To: The Collection Management and Public Services Leader’s Group  
From: The Collection Management and Public Services Leader’s Liaison System Working Group  

On September 21, 2006, the Collection Management and Public Services Leaders Group (CPL) formed a working group to review and respond to the University Library Council’s report to the Dean of Libraries on the Libraries’ liaison system. The members of the Working Group were:

- Marian Burright, Library Liaison to the Departments of Biology and Entomology  
- Lily Griner, Library Liaison to the Robert H. School of Business  
- Judy Markowitz, Library Liaison to the Departments of Theatre and Dance  
- Alan Mattlage, Library Liaison to the Departments of Communication and Philosophy (Working Group Chair)  
- Desider Vikor, Director of Collection Management and Special Collections  

The Group was charged to respond to seven recommendations appearing at the end of the ULC’s report. (See Appendix 1 for the specific charges.) Because the charges are interrelated, this report does not present our recommendations to each charge separately. Instead, we address the charges throughout the report and within a structure that we found most effective for communicating our recommendations.

**Methodology**

Upon convening, the Group discussed its charge and the ULC’s report. We determined that a thoughtful response would require meeting with library liaisons and other interested parties in the Libraries to hear reactions to and comments on the ULC’s report. Also, we would schedule focus group meetings with departmental liaisons to discover ways to improve the liaison system. Finally, we would investigate systems by which other university libraries communicate with their departmental faculty.

In November, we met with the Libraries’ three subject collaboratives: Arts and Humanities, Social Sciences and Allied Professions, and Science and Technology. The collaboratives include all of the library liaisons to the departments. We also met with other librarians, including members of the Library Executive Council. (See Appendix 2 for the questions presented to the collaboratives and other librarians in advance of our meetings.) Also, we met with Jennifer Hanna, Coordinator of the Libraries’ Communication Office. On Jan. 26th, the chair of the Working Group gave a progress report to the ULC and received comments and suggestions from the ULC. In March, we invited all 78 departmental liaisons to meet with us. Thirteen of them attended one of two meetings held on March 12th and 13th. We received e-mail input from six more departmental liaisons. (See Appendix 3 for the focus group questions.) We also gathered
information on other liaison systems that was readily available from academic libraries in
the U.S. On April 4th, we met with Tanner Wray to hear his input based on the ACRL
pre-conference on liaison systems that he and Lily Griner had attended recently. The
conclusions and recommendations included in this report are based on the information
gathered during the above activities.

**Improving the System**

Regardless of its limitations, the current liaison system is a critical component of the
communication system linking the Libraries and the University’s departments. Similar
liaison systems are common at other colleges and universities. Indeed, after reviewing
the readily available information about how colleges and university libraries
communicate with departments on their campuses, we found no well-developed
alternative system.

While we recognize difficulties with the current liaison system, we believe that the
chances are low that an entirely new system of communication would be superior to a
redesigned liaison system, and that the cost of designing a new system would be great.

Library liaisons have varying views about the effectiveness of communicating with
departments via a single departmental liaison. Most employ other channels to
supplement their communications with departmental liaisons; however, most also believe
that having some particular individual(s) in the departments to whom communications
can be sent routinely is valuable. Many believe that this is essential. It was also
recognized that larger departments might need a more elaborate departmental side of the
liaison system.

Consequently, the Working Group recommends that we retain a liaison system, but take
measures to address its weaknesses and augment the system with other channels of
communication to alleviate problems that the current system seems incapable of
addressing. The recommendations in the remainder of this report are a starting point for
taking these measures. Many library liaisons believe that the effectiveness of the liaison
system requires stronger University support for the work of the departmental liaisons.
Unless the University, its colleges, and its departments more highly value and reward the
role of the departmental liaisons, the ability of the libraries to improve the system will be
limited.

**Guiding Principles for an Improved System**

To improve the liaison system, all parties to the system must appreciate its purpose and
goals. First of all, the system seeks to develop dynamic relationships between the
Libraries and the academic departments in which information about each can be shared.
Departments must be made aware not only of the current services that the Libraries
provide, but also of the Libraries’ future directions. Conversely, the Libraries must be
made aware not only of the immediate needs of individual members of the departmental faculty, but must understand the broader and future information needs of the departments.

To establish the necessary communication, both partners must actively elicit and provide information. Both parties must seek to recognize, articulate, and satisfy the campus community’s information needs from the most immediate, practical level to the most general and strategic level. An effective liaison system will facilitate the engagement of all parties in these activities.

The benefits of such a system will be seen in the shared understanding of the current and future challenges and opportunities for providing for the campus’s information needs. The system should create a shared understanding of the directions of and prospects for research, teaching, and information storage and access.

Secondly, a strong system should create a wide base of support on campus for the Libraries and for better access to scholarly information. An engaged, well-informed cadre of departmental liaisons will be better able to communicate the successes and requirements of the Libraries to the wider campus community and can become effective advocates for information resources and services. The library administration and the ULC together should then devise a lobbying plan and recruit departmental liaisons to help implement it.

Managing the System

The liaison system needs to be developed and managed as a more coherent program than it currently is. To this end, the directors of Collection Management and Special Collections and Public Services should assume shared responsibility for the program, and should devote more time and greater energy to facilitate contact and communication between the Libraries and the departments. Their actions should be taken in cooperation with CPL, the subject collaboratives, and the Libraries’ Communication Office. The directors should ensure that the activities of these groups are strategically planned and coordinated to be mutually beneficial.

A coherent liaison program should maintain and publicize an accurate, current list of all departmental and library liaisons. It should also develop and maintain a set of best practices, general expectations, and job descriptions for library and departmental liaisons. The embryo of a list of best practices for each set of liaisons is included in this report. To emphasize the importance of the role of the departmental liaisons, the Dean of Libraries should send annual letters of appreciation to the departmental liaisons, acknowledging their service on behalf of their constituencies and the Libraries.

A coherent liaison program also should provide an orientation program for new departmental and library liaisons. At the orientation, new departmental liaisons should meet their library liaison and members of the library administration, preferably the Dean of Libraries. They should receive the Library Services Manual (see below) at the
orientation and participate in discussions about the liaisons’ job description, expectation, and best practices. Library liaisons should receive an individualized orientation immediately following their assumption of liaison responsibilities.

Communications and PR Recommendations

The work of the departmental and library liaisons necessarily functions on a variety of levels. Their work is supported by an ongoing exchange of information and a shared understanding of issues and concerns. Consequently, much improvement can be achieved by establishing new and more robust channels of communication between the Libraries and the departments. There are numerous formal and informal vehicles that will help accomplish this. This section lists some possibilities recommended for consideration.

- **Annual State of the Libraries Address:** The primary audience for this is the departmental liaisons. This would provide the Dean of Libraries an annual opportunity to meet with all liaisons and to speak with them about the past year’s accomplishments and the prospects for the next year. It would (1) allow the departmental liaisons to hear directly from the Dean of Libraries and receive a “big picture” perspectives on the status of the Libraries, and (2) afford an opportunity for an exchange of ideas (with the Dean) on matters of relevance to the academic departments and the Libraries. The address should convey a clear picture of the strategic direction and goals of the Libraries. The address needs to convey to the departmental faculty why we have taken difficult decisions, what challenges we face, and what our goals are. Library liaisons should communicate to the Dean topics to be included in the address.

  Occasional topical meetings with the departmental liaisons might be called to address particular needs and circumstances (e.g., as is done for the triennial serials review).

- **Annual Convocation of Departmental and Library Liaisons and the University Library Council:** There currently exists no mechanism for the ULC to tap the experiences and perspectives of the departmental liaisons. While the ULC has faculty representatives drawn from a variety of disciplines, the departmental liaisons collectively represent a body of individuals engaged in library issues that might be of interest to the ULC when shaping its agendas or investigating particular issues. An annual convocation of the ULC and departmental liaisons may provide the ULC with valuable input and also serve as another information source helpful to the liaisons. A convocation might also serve to alert liaisons as to how they might participate in lobbying efforts designed by the library administration and the ULC.

- **E-mail reflectors and electronic newsletter:** E-mail is a quick and effective mode of communicating brief and timely news items, questions, comments, and other
short items of information. Consequently, a reflector should be created to facilitate communication among the Libraries, the ULC, and the departmental liaisons. This reflector should include all liaisons (departmental and library), the library directors, and possibly the Dean of the Libraries. However, the Libraries must be sensitive to the glut of email messages that faculty receive. The list should be used only for important matters, particularly if a quarterly newsletter is disseminated (see below). Beyond this, more selective and specialized college-level reflectors might be created as needed, particularly for the larger colleges, where a separate reflector might provide more focused communication among departmental liaisons with particular, common interest. There may be some merit in the departmental liaisons also having their own reflector.

Furthermore, a reflector including all library and departmental liaisons could be used to send out a quarterly electronic newsletter. The content of this newsletter should avoid the kind of material that would appear in glossy PR brochures. Instead, it should be as much for “insiders” as will be intelligible to departmental liaisons. It should avoid reporting on past events; however, announcing newly implemented services would be appropriate. It should serve to alert its readers to immediate and future developments within the Libraries.

These email communications are not meant to replace the communications that library liaisons currently send. Liaisons that are successfully communicating with the departmental faculty should not be encouraged to begin relying on their departmental liaisons to communicate information.

- **Library services manual.** While the Libraries’ website provides a lot of material pertinent and useful to departmental liaisons and to the faculty in general, departmental liaisons do not appear to be accessing this information. The Libraries must find ways to push this information to the faculty without sending them information that will not be relevant to their specific needs. One possible medium for this would be a Library Services Manual which would be a compendium or handbook (virtual or otherwise) of currently available services, describing the services and providing a brief explanation of how to use them.

- **FYI and *The Library Bulletin.*** While the library should continue to use FYI to disseminate information to the University community, it should recognize that FYI messages alone will not be effective for most communications with the faculty. Similarly *The Library Bulletin* cannot be expected to keep the departmental liaisons or the faculty in general abreast of news from the Libraries.
Guidelines for Library and Departmental Liaisons

The liaison system is a partnership between the Libraries and the departments designed to support the teaching and research needs of faculty. To make the liaison system more effective, the Libraries and the departments must increase communication, maintain dynamic relationships, and build shared understandings of their respective missions.

The Working Group recommends that departmental liaisons be selected from experienced faculty members and that they serve for a minimum of three years. Preferably, their terms should correspond to the Libraries’ triennial serial review cycle. We encourage departments to ask their library liaisons to recommend faculty members who might serve as effective departmental liaisons before making appointments. We also recommend the following guidelines to improve communication, relationships, and shared understanding between the Libraries and the departments.

Guidelines for Departmental Liaisons:

- Meet with the library liaison(s) on a regular basis
- Serve as a point of contact to the department to disseminate information about the Libraries
- Serve as a point of contact to the Libraries to communicate information about the department
- Promote consideration of library concerns and interests within the department
- Promote consideration of departmental concerns and interests within the Libraries
- Encourage faculty to link their syllabi to subject specific and general library web guides as well as course-related web pages
- Involve the library liaison(s) in departmental function, e.g., faculty meetings, special events, faculty presentations, and departmental graduations
- Participate in liaison reflectors
- Attend the annual State of the Libraries Address delivered by the Dean of the Libraries
- Attend liaison convocations and special liaison meetings
- Facilitate library liaison participation in departmental new faculty orientations

Guidelines for Library Liaisons:

- Meet with the departmental liaison(s) on a regular basis
- Communicate library information regarding new resources
- Promote library instruction
- Encourage faculty to link their syllabi to subject specific and general library web guides as well as course-related web pages
- Request input on collection development issues
- Explain new and continuing library services, e.g., document delivery, Interlibrary Loan, and My Account
• Meet with those having special roles in the departments, e.g., department chairs, directors of undergraduate studies, directors of graduate studies, and teaching assistants
• Encourage the departmental liaison(s) to attend the annual State of the Libraries Address, liaison convocations, and special meetings
• Work with faculty as they develop assignments with a library research component
• Attend the campus New Faculty Orientation in August when appropriate

Workloads of Library Liaisons

The assessment of library liaisons’ workloads is a complex problem which exceeds the resources of this Working Group; however, two issues are pertinent to assessing workloads of library liaisons. First, the retirement or resignation of an individual library liaison has a direct effect on the workloads of others on his or her subject team as the workload must be divided among the remaining team members. Second, while the team structure helps absorb the work of departing library liaisons in the short term, it does not address prolonged position vacancies, nor does it address inequities that may have roots in disproportionate and/or evolving departmental responsibilities among library liaisons. Without the resources to assess these complicated issues, we recommend that they be addressed by the Public Services Work Force Planning group to begin work in 2007.

Appendix 1: Seven Tasks found in Working Group Charge

1. Determine whether the current liaison system can be restructured to address the concerns raised in the ULC Report or whether it should be replaced by a different system.

2. If the current system can be restructured, develop a strategic plan to strengthen the departmental liaison system.

3. Address the broader communication issues that are characterized as the “public relation function.”

4. Assess the workload of library liaisons and the number of subjects reasonable for any one librarian to carry.

5. Develop best practices for library subject specialists.

6. When determining the best practices (or the core expectations and commonly held duties and responsibilities) of library subject specialists, recognize the need for flexibility in order that departments with differing needs are all well served.

Appendix 2: Library Collaboratives Questions

QUESTIONS TO PROVOKE THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

Please consider these first four questions most carefully.

1. How would you describe to your academic department the purpose of the liaison program?

2. What do you see as the key strength of the liaison program? What do you see as a weakness? What opportunities do you believe are being missed by the current set up?

3. If you had to change one thing within the library liaison system what would it be?

4. How can the library build a stronger relationship with the Department you work with?

More questions to provoke thought and discussion:

5. Describe the communication channels that you use to contact your department. Do you employ your departmental liaison and/or other members of the department? Do you use personal email, phone, a listserves, newsletter? What is most effective? Why do you use one channel as opposed to others?

6. Describe the communications you receive from your departments. Do you feel that you have a good understanding of the needs, interests, and directions of your department as they relate to library services? Why or why not? What could improve your ability to get information from or about your departments?

7. Besides the Serial Review, what library issues do you talk with your departments about? To what extent are your contacts limited to specific problems? Are you able to effectively tell them about new library services? Are your communications with your department about broader needs arising in your departments? Who initiates these conversations -- you? the library administration or other person(s) in the Libraries? your departments?

8. If you were involved in devising a training program, best practices, or articulating the expectations for library liaisons, what would be some of the major things that you would want to cover?

9. What might better support your departmental liaison in his or her work? How might this be provided by the Libraries? By the Department? By the University?

10. Is your department liaison responsive to your request?

11. Do you regard your role as library liaison as being and advocate of the Libraries to your department, their advocate to the Libraries, or something different?

12. Do you feel that the workload among library liaisons is equitable? If not, how could the inequities be addressed?
Appendix 3: Departmental Liaison Focus Group Questions

1. What can the Libraries do to help your work as a departmental liaison?

2. What can your department do to help your work as a departmental liaison?

3. What are the biggest obstacles you face in doing your work as a departmental liaison?

4. How would you like to hear about library services and other library-related matters?

5. Excluding publicly available information, how would you recommend that library liaisons (that's us) become informed about what's happening in your departments?