

Approaches to Liaison Librarianship: Innovations in Organization and Engagement, edited by Robin Canuel and Chad Crichton

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Book Review: *Approaches to Liaison Librarianship: Innovations in Organization and Engagement*

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Liaison work has always been an essential part of academic librarianship, and much has been written about the changing roles of academic librarians and their evolving responsibilities in liaison activities. However, the precise meaning of this role is vague. Traditionally, information literacy instruction, reference, and research support have been the core pillars of liaison librarianship, but in recent years roles have expanded. Nowadays, liaison librarians are expected to be conversant in scholarly communication, effective in curriculum and program planning, and able to troubleshoot in the changing landscape of technology in order to satisfy a wide variety of demands from students and faculty.

Approaches to Liaison Librarianship collects the voices of many practicing librarians illustrating their experiences. The editors, Robin Canuel and Chad Crichton, have extensive experience in liaison librarianship. Canuel has served as the head of Liaison Services at McGill University Library where he supervised a large team of liaison librarians, and previously he held a variety of liaison roles. Crichton is a liaison librarian at the University of Toronto Scarborough (UTSC).

This edited collection presents case studies, ideas, and perspectives from a wide range of Canadian and American institutions that provide valuable insight into liaison models and how they are implemented in today's college and university libraries. Although this collected book focuses on North American academic libraries, academic librarians around the world will find the book's content relevant. Many of the chapter authors are liaison librarians who share their day-to-day experiences with their challenges and opportunities, as well as descriptions of projects and

initiatives in collaboration with research and teaching faculty. Liaisons will find this very useful to read and to draw on for inspiration; however, the book is of great interest also for librarians with other roles and responsibilities in academic libraries, as it offers several examples of effective collaboration between liaisons and all academic library staff.

Over 20 chapters, the book addresses many topics about liaison librarianship. Chapters 1 to 5 present case studies of academic librarians implementing liaison programs to meet the specific needs of their communities. Chapter 6 discusses outreach activities for liaison librarians; Chapters 7 and 8 focus on embedded liaisons; and chapter 10 presents a curriculum mapping exercise. Collaboration with faculty, a major function of liaison work, is addressed in multiple chapters. For example, Chapter 9 describes the author's experience working collaboratively with faculty in the Health Sciences department at California State University, East Bay, on designing a new public health course; Chapters 12 and 13 discuss the efforts of faculty and librarians to build effective partnerships to provide research assistance to graduate students. Particularly interesting is Chapter 11, in which the author, a liaison librarian in the humanities and social science, describes an effective collaboration with her colleagues in Rare Books and Special Collections at McGill University, Montreal, to instruct students to identify and find primary sources as well as use them critically. This chapter shows how a close collaboration between liaison librarians and rare book and special librarians (but also archivists) can provide a great opportunity to highlight a library's collections of rare materials.

Subsequent chapters describe the experience of an embedded librarian serving as an adjunct instructor (chapter 14), the opportunities and advantages of faculty-liaison relationships (chapter 15), and a library project to decolonize library collections (chapter 16). The following chapters address the importance of collaboration between liaisons and their colleagues in academic library, such as functional specialists (chapter 17) and scholarly communications librarians (chapter 18). Chapter 19 discusses the role of entrepreneurship in liaison work. Finally, readers will find especially interesting the final chapter, which casts a gaze on the (possible) future of liaison librarianship. Actually, the goal of the chapter is not to predict the future of the profession, but to highlight the notion of "futures thinking" as a way for a library to become a source of external influence. The chapter takes inspiration from the *Futures Toolkit* developed by the UK Government Office for Science, which provides a set of tools to guide organizations use long-term strategic thinking in policy making: in particular, the author discusses several methods alongside potential applications for liaison work (backcasting, futures scenarios, roadmapping, visioning). After discussing the current state of liaison librarianship across a variety of academic

institutions throughout the book, this inspiring chapter is an excellent conclusion as it reminds readers to keep looking to the future.

All the experiences reported in these chapters demonstrate the importance for liaisons to have strong relationships with other librarian colleagues who have expertise in different fields. This is an excellent book that helps readers to better understand the many facets of liaison librarianship today. With such diverse initiatives described, readers can learn about many facets of liaison librarianship. However, since the scope of the volume is broad and with extremely varied content, it would have been useful if the book was structured in more defined sections to organize topics more clearly. The volume would have benefited from a division of major sections focused on specific topics – for example, collaboration between liaisons and their colleagues in the library is a theme that could constitute a separate section containing chapters 11, 17, and 18. Despite this organizational oversight, *Approaches to Liaison Librarianship* is an insightful read for liaisons that provides valuable perspectives on liaison librarianship, giving inspiration on how to become true collaborators in all aspects of campus intellectual life.