E **Evidence Based Library and Information Practice**

There is No Association Between Subject Liaisons' Perception of Their Work and Faculty Satisfaction with Their Liaisons

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Abstract

Objective – To determine the relationship between librarians' self-assessment of their liaison responsibilities and faculty's satisfaction with their liaison's performance, and the factors influencing these perceptions.

Design – Web-based survey questionnaire.

Setting – The survey was conducted over the Internet through email invitations.

Subjects – 354 librarians and 140 faculty members from selected universities and colleges in the United States.

Methods – 602 colleges and universities were selected based on institution size, degrees offered, and financial status using U.S. Department of Education's 2008 institution data. Each institution was randomly assigned one of three subject designations: chemistry, psychology, or English. A randomly selected faculty member from the designated subject department and their corresponding subject liaison librarian ("liaison") were contacted for the survey.

Institution websites were used to locate faculty and liaisons. If a list of liaisons could not be found, then a librarian from the website's available contact list was randomly selected instead. The chosen individuals were invited via email in April 2010 to participate in the

online survey. Before the survey closed in mid-May, up to two follow-up emails were sent to those who had neither responded nor asked to be removed from the contact list. The survey questionnaire was delivered through the Lime Survey platform and consisted of 53 items in 15 questions.

Main Results – The survey had an overall response rate 41.0%: 58.8% from librarians and 23.3% from faculty. Three hundred and four of the 354 librarians surveyed (85.9%) were self-identified liaisons, although researchers were unable to identify 61 of them through their library websites.

Most liaisons surveyed had responsibilities in the areas of collection development (96.1%), instruction (87.2%), and reference (82.6%). They provided an average of eight types of liaison services, some of which fall under these categories. The liaisons worked with an average of four academic departments (M=4.12, SD=2.98) and spent approximately 10 hours per week (M=10.36, SD=9.68) on their subject responsibilities.

The majority of liaisons felt they were successful (62.5%) or very successful (13.8%) in their liaison services and were either satisfied (50.7%) or very satisfied (12.2%) with the liaison relationship with their departments. E-mail (97.2%) was the liaisons' most frequently cited communication channel. The frequency of contact with their departments had the highest correlation (gamma = -0.567, p < 0.05) with liaisons' perception of their own performances.

Of the 140 faculty surveyed, 104 indicated that their library had liaisons and 66.3% of them had had some contact with the liaison within the previous 6 months. Faculty who knew their liaison by name (gamma = 0.668, p < 0.05) or who had recent contact with the liaison (gamma = -0.48) were more satisfied with the liaison services than those who did not. Faculty who received more services from their liaisons (gamma = 0.521) also indicated greater satisfaction than those who received fewer services.

Faculty assigned higher importance than liaisons did to three liaison services: faculty participation in collection development, new publication notices, and copyright information. On the other hand, liaisons ranked the importance of information literacy-related services, including in-class library instruction sessions and integration of library instruction into the curriculum, much higher than did faculty.

Furthermore, 66 pairs of liaisons and their corresponding subject faculty completed the surveys. Forty-nine of the faculty members out of those matched pairs knew their liaisons and were more satisfied with the liaison services than those who did not. However, no other relationships, such as correlations between faculty satisfaction of their liaisons and liaisons' assessment of their own performance, could be found between responses of these matched faculty and liaison pairs.

Conclusion – This study highlighted the disparity between faculty's and librarians' perceptions of library liaison programs. Most notably, there were no statistically significant relationships between liaisons' perception and satisfaction of their work and their faculty members' satisfaction of the liaison services. Faculty and liaisons also differed in their assigned importance to various types of liaison services.

Moreover, while faculty's satisfaction with liaison services correlated with the frequency of their contact with and the number of services received from their liaisons, their satisfaction did not translate into approval of the library. No statistically significant relationship could be found between faculty's familiarity or interaction with their liaisons and their satisfaction with their libraries overall.

Commentary

Since much of the research on library liaison services is limited to the perspectives of librarians or to programs within a single institution, this article provides a timely

contribution to current scholarship. The study scored an overall rating of 84% based on the Evidence-Based Librarianship (EBL) Critical Appraisal Checklist (Glynn, 2006). Rating for each EBL sub-section was also equal to or greater than 75%, indicating both an overall and section validity.

However, there is one notable flaw in the study design: the authors chose English, chemistry, and psychology as the representative academic disciplines without providing any sound rationale for their choices. This selection included two subjects in the humanities, but excluded all of fine arts, engineering, education, medicine, and business. Since faculty members' information needs vary across disciplines, such unbalanced subject selection reduces the representativeness of the study findings. Possible variations between responses from the three disciplines were also unexamined, even though the findings could be valuable to liaisons working with multiple academic departments.

In addition, while selected survey questions are described in the results, readers would benefit from complete copies of the questionnaires. In particular, it is unclear whether the faculty survey effectively defined, or differentiated between, liaison and general library services. For instance, a few faculty members indicated that they received copyright information as a liaison service, even though their corresponding liaisons did not provide copyright consultations.

Libraries commonly offer faculty services through channels in addition to subject liaisons. Therefore, faculty respondents may have mistakenly attributed all services from the library as services from their liaisons, or vice versa. Since the authors aim to differentiate between faculty satisfaction of their liaison and of the library, providing the actual questionnaires would aide readers in determining whether a lack of clearly defined service channels in the faculty survey had significantly impacted the validity of selected findings.

Nonetheless, despite a few areas for improvement, this study provides a timely examination of liaison services and highlights the lack of evidence based research to support the effectiveness of liaison programs and their values to academic libraries. Furthermore, the findings not only provide practical implications for liaison librarians to evaluate and prioritize the type of services offered based on faculty feedback, but also offer directions for future scholarship, such as comparisons of liaison service perceptions across multiple disciplines, or interaction between liaisons and multiple faculty members from the corresponding departments.

References

Glynn, L. (2006). A critical appraisal tool for library and information research. *Library Hi Tech, 24*(3), 387-399. doi:10.1108/07378830610692154