If you run, host, or staff an event for “your people,” did anyone come? Attendance is, depending on the size, geography, and mode of delivery, a relatively easy

metric to use. It does not inherently convey information about quality, but in an environment where attendance is not compulsory and time is precious, the fact of presence does suggest that attendees feel that something is to be gained by coming. Repeat attendees, if you are able to track this, can be another sign that your offering is perceived as useful.

“Open rate” is a measure used in public relations and communications to track the extent to which subscribers are interested in content. You may or may not have the ability to track this, depending on the kinds of tools that you use to communicate with your patrons, as well as university policy. Are you allowed to email an entire department’s faculty? A whole school? These are important questions to have answered before commencing an outreach strategy, both in terms of understanding local culture and ensuring that you will not be violating policy and presently returned to the job market. Mailing list software like MailChimp can determine how many people opened a newsletter, and hits can be counted for web pages for events, assuming your relationship with library or university IT/technology is salutary. Social networks may, depending on a variety of factors, be able to provide you with information like the number of times people have interacted with a post or the number of people who have shared it. Most email clients have an option to send with a return receipt request, though it is worth considering whether that tool is appropriate in an age when many may receive hundreds of emails daily. As with attendance, these are qualitative indicators, but they can help to determine whether you are at least reaching your people.

Bibliometric study is a time-intensive form of assessment, requiring analysis of citations, bibliographies, and similar scholarly apparatus. Often this is used to determine whether the quality of undergraduates’ papers, for example, improved after exposure to information literacy instruction. Research has been carried out on the utility of this method for evaluating liaisons programmatically, studying everything from bibliographies to conference abstracts. Whether such a study is valuable to you in assessing your work may ultimately be a question of your available resources. Do you have student workers to help tabulate your data? Can you easily gather the materials from which that data would be extracted? This method may be best suited for situations where the presence of high-quality data can be a “make or break” factor, as with evaluation for tenure, promotion, etc.

### ↳ Try This:

- Read up on assessment at your library and institution. Learn about the accreditation standards to which your assessment is pegged.
- If you aren’t familiar with assessment generally, take a look at professional development offerings from LLAMA or ACRL’s Instruction Section.

## Finding the Gaps and Making Improvements

The aforementioned approaches for assessment and evaluation are based on the assumption that you are working as a liaison and want to find ways to determine the success of your efforts. What if you are a new liaison trying to determine where to spend your time? Or what if you are looking to make a significant change to your liaison services?

While some librarian positions are newly created, many others are replacements for librarians who have retired, changed jobs, or changed institutions. In other cases, the position may be part of a reorganization, either on a large scale or simply reconfiguring a few people's responsibilities or duties. When this is the case, consider the work that was done before you were hired. Study any succession documents or files your predecessor left behind, scour your library's web presence (internal and external) for information about her past activities, and check out any scholarship that she may have produced in the course of or following her employment that addresses work she did in "your" position. This may help to give you a baseline for what has been done at your institution for your liaison departments, as well as pointing out areas for immediate discussion with your supervisor. If you're the new Education, Psychology, and Sociology Liaison, and you can find ample evidence of services to the Education Department and Psychology Department but none to Sociology, there's presumably an explanation for that, and you should seek it out (diplomatically and carefully).

What do your departmental colleagues do? Or, if liaison department responsibilities are spread across many different library departments, what do your fellow liaisons do? Their activities may be as varied as their departments and their patrons, but undoubtedly you will see examples of activities that are worth considering offering for your patrons. As with the "predecessor" situation described above, study the library's external and internal web presences, shared departmental documents, etc. You'll benefit from talking with your counterparts in meetings, but also via chats over coffee or perhaps walking meetings outside the building. Some ideas may be departmental imperatives or generally agreed on, but sometimes one or two librarians are offering something that you can borrow. If you are coming from another library, consider liaison services at your previous institution, and what was successful there that has not been tried at your new library or is at least not currently in practice.

What is missing at your institution? You can extrapolate to your departments from what your colleagues are doing, what you find in the literature, or have done elsewhere, but what about the "unknown unknowns?" An environmental scan of your liaison departments can reveal gaps that you can exploit to help them meet goals for faculty and students. Is Dr. Smith griping on Twitter about more-terrible-than-usual student citations? Maybe it's time for a Mendeley workshop. Is there a workshop for pre-tenure faculty about planning for tenure that did not

involve discussion of ORCID iDs, Google Scholar, or Web of Science? Maybe you should reach out to the faculty you saw there in your departments and offer a group consultation. Is one of your departments offering a new distance certificate that's still in the pilot stage? Maybe it's time for them to have their first encounter with the idea of an embedded librarian.

The Networking and Conferences chapter of this volume provides extensive coverage of how to benefit from such activities, and more liaison-specific guidance is available at the end of this chapter. In this section, it's worth saying that one of the key benefits of conference attendance can be seeing new ideas and “bringing them back” to your library, whether you replicate a service or offer something new that is influenced by it. Look for best practices among other liaisons who are serving similar departments. In addition to discoveries at conferences, study articles, books, blog posts, useful threads on social media, etc. Every field or general area of liaison librarianship has its own literature, sometimes robust and sometimes stretching back for many decades. What were your counterparts doing in 1990? In 1970? Sometimes their activities (or documentation) may be modest, but we can all learn from the efforts of librarians who went before us.

### ↳ Try This:

- Join one listserv or discussion list peopled by faculty like the ones in your liaison departments. Watch the traffic to see what issues emerge, library-related or otherwise.
- Look at the offerings at the libraries of your “library heroes,” the people whose careers you aspire to emulate. What do they offer at their library?
- Get together with colleagues who do similar work to yours at a conference or local gathering and plan to “blue sky” about liaison work. What, in an ideal world, would you all like to offer your patrons?

## Evaluating Outreach Accomplishments for Promotion/Tenure

Some liaisons will have options at regular or occasional intervals to advocate for their own advancement: promotion, tenure, or a raise. In order to make their case for this, liaisons will generally have to furnish documentation. Many variables come into play with this, but the requested documentation may stretch from a sizable crate of materials for promotion of tenure-eligible librarians to a brief email to a supervisor for sorting raise eligibility that lists significant recent accomplishments. Local variation, along with variation in just what sort of advancement you seek, will have a big impact on what this process looks like for you. Parts of the process, however, will be the same.

While this is not a self-help book as such, this seems an appropriate place to urge you to adopt a mindset of collecting evidence. Many students and faculty will send thank you notes, print or electronic, for things you do as part of your ordinary duties or above and beyond them, and the best of these can be useful for your dossier. Without thinking of them as fodder for promotion, however, many librarians toss or delete these. Will each and every one be used ultimately? Unlikely, but being able to pull out a manila folder or appropriately tagged email and select from them when the time comes is impossible if you didn't think to save them in the first place. This practice should be extended to other kinds of documentation: teaching evaluations, fliers for events you run, university or local news clips about your activities, postings about your work on library association or other professional association websites, etc. Particularly when one's work often involves person-to-person interactions, much of it cannot easily be counted. Being prepared to seize "evidence" when it shows up is useful for your career.

Documenting work can also be something that happens before a project, initiative, or class ever gets off the ground. At the very least, it's something that you should think about before your work is completed and receding in the rear-view mirror. Depending on your workplace, staffing, etc., there may be little or no slowdown between projects, with your work differing more in type than in load, and it's very easy to get caught up in the rush of the next project. Obviously you need to allocate your time and energy to your work while you're doing it, not keep your mind on CV-polishing and career-building, but it's helpful to spend energy on this in a timely fashion. Likewise, ensure that you have access to or copies of (or both) collaborative work in which you have a share. When a colleague leaves your institution to work elsewhere, will she have had the courtesy and forethought to leave copies of your jointly authored PR plan behind? Or did she just delete it along with the rest of the contents of your Google Drive folder? Will she have time to help, or be amenable to helping, two years after she's moved and you are putting together your dossier? These are questions that are better to have answered earlier than later.

What do librarians do at your library? The way that portfolios, dossiers, etc., are collected and organized may vary substantially from place to place. Someone—your supervisor, peer review committee chair, HR librarian—will be able to point you to whatever official requirements or unofficial guidelines exist there to help you plan your activities in this regard. There may also be brown-bag symposia, presentations, or one-on-one meeting opportunities to discuss promotion/tenure, and you should take every advantage of these, if at all possible. Librarians' dossiers—or "generic" examples of same—may or may not be available to review at your institution, depending on various factors. Whenever possible, study official guidelines *and* get informal advice from trusted colleagues who have already been through the process—preferably recently, and preferably at the same step or level as you (Librarian I/II/III, Instructor/Assistant/Associate/Full Professor, etc.).

Consider also how you will organize your materials. This may seem trivial, but you should plan this with the same care that you put into job applications. No one is under an obligation to promote you or grant you tenure, and depending on the way your institution handles this, the people in charge of evaluating your application may be dealing with one candidate or fifteen. If they have to search and struggle to understand the “case” that you have built for yourself, your chances of success may be lower. No one has infinite time, and if they cannot find materials essential to your promotion or understand how your documentation demonstrates your fitness in a given category, trouble may lie ahead.

### ↳ Try This:

- Start a folder, file, tag, or box to store your “kudos.”
- Brainstorm for five minutes, listing the kind of documents, files, forms, and other materials you’ve generated as a librarian or seen generated that could serve as a basis for assessing your work.
- Schedule coffee (in person or over Skype) with a librarian promoted in the last year and ask her advice about best practices and unexpected pitfalls.
- Plan to succeed by writing out a loose plan with timeline and goals for everything you need to do between now and your next promotion.

## Professional Meetings and Organizations

Finally, liaisons find different professional homes depending on their department assignment(s), professional development funding, and geographic availability. Unlike many librarians whose duties are primarily tied to functions, not units or disciplines, liaisons benefit uniquely from participating in subject-area gatherings and organizations.

No one-size-fits-all solution exists for this, and a given liaison must decide for herself where her time is best allocated, based on duties and professional development needs, while remaining cognizant that these needs may dictate different choices in different years or career points. New librarians can occasionally get reduced membership/attendance rates or apply for scholarships intended to defray participation costs.

### *Non-Disciplinary*

Liaisons benefit from participating in organizations and events that appeal broadly or have a functional orientation. They may connect with liaisons to similar or different areas or learn about emerging trends in libraries or academia that affect their work and/or subject areas. Sample organizations and gatherings include:



- ALA: ALA Annual Conference, ALA Midwinter Meeting
- ALA/ACRL: ACRL Conference, Scholarly Communication Roadshows
- The Charleston Conference: Issues in Book and Serial Acquisition
- LOEX, focusing on instruction
- National Diversity in Libraries Conference
- OpenCon, focused on scholarly communication and open access

## *Disciplinary*

Associations and related events exist for all major academic disciplines. Some liaisons attend conferences in their subject areas (where there may be library-related panels, sessions, or whole conference “tracks”), some attend library conferences specifically devoted to their subject areas, and some do both. For example:

- Arts: Art Libraries Society of North America, College Art Association
- Humanities: American Historical Association, Modern Language Association, Digital Humanities
- STEM: Special Libraries Association, Medical Library Association, Association of Advanced Science Exchange

## *Geography*

Local organizations or gatherings can provide unique opportunities for liaisons to discuss challenges specific to a particular place. How well they meet your needs may vary by population density, economic conditions, accessibility, etc. Liaisons may find utility in such organizations as:

- State: Virginia Library Association, Delaware Library Association, Colorado Association of Libraries
- Regional: Pacific Northwest Library Association, New England Library Association
- Specialized Consortia: Association of Southeastern Research Libraries, Statewide California Electronic Library Consortium

## ↳ Try This:

- Study the CVs of librarians at your institution, as well as liaison librarians who are outstanding in their specialty. Make a list of the conferences they present at or attend, and discuss with your supervisor how to attend these conferences.
- Study the conference attendance of faculty in your liaison departments, which you can often determine via Twitter, Google searches for conference paper abstracts, etc. Consider whether you should try attending one of these events or whether you can just learn remotely.

- Make a ranked list of all recurring conferences you might want to attend in a year, from easy to “pie in the sky,” using such criteria as registration fees, distance, credentials of presenters, etc.
- Search some library association websites for grants to cover conference travel.

## Conclusion

Liaison librarians are generally more involved today in communicating with their liaison departments about open educational resources, data, and digital scholarship than ten years ago. What we will be doing ten years on is going to vary according to everything from local conditions to funding agencies to the outcomes of ongoing conflicts in the academy—about online education, adjunctification, and more. Our duties will multiply, more often than not at a greater rate than legacy library services atrophy or vanish, and we will presumably always be in the position of ambassadors, negotiators, and liaisons everywhere: balancing the needs of our two (or more) constituent parts as we consider how best to fulfill the needs of each.

Navigating all of these changes involves looking in a few different places. One route is to seek out training for liaison or subject librarians in general. Another is to look for training for librarians by subject type (“business librarians,” etc.). Another is to identify opportunities in your subject areas that apply to librarians, whether that’s open access for art historians or literature review workshops for psychologists. Below are a few print resources that may be useful as you develop in your role as a liaison.

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