



Collaboration Building Between Teaching Faculty and Librarians: Based on a Case Study on Field Librarians at the University of Michigan

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Abstract. This paper investigates collaboration building between teaching faculty and librarians in university settings, and specifically the question: “What are the librarians’ main approaches to teaching faculty to build collaborations with teaching faculty?” In order to answer this question, a qualitative case study of field librarians at the University of Michigan was conducted. An analysis of thematic coding revealed “interacting with the community members”, “as a member of the community”, “customised to individual needs” and “staying in touch” as categories of librarians’ strategic approaches to teaching faculty. The results indicated field librarians’ approaches were focused on relationship marketing. While these approaches were similar approaches in the Earlham model, these developing processes were different.

Keyword: Faculty-librarian relationship · Collaboration · Information literacy instruction · Field librarian · Embedded librarian · Qualitative case study · University of Michigan

1 Introduction

As a result of recent higher educational reforms, universities have included information literacy among their attributes for graduates in order to help undergraduates build a foundation of information literacy in everyday life for their future. In this context, building relationships between teaching faculty and librarians has been recognised as an important factor contributing to the success of information literacy instruction (ILI), and helping to enhance information literacy learning outcomes for students [1, 2].

In order to build successful collaborations between teaching faculty and librarians, novel models of university librarians, such as embedded librarians, have been proposed and introduced into university settings. The purpose of this paper is to gain some indications to consider about the successful collaboration building both in practical and theoretical perspectives based on investigating the collaboration building between teaching faculty and embedded librarians in university settings.

2 Literature Review

Based on a review of the literature on embedded librarians, Schulte revealed common activities of embedded librarians such as those embedded in course management systems and physical co-location with patrons. In conclusion, Schulte indicated a formal and systematic process to quantify outcomes, and demonstrated that the impact of embedded librarians was insufficient; no study evaluated embedded librarians in terms of physical and cultural integration into an academic or business unit [3]. There have been several other studies on embedded librarians [4–9], but their main focus was not on building collaboration between teaching faculty and embedded librarians, even though some studies mentioned it [4]. Thus, a research which focused on the collaboration building should be conducted.

Based on a review of the literature on building collaboration between teaching faculty and librarians in higher education, previous studies have offered two main research perspectives. One was librarians' strategic approaches to teaching faculty in order to build collaboration. The other was library, institutional and social contexts which promoted collaboration building [10]. Out of these two perspectives, this paper engaged in investigating embedded librarians' strategic approaches to teaching faculty which embedded librarians used to build collaboration with teaching faculty.

3 Methodology

The research question was “What are the librarians' main approaches to teaching faculty to build collaborations with teaching faculty?” In order to answer this question, a qualitative case study of field librarians at the University of Michigan was conducted. Based on purposeful sampling, in particular, maximum variation sampling, the University of Michigan was selected. The sampling criteria were: (1) institutions at which librarians provided ILI in collaboration with teaching faculty, (2) institutions at which librarians provided instructional support for teaching faculty, and (3) institutions at which librarians provided ILI or instructional support in collaboration with other campus units.

In January 2002, the library started a field librarian project and hired three field librarians in Women's Studies Programme, the School of Arts and Design and the Department of Classical Studies. These field librarians did not work in library buildings but worked most hours in offices located in the school, department and programme (hereafter referred to as departments) that each of them served. Their main mission was to provide learning, instructional and research support both to students and teaching faculty in their respective departments. The field librarians were part of the university library system and worked some hours, typically reference desk hours, in the main libraries [11–13].

The data was collected from semi-structured interviews with field librarians, library administrators and teaching faculty and from observations of physical artifacts, and analysed by thematic coding based on grounded theory coding [14] (Tables 1 and 2).

Table 1. List of informants (*Group interviews)

Code	Informants (Academic backgrounds)	Time (mins)	Dates	Sex
A	Library Manager (Associate University Librarian for Public Services)	48	05/12/2007	F
B	Field Librarian (Women’s Studies Programme)	33	13/05/2004*	F
		82	29/06/2004	
C	Field Librarian (School of Art and Design)	33	13/05/2004*	F
		75	22/06/2004	
		105	26/9/2012	
D	Field Librarian (Department of Classical Studies)	33	13/05/2004*	M
		95	22/06/2004	
		120	05/12/2007	
		60	27/09/2012	
		80	28/09/2012	
E	Teaching Faculty (School of Art & Design)	42	09/11/2006	F
F	Teaching Faculty (School of Art & Design)	40	14/11/2006	M
G	Teaching Faculty (Faculty of Classical Studies)	34	06/12/2007	M
H	Teaching Faculty (Faculty of German Studies)	34	06/12/2007	M
I	Field Librarian (Department of Screen Arts & Cultures)	70	27/09/2012	M

Table 2. Questions to informants

<p>Questions to Field Librarians</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What kinds of information literacy instruction do field librarians provide for students? • What kinds of instructional/research support services do field librarians provide for teaching faculty? • How do field librarians work with teaching faculty in students’ learning? • How do field librarians work with other campus units? • How do field librarians communicate with other librarians, teaching faculty and staff on campus, formally and informally? • How do field librarians develop their competencies?
<p>Questions to Library Managers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why did the Library decide to introduce field librarians into departments? • How did the library manager ask the university and departments about introducing field librarians? • How did the library manager select the departments to which field librarians were assigned? • What competencies did the library manager expect of field librarians?
<p>Questions to Teaching Faculty</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do teaching faculty work with field librarians? • How do teaching faculty communicate with field librarians formally and informally? • What are teaching faculty’s attitudes towards field librarians and libraries?

4 Results

4.1 Outline of the Results

As a result of the analysis, several categories were extracted: “Pressure on innovation” was one on causal condition, “discussing non-traditional library services of groundbreaking” was one on context, and “embedding librarians into departments” was on phenomenon. Owing to changing the broader academic environment, academic units had to negotiate competing needs and budget with limited economic resources [12]. Under such an environment, the library manager, an associate university librarian for public services, and her colleagues discussed new plans for how the library could do a better job of getting librarians integrated into the teaching and scholarly environment because there was no bridge between departments and libraries [A, 8]. Based on investigating collaboration practices between teaching faculty and librarians at other institutions, the concept emerged of field librarians being physically located in departments [A].

As categories of librarians’ strategic approaches to teaching faculty, “interacting with the community members”, “as a member of the community”, “customised to individual needs” and “staying in touch” were discovered (Table 3). Similarly, “leadership of library managers” and “librarians’ competencies and personalities” were discovered to be categories of intervening conditions in library contexts, and “small community”, “operational support by departments” and “financial support by a university administrator” were discovered in institutional contexts. As consequences, field librarians acted as “bridges between departments and libraries”.

The following sections examine categories of librarians’ strategic approaches to teaching faculty.

Table 3. Properties and dimensions

Framework	Categories	Properties	Dimensional extent	Dimension
Causal Conditions	Pressure on innovation	strength	nothing --- week --- strong	strong
		budget	reduction --- still --- increase	reduction
		Environment	collaborative --- competitive	competitive
Context	Discussing non-traditional library services of groundbreaking	Services	abolishment --- reduction --- stay --- new	new
		type	traditional --- non-traditional	non-traditional
		Proposer	library users --- librarians --- library administrators	library administrator
		relationship with departments	no --- weak --- strong	no
Phenomenon	Embedding librarians into departments	number	nothing --- a few --- most --- all	a few departments
		belonging	libraries --- departments --- university	libraries
		workplace	libraries --- departments --- university	Departments
		office location	libraries --- departments --- university	Departments
		supervision	libraries --- departments --- university	libraries
Action/ Interaction Strategies	Interacting with the community members	Purpose of the initial meeting	Icebreaking --- grasping potential needs --- selling library services	Icebreaking/grasping potential needs
		means	e-mail --- telephone --- face to face	e-mail/telephone/ face to face
		frequency	nothing --- sometimes --- often --- always	most of every day
	As a member of the community	settings	Informal --- formal	Informal/formal
		relationship	they --- you --- we	we
	Customised to individual needs	topics	general --- specific	specific
		timing	begging of the term --- end of the term	when had a topic
	Staying in touch	frequency	nothing --- sometimes --- often --- always	often
means		e-mail --- telephone --- face to face	e-mail/telephone/ face to face	

4.2 Interacting with the Community Members

Field librarians emphasised interaction with teaching faculty and students in the departments. Building interpersonal relationships were considered to promote not only an understanding of the potential needs of individual teaching faculty and departments but also to establish channels to future collaboration with teaching faculty in educational and research settings.

Field librarians met with individual teaching faculty in the departments when field librarians arrived in the departments. In the meetings, field librarians casually talked with teaching faculty about their research interests. At this stage, field librarians usually did not mention library services because icebreaking and grasping potential needs were considered more important than selling library services [B, C, D]. After the icebreaking meetings, field librarians had a number of opportunities to interact with teaching faculty in the departments. A field librarian explained this situation as follows:

In a typical day I have a great deal of interaction with students, faculty, and staff...I am constantly communicating with people either face to face, over the telephone or via e-mail...the interaction gives me a broader perspective about what is happening and how the library and the school interrelate [11, p. 18].

Based on daily communications, field librarians got to know individual teaching faculty including their interests more and more, and gained and renewed the outline of their future involvement in the departments.

4.3 As a Member of the Community

Field librarians were involved in various formal and informal settings in the departments. Like teaching faculty, field librarians frequently attended faculty meetings and met prospective teaching faculty in the departments [B].

Attending departmental meetings gave opportunities for field librarians to deliver library services to teaching faculty and staff in the departments. At the monthly faculty meetings, field librarians usually shared the current topics on library services with teaching faculty. A field librarian proposed to integrate ILI into honours programmes when teaching faculty discussed the quality of submitted theses on the departmental curriculum committee [D]. Field librarians were able to propose appropriate services to the occasion because they were familiar with current topics in the departments. A field librarian explained "I am much better able to judge what will be needed. I know the curriculum better from being part of faculty meetings and student discussions" [11].

Field librarians were also involved in various academic and social events in the departments. One field librarian held an exhibition on art books in collaboration with a teaching faculty in the department [C], while another arranged a book exhibition at an international academic conference hosted by the department [D]. In addition,

field librarians joined in social events such as going on picnics, watching baseball games and going bowling with teaching faculty and staff in the departments [D, 11]. A field librarian mentioned the situation as follows:

To demonstrate how much they have accepted me, last year I was able to serve on the School's staff retreat planning committee. I am warmly invited to, and accepted at, all types of social gatherings – show openings, holiday parties, birthday celebrations, and even staff bowling night. I try to take as many opportunities as I can to get to know the people with whom I am working [11, p. 19].

On a picnic and at a baseball stadium, a field librarian received questions on information search from teaching faculty, and gave quick answers on the spot [D].

Each field librarian was deeply involved in everyday life of each department. Such involvement helped field librarians not only to understand current situations in each department but also to be recognised as colleagues and to maintain the collegiality.

4.4 Customised to Individual Needs

Field librarians designed ILI customised to each course. Some teaching faculty had told field librarians about their students' frustration with doing library work and their own hesitation in developing assignments. Based on these individual needs, field librarians designed ILI. A field librarian explained "I could tailor my instruction to their needs... I decided what I would show them in the library based on what the professor had decided to have the students do" [C].

Field librarians designed topics of information resources and timing of the session appropriate for each course. Concerning topics of information resources, a field librarian explained "I usually propose a specific topic that I might use as an example if I was in their class... so that students have an idea from different kinds of information" [12]. In order to understand these topics, field librarians asked if teaching faculty could send their syllabi to the field librarian, and, when necessary, asked them further questions in conversations and e-mails [C]. Concerning the timing of the session, field librarians realised that there was a specific timing at which students could actually start their own work. Based on the experience of providing ILI in the first class, a field librarian recognised "students do not want to listen to me, if students wait too long" [B]. Field librarians understood that students had to have a topic that they were thinking about when students learned about finding information resources [B, C].

The library manager explained that field librarians should consider the specific needs of the community as follows:

...the library drafted a basic job description that included... We put a strong focus on individual faculty needs in the specific context of their disciplines... each field librarian was able to articulate their role within the individual context of their discipline, departmental culture, politics, and academic directions... [12, p. 40].

Field librarians customised not only ILI but various services to individual needs in the departments. One field librarian emphasised collection development because teaching faculty and graduate students in the department wanted to enrich their book collection. The field librarian assigned nearly seventy percent of their time to develop collection [D].

4.5 Staying in Touch

Field librarians believed that their continued presence kept the library alive in minds of teaching faculty and their students [11]. In departmental meetings, e-mails and face to face communication, field librarians stayed in touch with teaching faculty and students in the departments and kept them informed of library issues.

In monthly departmental meetings, one field librarian shared something new about libraries with teaching faculty [D]. Another field librarian contacted the deans whenever needed [C]. These presence helped teaching faculty to realise that the field librarian worked for the department, and what their field librarian could do for them. Field librarians routinely sent e-mails to update teaching faculty of their activities. One field librarian sent out e-mail messages each term to teaching faculty in the department to remind them that their field librarian could provide ILI for their classes [C]. Another field librarian frequently sent out e-mails to all teaching faculty and graduate students about information on required resources, services, workshops, new matters in the library and things that teaching faculty should have known. The more field librarians knew individuals, the less structured and more informal these communications became [B].

In daily communication, field librarians frequently heard such expressions as “Oh, librarians can do that”, and thus casually tried to make community members aware not only by sending e-mails but also by working around offices and asking them to go for a cup of coffee [B]. Field librarians advertised their services more than e-mails and daily communications. One field librarian put his profile and contact information on the bulletin board of the department as a member of the community [D]. Another field librarian put a sign of her availability on the office window facing a busy corridor [C].

In class sessions and in orientations for students and new teaching faculty, field librarians emphasised that teaching faculty and students could feel free to ask field librarians questions whenever needed [C, 12]. Field librarians asked if ILI could be introduced in their classes when teaching faculty realised that their students were not always as prepared for research assignments as they had thought. Some teaching faculty did not wish to give up their class time for a field librarian, and then the field librarian asked the teaching faculty to include her contact information on the syllabus [B].

In order that teaching faculty and their students could recognise that field librarians were available whenever needed, field librarians kept informing them of their services.

5 Discussion

Based on a case study of field librarians at the University of Michigan, “interacting with the community members”, “as a member of the community”, “customised to individual needs” and “staying in touch” were discovered as categories of librarians’ strategic approaches to teaching faculty. These categories indicated that field librarians’ main approach was to build good relationships with the community members including teaching faculty. Field librarians firstly approached individual teaching faculty by ice-breaking meetings, which were one-way approaches from field librarians. In parallel with interacting with individual teaching faculty based on the icebreaking meetings and the following daily communications, field librarians have been building interpersonal

relationships with the community members and increasing opportunities to be asked to join in various departmental events, such as meeting with prospective teaching faculty and joining in picnics and bowling games. Thus the interactions became two-way approaches between the community members and field librarians, and the level of interaction proceeded from low to high. The two-way interaction helped field librarians design and provide library services including ILI customised to individual teaching faculty and each specific situation. The higher the interaction became, the more familiar the librarians became with the specific contexts. As a result, field librarians were able to design appropriate customised services, and teaching faculty and their students were satisfied with their services and asked field librarians further questions [F]. In order to maintain the interaction, field librarians provided “staying in touch” approaches so that teaching faculty could keep in mind that field librarians were available whenever needed.

Such field librarians’ relationship-based approaches were located in relationship marketing. Relationship marketing was marketing and management based on “forming long-term relationships with customers. Rather than trying to encourage a one-time sale, relationship marketing tries to foster customer loyalty by providing exemplary products and services” [15]. Grönroos proposed key relationship-based characteristics: (1) the service provider and customer engaged in long-term business contact; (2) the relationship required that the service provider gained insight into the customer’s everyday process; and (3) the goal of the relationship was mutual value creation [16, p. 3]. Field librarians engaged in long-term contact with teaching faculty in the departments through continuous approaches including icebreak meetings, e-mails and daily face to face communications. Moreover, they were involved in various departmental events, not only faculty meetings but also social events. Based on being deeply involved in the everyday life of the departments, field librarians gained insights into specific needs of individual teaching faculty and the departments. These insights helped field librarians design and provide exemplary services customised to individuals and individual situations. It resulted in fulfilling teaching faculty’s needs such as enhancing learning outcomes in their classes and solving problems with information searches in their instructional and research process. It also resulted in fulfilling the library’s functions to integrate library services into teaching and scholarly environments. Teaching faculty actively used library services provided by the library via the field librarian in the department. Field librarians filled in a role of bridges between the departments including teaching faculty and the library, and created value both for the department and for the library.

Previously, based on a case study of Earlham College in the United States, the Earlham model was constructed as a model of building collaboration between teaching faculty and librarians in education. The main strategic approaches were “customised ILI”, “instructional support for teaching faculty” and “interpersonal communications”, which were recognised as a similar set of approaches of field librarians at the University of Michigan [17]. While the outlines of these approaches were paralleled to each other, these developing processes were different.

At Earlham College, the initial approach was to individual teaching faculty asking if librarians could provide ILI in their classes in order to solve the problems that students did not know how to find information and librarians had to answer same basic questions at the reference desk repeatedly [18]. In the process of providing ILI,

librarians realised that ILI should be customised to each course so that students could listen to librarians seriously. Librarians also realised that building interpersonal relationships with teaching faculty could become infrastructure of successful ILI, and extended approaches such as “instructional support for teaching faculty” and “interpersonal communications” [19]. Thus, “customised ILI” was located as the core approach, and “instructional support for teaching faculty” and “interpersonal communications” with teaching faculty were located as the supplemental approaches in order to promote successful “customised ILI”.

At the University of Michigan the initial approach was “interacting with the community members”. Based on interpersonal relationships with individual teaching faculty, field librarians gained the outline of their future services “customised to individual needs”. This “customised to individual needs” approach covered with various services including ILI. Therefore, building interpersonal relationships with teaching faculty based on “interacting with the community members” and “as a member of the community” were located as core approaches, and led to designing services “customised to individual needs”. It showed the developing process of designing customised services and building interpersonal relationships were opposite to the Earlham model, and field librarians were involved in more diversified services in the departments.

6 Conclusion

This paper investigated librarians’ strategic approaches to teaching faculty which librarians could promote to build collaboration between teaching faculty and librarians. Based on a qualitative case study of field librarians at the University of Michigan, “interacting with the community members”, “as a member of the community”, “customised to individual needs” and “staying in touch” were discovered as categories of librarians’ strategic approaches to teaching faculty. These categories showed field librarians’ main approach was to build good relationships with teaching faculty and was located in relationship marketing. While these approaches were similar approaches with the Earlham model, the developing processes and core approaches were different.

Future research concerning the following two points will be required. One is to interpret categories of intervening conditions in library, institutional and social contexts based on a case study of field librarians at the University of Michigan, and complete a conceptual framework of building collaboration between teaching faculty and librarians in university settings. The other is to analyse conceptual frameworks developed from multiple case studies including this case study through a thematic coding approach.

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