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Teaming Up: Benefits of Collaborating with Library Colleagues

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Benefits of collaborating with library colleagues

Kim Cornell, Lise Doucette, and Dan Sich

OLA Super Conference
February 26, 2010
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
  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?

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