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Communication with Classroom Faculty

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Faculty Relations

“The liaison model must also foster teamwork among the professors, students, and liaison librarians to be a success. The relationship can be viewed as similar to the offensive unit of a football team. The professor plays the role of the quarterback and gives students assignments in the same manner as a quarterback gives the plays to the team in a huddle.... The liaison librarians are like the offensive line, which determines where the play will go based on the alignment of the defensive team. The obstacles to completing the play successfully are the databases, serials, and monographs available. Because the liaison librarians are experts in this area, they will know what is available to complete the assignment and will tell the ‘quarterback’ which way to send the ‘play’: where to send the students to complete the assignment best. Once the entire team grasps and runs the same play, success will be guaranteed. Students will have a better understanding of their assignments, and professors will have reasonable expectations of their students.”

Konata, L. L., & Thaxton, L. (2001). Transition to a Liaison model: Teaching faculty and librarian perceptions. *Urban Academic Librarian*, 11(1), 28-56.

COMMUNICATING WITH CLASSROOM FACULTY

by

Elysabeth Kleinhans

College and university librarians are frequently urged to expand their communications efforts with classroom faculty in order to provide better service and to gain support for their libraries. Evan Farber (1978) has emphasized the need for more personal communication with individual faculty members. Guskin, Stoffie, and Boisse (1979) have recommended various communications methods such as attendance at faculty receptions and other social functions, and contributions to faculty newsletters. Miller (1977) has promoted the development of liaison personnel who work with individual academic departments as another important means of showing faculty the importance of the library in their work. These techniques are intended to help the faculty see the librarian as a partner in education and also to reduce tensions.

Tensions may arise in academic institutions when librarians attempt to obtain faculty status or privileges usually reserved for classroom faculty. They may also surface when librarians try to expand their teaching role through bibliographic instruction programs, which some faculty see as an encroachment on their own preserve. Tensions arise because of faculty resentment towards librarians, who may not be viewed as equals. It is important to librarians, however, to establish their right to equality by demonstrating that they are an integral part of the educational process. The communications techniques recommended have all been directed to this end: to make classroom faculty appreciate and respect librarians.

Librarians also express resentment towards classroom faculty, and one reason for this resentment is the faculty's perceived lack of understanding of what goes on in libraries. Day-to-day annoyances caused by faculty actions such as assigning the same book to twenty-five students without prior notification to the library or even without checking to see that the book is in the catalog are quite common; and librarians privately speak about them but rarely mention them publicly. However, these resentments are very real; they are the silent unmentionable frustrations of the job. Unfortunately, classroom faculty are usually unaware of the existence of such problems. The cumulation of minor incidents frequently makes for an overall negative feeling between librarians and classroom faculty.

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In general, librarians have made efforts to reach out to and establish rapport with classroom faculty, who, unfortunately, have not responded enthusiastically to such overtures. Many of the problems could have been avoided by a simple telephone call from the faculty member involved. To discover if the problems mentioned, as well as others, were as common elsewhere as they were at John Jay College, and to see if there was any relationship between the communications efforts of libraries and the positive and negative experiences of librarians with the faculty, a survey of librarians in the City University of New York was conducted. The survey included chief librarians and public services librarians. They were asked to respond to twenty-three questions, but only the three which are relevant and which appear in Figure 1 are discussed here.

The first question deals with the various methods of communication used and the extent of their effectiveness as perceived by the librarians. The second question asks about the incidence of positive experiences and encounters which librarians have had with the faculty, including compliments for the library and individual librarians, requests for assistance with projects, and other activities which indicate a respect for librarians as experts in their field. The third question deals with the incidence of negative experiences or encounters with faculty, including unsuitable assignments to students, attempts to use the library as a substitute class, and other activities which might reflect a lack of understanding of the role of librarians in the university setting. Answer sheets were anonymous but coded by institution to allow for comparisons.

Of 162 questionnaires sent, seventy (43%) were returned. Several methods were used to analyze the responses. Mean scores were computed from individual answers to each question. The results appear in Figure 2. Some of the respondents did not answer some of the questions. In Question 1, it is apparent that for those who reported liaison personnel, this was felt to be the most effective method used. In Question 2, compliments were reported as the most frequently occurring positive experience with faculty; and in Question 3 the most frequently reported negative experience was not notifying the library of assignments which could cause a special drain on library resources or personnel.

Correlations between communications efforts and positive experiences and between communications efforts and negative experiences were computed by correlating the figures for the perceived effectiveness of communications efforts with the figures for the perceived frequency of occurrence of the other two variables. The figures were obtained by dividing, for each institution, the sum of the

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scores for each question by the number of respondents. Bias was reduced by elimination of the six institutions with only one respondent each.

The correlation coefficient between Question 1 and Question 2 was a highly significant .79, a very gratifying result, indicating a high correlation between perceived effectiveness of communication efforts and positive experiences with classroom faculty. While correlation does not imply cause, it would appear that the librarians at the institutions studied are doing something right; their communication efforts are evoking positive faculty responses.

The correlation between Question 1 and Question 3 was .09, indicating a negligible relationship between perceived effectiveness of communications efforts and negative experiences with classroom faculty.

Thus, communicating with classroom teachers in an effort to have them view us as true partners in education has fulfilled its public relations role. What librarians have been communicating is that the library is a nice place and that librarians are competent people who can be counted on to do a good job. Public relations efforts have been remarkably successful. Positive experiences with the faculty run high at institutions which have followed this course. However, it is evident that using even highly rated techniques such as liaison personnel has not had enough impact on faculty behavior to prevent the negative experiences which bother librarians so much. A study by Nelson (1973) has shown that faculty are frequently not aware of the services offered by the libraries at their institutions, of the procedures they should follow in using the library, or of the problems discussed above. Ignorance is not bliss, and frequently the problems arise from ignorance.

In my personal experience, when I have pointed out to a faculty member a problem which has come up because the library was not notified about his assignment in advance, the professor has been very cooperative about subsequent assignments. If librarians spoke out a little more, many of the problems would probably be avoided. They should communicate more about what they would like professors to do for them as well as advertise what they can do for the professors.

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FIGURE 1

1. What formal lines of communication between librarians and members of the teaching faculty exist at your institution? Please indicate if any of the following means are utilized at your school and rate their effectiveness in informing the faculty of the library's function in the academic community and/or in promoting faculty cooperation with the library. 1 indicates least effective, 5 most effective.

A. Library committees composed of faculty members who meet with librarians.	Yes No	1 2 3 4 5
B. Library representation on policy committees.	Yes No	1 2 3 4 5
C. Attendance at general faculty meetings.	Yes No	1 2 3 4 5
D. Librarians assigned as liaison personnel to faculty members or departments.	Yes No	1 2 3 4 5
E. Newsletters	Yes No	1 2 3 4 5
F. Direct mailings from the library to faculty members.	Yes No	1 2 3 4 5
G. Attendance at institution-wide social events.	Yes No	1 2 3 4 5

2. Following is a short list of positive experiences which you may have had with faculty members. Their frequent occurrence may indicate an appreciation of the library's function in the academic setting. Please indicate which of these you have experienced and their frequency. (1 is very infrequent, 5 very frequent.)

A. Requests for special library instruction classes for students.	Yes No	1 2 3 4 5
B. Requests for help in planning assignments to help students use the library more effectively.	Yes No	1 2 3 4 5
C. Requests for faculty seminars on various aspects of library use.	Yes No	1 2 3 4 5

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- D. Suggestions for methods of improving library services (not acquisitions requests) Yes No 1 2 3 4 5
- E. Requests for help with specific research projects. Yes No 1 2 3 4 5
- F. Compliments paid to individual librarians or to the library as a whole. Yes No 1 2 3 4 5

3. Following is a short list of negative experiences which you may have had with faculty members. Their frequent occurrence may indicate a lack of understanding of the library's function. Please indicate which of these you have experienced and their frequency. (1 is very infrequent, 5 is very frequent.)

- A. Assigning books and telling students that they are in the library without checking the card catalog. Yes No 1 2 3 4 5
- B. Giving assignments which are unsuited to the library's collection and resources. Yes No 1 2 3 4 5
- C. Expecting the librarian to be a substitute teacher, i.e. assigning a library lecture to take the day off. Yes No 1 2 3 4 5
- D. Expecting the librarian to be a personal research assistant. Yes No 1 2 3 4 5
- E. Giving assignments which are above the students' level of competence in dealing with library materials. Yes No 1 2 3 4 5
- F. Not notifying the library of assignments which will cause a special drain on library resources or personnel. Yes No 1 2 3 4 5

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FIGURE 3

<u>INSTITUTION</u>	<u>AVERAGE Q.1</u>	<u>AVERAGE Q.2</u>	<u>AVERAGE Q.3</u>
Baruch	9.00	7.00	9.25
Brooklyn College	17.55	12.64	13.44
Bronx Community	11.67	6.33	13.00
City College	14.13	9.50	11.50
Hunter College	13.00	13.22	11.44
John Jay	15.33	12.00	15.33
LaGuardia	29.00	19.50	12.25
Lehman	7.50	9.50	11.50
Medgar Evers	19.75	17.00	19.75
Queens College	14.75	11.25	12.00
Staten Island	19.00	10.50	10.00
Queensborough Community	17.67	11.67	14.67
Mount Sinai	17.00	10.00	4.00

Correlations:

Question 1 and Question 2: $r=.79$ $p<.01$
 Question 1 and Question 3: $r=.09$ $p>.01$

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