BACKGROUND & CHARGE

In September 2006, the University of Maryland Libraries formed a working group to review and respond to the April 2006 University Library Council report on the effectiveness of the Libraries' liaison system. The working group finished their report in May 2007. In August 2008, the Liaison System Implementation Group (LSIG) was formed and charged with implementing portions of that report. Specifically, the LSIG was to complete the following activities by the end of the Fall 2008 semester:

1. Determine expectations for departmental and library liaisons
2. Publish a list of best practices for departmental and library liaisons
3. Develop and disseminate a Library Services Manual for teaching faculty
4. Create a Web page for the liaison system
5. Improve communications between departmental and library liaisons by establishing an email reflector list
6. Initiate a system of acknowledgement of departmental liaisons' service including a yearly thank you letter from the Dean of the Libraries
7. Recommend approaches to keeping liaison system content (reflectors, Web pages, manual, etc.) current

FINDINGS

Expectations & Best Practices (Goals #1 and #2)

LSIG combined goals 1 and 2 by creating guidelines for departmental and library liaisons (see Appendices A & B). These guidelines include goals and “best practices” for liaisons. The group collected and incorporated feedback on the draft guidelines from librarians (via meetings with the subject collaboratives), and from teaching faculty (via email). These guidelines are an attempt to bring consistency to the liaison system by codifying the practices that many of our best library and departmental liaisons already perform. They are also an attempt to describe liaison work “in a perfect world” of unlimited time and resources. In reality, individual liaisons will make decisions as to which practices, of the many outlined in these documents, are worth their time and effort. Team leaders and Performance Review Committees (PRCs) will work with liaisons to incorporate these best practices into their annual work plans. Further, team leaders will use these guidelines as a measure of liaison librarians’ efficacy and in evaluating requests for merit increases.

The guidelines also will be used to orient new librarian subject specialists to the liaison system. Newly-hired liaisons may not know how to begin working with their departments, so we can improve the liaison system by providing a clearer description of liaison work. Additionally, the liaison system can be improved by creating a forum for library liaisons to share information with one another about the practices, activities, and communication methods that have worked especially well with their departments. A yearly “All Liaisons” meeting will be scheduled to facilitate greater information-sharing between librarians.
Delineating these best practices makes clear the large amount of work that our most active library liaisons are doing. The University Library Council report of 2006 similarly finds that “the resources of the [Library Liaisons] are spread extremely thin,” going on to note that “changes in the system that merely give additional duties or responsibilities to the [Library Liaisons] are unlikely to succeed.”¹ All of this underscores the need for the Libraries to address liaison workloads (i.e., liaison work, teaching, reference, collections, committees, service, etc.) as part of its upcoming workforce planning efforts. These guidelines will be incorporated into liaison librarian job descriptions.

Furthermore, although the day-to-day work of establishing and maintaining relationships with academic departments falls on the subject librarians, there is a need for greater support for the Liaison System from the Libraries administration. There must be a library-wide understanding and recognition of the importance of liaison work to the mission of the Libraries, to which the administration can contribute in several ways:

- The Dean of Libraries should share the new liaison guidelines with the Council of Deans, so that the group (which includes the Provost) is aware of these documents. The Dean should stress that this work has been mandated by the University Library Council because of its importance to the University.
- When possible, seek library liaison input in decisions that will impact campus users. When needed, seek assistance from Library Liaisons in implementing and/or promoting new library services.
- Notify departments of “bad news” (e.g., serial cuts and budget shortfalls.) When this news continually comes from individual liaisons, it is damaging to morale and an impediment to liaison relationships. To be clear, Library Liaisons will continue to disseminate the “official word” from the Dean of Libraries, but the initial “press release” should come from the administration.
- Consult with the Libraries’ senators and the University Library Council to raise awareness of the new guidelines among University Senate members.

Library Services Manual (Goal #3)

The group discussed the creation of a comprehensive printed Library Services Manual. However, it was agreed that faculty members would be unlikely to keep or use a printed guide. Such materials also are costly to produce and quickly become out of date. The decision was made to turn our efforts toward improving the existing “Information for Faculty and Graduate Students” Web page (http://www.lib.umd.edu/faculty.html) so that it could function as the definitive guide to library services for faculty. With input from the subject collaboratives and substantial technical assistance from ITD Web Services, a new page was created: http://www.lib.umd.edu/PUBSERV/Faculty.html. (Note: This URL will change to http://www.lib.umd.edu/faculty.html when the page goes live.) We feel the organization and look of the new page are vastly improved. The new page also includes a web form to allow faculty members to suggest additions or corrections to the page.

One problem with the current Web page that still needs to be addressed is that many faculty members are not aware that it exists. Publicity activities will include:

- An official “roll out” of the updated page, with notices in Campus FYI, Faculty Voice, Between the Columns, and other venues as appropriate. Library liaisons will also notify their departmental faculty of the new page.
- Adding a link to the page from the “Libraries” tab in ELMS (Blackboard)
- Adding a link to the page from the Office of Faculty Affairs homepage (http://www.faculty.umd.edu)

In addition, the new page can be printed on one sheet so it can be distributed at new faculty orientations and other such events.

**Liaison System Webpage (Goal #4)**

The group also created a Liaison System Homepage to provide easy access to contact information, best practices, and background information. The page is located currently at: http://www.lib.umd.edu/PUBSERV/Liaisons.html (Note: This URL may change.) It is also linked prominently from the new “Library Services for Faculty and Graduate Students” page (See Goal #3).

**Email Reflectors (Goal #5)**

Email reflectors already exist for library liaisons (sel-liaison@umd.edu) and departmental liaisons (libumliaisons@umd.edu). The group felt that there was no need to create another list combining the two; when the Libraries need to send a message to all liaisons it is fairly simple to address it to both reflectors.

**Recognition of Departmental Liaisons (Goal #6)**

As outlined in its charge, the group recommends acknowledgement of departmental liaisons' service via a yearly thank you letter from the Dean of the Libraries.

**Keeping Liaison System Information Current (Goal #7)**

To ensure its smooth operation, the Library Liaison System needs regular oversight. It is therefore proposed that a “Liaison Coordinator” position be created, with service as Coordinator to be rotated among the three subject collaboratives. A term as Liaison Coordinator will last two years, after which it must be transferred to another collaborative. In order of service, the Liaison Coordinator will come from the Arts & Humanities Collaborative, followed by the Science and Technology Collaborative and then the Social Sciences and Allied Professions Collaborative respectively. Each collaborative would determine a process by which to solicit a volunteer to serve in this role. To stress the importance of the Liaison System, service as Liaison Coordinator should be considered highly meritorious. The Directors of Collections and Special Collection and Public Services will announce the Liaison Coordinator to library staff every two years. During the term, the Liaison Coordinator would be responsible for working with appropriate groups and individuals to manage the following activities:
The Liaison Coordinator would also be involved with planning an orientation and convocation of library and departmental liaisons, members of the University Library Council, and other key library staff members. As the Coordinator position develops, other activities may be added to the above list.

CONCLUSIONS

The Library Liaison System at the University of Maryland exists to establish ongoing relationships between the Library and the University’s academic departments. At its core, the Library Liaison System is composed of subject librarians and departmental faculty working together to enhance communication and improve library resources and services. Now more than ever, this relationship requires a dedicated and proactive effort from both sides to ensure that the Libraries’ declining resources (both in terms of money and staffing) are allotted and managed as well as possible. It is our hope that this report will provide a road map to further improve the process and that, through the consideration and implementation of the recommendations herein, the Library Liaison System will continue to develop in its mission to facilitate the effective and efficient fulfillment of information needs at the University of Maryland.

Respectfully submitted,

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Appendices:
A. Guidelines for Subject Librarian Liaisons
B. Guidelines for Departmental Liaisons
APPENDIX A
Guidelines for Subject Librarian Liaisons

The Library Liaison Program at the University of Maryland exists to establish ongoing relationships between the Library and the University’s academic departments. At its core, The Library Liaison Program is composed of subject librarians and departmental faculty working together to enhance communication and improve library resources and services.

SUBJECT LIBRARIAN LIAISONS

Developing relationships between the University Libraries and academic departments at the University of Maryland is a core responsibility for all subject librarian liaisons. It is expected that subject librarian liaisons will be proactive in all areas, achieve some level of mastery of their subject areas and communicate regularly with their departments.

Librarians can use a variety of approaches to build rapport with their academic departments. Liaison activities are an essential part of the ongoing mission of the University Libraries for supporting teaching and research across the curriculum.

An effective liaison will take advantage of opportunities to learn about and contribute to his or her subject specialization(s) through collection development, instruction, and in-depth consultation activities.

Individual liaisons should encourage viable relationships between the University Libraries and their respective academic departments or recognized special interest groups. In liaison relationships the Libraries strive to educate the academic departments on library issues as well as promote transparency grounded in mutual respect. Subject librarian and departmental liaisons share an understanding and awareness of the challenges and opportunities inherent in serving specialized areas of academic creativity while supporting the teaching and research needs of the University.

Examples of liaison activities appropriate for subject librarian liaisons are limited only by the imagination of the liaisons working together with academic departments to forge mutually beneficial alliances.

Effective alliances of this kind are based on shared understanding and commitment to service throughout the university. Individual liaisons are encouraged to combine various activities, as appropriate and useful, in achieving the desired ends stated above.

Listed below are goals and best practices for all subject librarian liaisons:
COMMUNICATION

Maintain an ongoing dialog with departments and individual faculty.

- Meet with those having special roles in the departments, e.g. department chairs, directors of undergraduate studies, directors of graduate studies, and teaching assistants.
- Meet with the departmental liaisons on a regular basis.
- Share, explain and promote new developments in the Libraries, such as budgetary issues and changes in services and procedures, in a timely manner.
- Inform faculty, students, and staff of new resources and offer instruction or facilitate use when needed.
- Attend department/college/school functions, lectures, events, colloquia, conferences, performances, convocations, etc., in order to increase awareness and understanding of teaching and research interests.
- Monitor changes in curriculum related to both traditional and interdisciplinary initiatives.
- Attend meetings of academic departments when possible to report on library matters.
- Be aware of research and teaching interests of faculty and graduate students.
- Attend the campus New Faculty Orientation in August and departmental orientations for new faculty and students when appropriate.
- Provide orientations and introductions for new faculty to inform them of the library’s resources and services and learn about their interests.
- Encourage the departmental liaison(s) to attend the annual State of the Libraries Address, liaison convocations, and special meetings.
- Attend subject-specific annual conventions, association conferences, meetings, etc., when appropriate.
- Respond to departmental, faculty and student requests in a timely manner.
COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT

Work closely with assigned department to develop an understanding of the ongoing needs for library resources and collections and collaborate with faculty to build collections that meet their research and teaching needs.

- Inform faculty of changes in the Libraries’ collection development policies and procedures.
- Consult with faculty about departmental requests for new or updated acquisitions.
- Inform faculty of new trends in publishing, copyright and scholarly communications.
- Attempt to acquire materials authored by faculty members for the library collections.
- Provide support for program and accreditation review processes, new academic program establishment, and grant proposal preparation.

SUBJECT LIBRARY INSTRUCTION

Promote and encourage the integration of library instruction and information literacy into the department’s courses and curriculum.

- Develop complementary materials to support course instruction, such as web pages and tutorials.
- Collaborate with faculty to design effective library assignments.
- Encourage faculty to link general library web guides as well as course-related web pages to their course management systems and/or syllabi.

REFERENCE / CONSULTATION

Provide specialized subject assistance to meet information and research needs of faculty and students.

- Understand faculty and students’ expectations and perceptions of library resources and services.
- Develop and maintain subject-specific library resource guides.
- Market research assistance to faculty and students of the departments served.
- Respond to departmental, faculty and student requests in a timely manner.
MASTERY OF THE SUBJECT

Develop an understanding of the subject areas of assigned departments in order to best serve their needs.

- Attend professional conferences, including those sponsored by library associations, publishing groups, or academic societies related to subject specialization(s), and those sponsored by subject-specific professional organizations and societies.
- Join library, academic, or professional associations related to collection management issues or subject specialization(s).
- Monitor new developments in the field by joining appropriate list-servs and reading professional literature, especially the major review journals.
APPENDIX B
Guidelines for Departmental Liaisons

The Library Liaison Program at the University of Maryland exists to establish ongoing relationships between the Library and the University’s academic departments. At its core, The Library Liaison Program is composed of subject librarians and departmental faculty working together to enhance communication and improve library resources and services.

FACULTY DEPARTMENTAL LIAISONS

Developing relationships between the academic departments and the University Libraries is an important responsibility for departmental liaisons.

The role of faculty departmental liaisons is to provide essential support to the library liaison program by developing a collaborative partnership with the subject librarian liaisons and by working to enhance communication and improve library resources and services.

An effective departmental liaison will take advantage of opportunities to stay current on new developments within the library including new resources, services, and programs. Departmental liaisons should encourage the development of an active, reciprocal relationship with their subject librarian liaisons in order to promote transparency grounded in mutual respect. Subject librarian and departmental liaisons share an understanding and awareness of the challenges and opportunities inherent in serving specialized areas of academic creativity while supporting the teaching and research needs of the University.

Departmental liaisons have a unique perspective on the research and curricular needs of their academic departments. They are therefore encouraged to solicit the requests and concerns of their fellow faculty members and to share those with their subject liaison. Effective alliances of this kind are based on shared understanding and commitment to service throughout the university. Individual departmental liaisons are encouraged to combine various activities, as appropriate and useful, in achieving the desired ends stated above.

Listed below are the goals and best practices for the departmental liaisons.

IN RELATIONS WITH SUBJECT LIBRARIAN LIAISONS

Assist subject librarian liaison in all matters concerning the department by having an ongoing exchange of information and a shared understanding of issues and concerns.

- Meet with the subject librarian liaison on a regular basis.
- Be responsive to communications from the subject librarian liaison.
• Communicate information about the department to the subject librarian liaison, e.g. personnel changes, new directions in the curriculum and research interests.

• Include the subject librarian liaison early on in the process of adding new programs so assessments of library materials can be done in a timely manner.

• Involve the subject librarian liaison in departmental functions, e.g., faculty meetings, special events, faculty presentations, and departmental graduations.

• Communicate departmental concerns about the library to the librarian liaison, e.g. collections or services.

• Assist subject librarian liaisons in promoting and executing library projects that require departmental participation, e.g. serials review, search committees for new subject librarians, assessment of collections for new programs.

• Monitor liaison email reflectors and participate in email discussions as appropriate.

• Attend the annual State of the Libraries Address delivered by the Dean of the Libraries.

• Attend liaison convocations and special liaison meetings organized by the Libraries.

• Alert subject librarian liaison to new department faculty.

• Inform subject librarian liaison of scheduled program and accreditation reviews.

WITHIN THE DEPARTMENT

Disseminate information about the Libraries to the department.

• Promote consideration of library concerns and interests within the department.

• Stay informed about broader library issues and educate fellow faculty members, e.g. serials review, scholarly communication, etc.

• Assist library subject liaison in his or her relationships within the department.

• Facilitate subject librarian liaison participation in departmental meetings and new faculty orientations.