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# Teaming Up: Benefits of Collaborating with Library Colleagues

Kim Cornell

*The University of Western Ontario, kcornel@uwo.ca*

Lise Doucette

*The University of Western Ontario, ldoucet@uwo.ca*

Dan Sich

*The University of Western Ontario, dsich2@uwo.ca*

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# Teaming Up:

## Benefits of collaborating with library colleagues

Kim Cornell, Lise Doucette, and Dan Sich

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# Three questions

- Clueless about chemistry (or some other subject)?
- Inundated with instruction (or other work)?
- Reinventing the wheel?

# Objectives

- Provide details of team approach
- Highlight benefits to: librarians, library, users
- Discuss problems & opportunities
- Inspire you to try

# Big picture

- Western
- Western Libraries
- Taylor Library
- Taylor Library Teams
  - Physical Sciences Team
  - Life Sciences Team



# Big picture

- Western's Mission Statement:
  - “Western provides the best student experience among Canada's leading research-intensive universities.”
- Increasing number of graduate students
- Stable number of undergraduate students
- Multi-disciplinary research
- New programs



# Some team history

- Initially, discussion forum
- Recognizing opportunities
- Moving to more structured team approach
- Meeting our user needs
- Silos vs knowledge sharing & skills development

# Driving factors

- Where were we?
- What were the opportunities? What were the challenges?
- What were we trying to accomplish?
- Did it work? Why?



# Institutional priorities

- Trickles down:
  - university > library system > individual libraries > teams > individuals
- Good opportunity to rethink how we are doing things
- Example: increase in graduate students
  - How did we respond?

# Staff vacancies

- @ your library?
- Retirement, maternity leave, secondment to project
- Hole on the beach? We fill-in
- Amount of notice? Time for knowledge transfer?
- Stressful... learning experience
- Learned to communicate

# Staff vacancies

- Early days: no discussion, no shifting responsibilities
- @ your library? Support mechanisms?
- 'Maintenance mode': team @ work
  1. Define gap: Documented? Time-sensitive, cancel/delay? Mission-critical? Courses? Contacts? Knowledge transfer?
  2. Fill gap: listen, encourage, volunteer, negotiate
- @ your library? Individual or team decision?

# Staff vacancies

- Chemical intolerance (stress)
- ID uncertainties, diffuse stress
- Non-mission-critical tasks: cancel, defer?
- Communication, documentation, working together
- Major projects, time-sensitive/golden opportunities  
→ can't abandon; be selective re new initiatives

# Staff vacancies

- @ your library? Immediate demands? Share remaining workload? Planned process?
- Adjustments? Clarify year's planned activities
- Help from Life Sciences Team
- Flexibility; shared goals, ownership, and responsibility

# Staff vacancies

- Library Head advocacy for staffing
- Make a case: support research, instruction, etc.
- Takes 8 months to fill vacancy: ad, interviews, etc.
- = 8 months of filling-in, checking-up
- Collegial, supportive; talk & listen
- Work together to find solutions

# Filling staff vacancies

- Carve out a spot
- Team talk: new hire's experience, expertise?
- Match-making: familiar, interesting? learning opportunity?
- E.g., Dan's: new + familiar + well thought-out
- Input from new hire, preferences?
- Collective decision-making
- @ your library? Ad for specific subjects?
- Opportunity to juggle subjects, share tasks

# Filling staff vacancies

- Multi-seater bicycle, 1 vacant seat
- 4+ months to learn how to pedal
- Team trains new hire
- E.g., highlight resources, keep track of courses
- Introduction to team culture



# Filling staff vacancies

- Knowledge transfer:
  - ▣ Instruction, contacts, collections
  - ▣ Previous librarian on-site?
  - ▣ Temporary coverage in place?
- E.g., Earth Sciences (geochemistry = chemistry)
- E.g., Maths
- When the new feet know how to pedal...

# Filling staff vacancies

- ...bring bicycle back up to speed = 'normal mode'
- Consider new/on-hold initiatives (once again)
- Discuss: new individual/team goals/projects, new committee memberships; consider workloads, interest, experience & expertise
- Throughout: ensure that users are well-served, in a consistent way

# Consistent service to users

- Cross-training as a team
- Moving away from traditional expert model
- Sharing instruction benefits us and students
  - Informal discussions about classes
  - Attending a colleague's class
  - Roving assistant in class
  - Presenting short section of class
  - Fully sharing sections or series of classes

# Consistent service to users

- Curriculum integration
  - Map out students' interactions with library
  - Build on skills learned in each year
  - Avoid repetition
- Other shared opportunities
  - Collections decisions
  - Office hours and drop-in sessions for graduate students

# Lessons learned

- Start small → collaborate on a project
- Share...documents, teaching content, knowledge
- Document work, priorities
- Cross training is key
- Recognize the time commitment for teamwork
- Revisit regularly and tweak to move forward
- Foster support for self-managed team model

# In summary...

- Snap-shot from ongoing process
- Determinants of success:
  - Openness to re-thinking
  - Communication (formal & informal), location, environment of support
  - Encouragement, continuous skills development

# Answers to three questions

- Clueless about chemistry?
  - Comfort with challenging resource, via co-teaching
- Inundated with instruction?
  - From 1 to 5 staff, sharing support of 8 sessions
- Reinventing the wheel?
  - From independence to support, shared ideas & modules
- For us, team = effective, ensures best service
- Benefits: workload & lack of expertise issues
- How might it look for you?

# Questions?

- Kim Cornell [kcornel@uwo.ca](mailto:kcornel@uwo.ca)
- Lise Doucette [ldoucet@uwo.ca](mailto:ldoucet@uwo.ca)
- Dan Sich [dsich2@uwo.ca](mailto:dsich2@uwo.ca)