Becoming engaged in the user’s environment: initial musings

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Becoming Engaged in the User’s Environment: Initial Musings

Triveni Kuchi

Wearing Two Hats: Librarians' Experiences Running Academic Programs at Rutgers

A Panel by Scholarly & Professional Activities Committee (SAPAC)

December 10, 2011
Rutgers University Libraries
Librarian Roles and Opportunities: A Variety of Hats
Position:

*Social Sciences/Instructional Services Librarian*

One of the library hats:

*Subject specialist and liaison to Sociology and South Asian studies Program*
Roles(s) as a Librarian

- Liaison
- Instruction
- Reference
- Subject Specialist
- Collection Development

- Conferences/Presentations/Scholarship
- Service – to profession and institution

Activities and interactions include one-to-one, email, meetings, committees, task force, team work, and so on.
Liaison Librarian

Activities include:

- Reviewing library services at faculty meetings, and consultations with faculty, grad and undergrads
- Co-organizing, presenting and attending social events, programs, seminars, etc
- Teaching library research sessions/tours/presentations
- ... 

One-to-one meetings with faculty & grads to learn about their research needs, reaching out with ideas, suggestions and solutions that meet or address their needs...Have many conversations and follow up on some potentials/interests
Becoming an engaged liaison

- Work closely with South Asian Studies program (SASP), faculty, staff and students – School of Arts and Sciences (SAS)

- Purpose:
  - To learn about users’ activities, research areas and focus, purpose of the program, etc.
  - To build collections, resources and services related to these needs
  - Personal interest/motivation: use my experience, background, skills, and interest in the region to develop strong connections with users
Collaboration Opportunity

- In 2009 Spring, SASP faculty elected their librarian as the new director of the program.
- The Library Director, University Librarian, and administrative and area deans of SAS together approved this appointment of 3 years.
Program in South Asian Studies (SASP)

About the Program

- Established in 2003 by faculty teaching or interested in South Asia region: includes the nations of Bhutan, Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Tibet, as well as the bordering nations of Afghanistan and Myanmar.

- Mission: SASP seeks to promote the study of this region and its diasporic communities through the development of an interdisciplinary set of courses, speakers' series, and public events.
As of 2010-11 there are 27+ faculty from SAS’ History, Religion, Art History, Cinema Studies, AMESALL, Sociology, Anthropology, Geography, English, Women’s & Gender studies, Comparative Literature; + School of Business, Newark; + SEBS + UMDNJ/RWJ & so on…

And 28+ Rutgers Student Organizations related to South Asia
Program in South Asian Studies (SASP)
Role & Responsibilities of the Director

- Multi-disciplinary faculty & student engagement
- Programs & conference collaborations and coordination
- SASP Executive Committee meetings
- South Asian Junior Faculty Working group engagement
- Student Advising for minors, some indv. majors
- Research/Travel Awards
- Chakra Grad/UG paper Award
- Rutgers India project
  - Chair of the IAPP Strategic Planning India faculty committee
  - Participated in IIE Study tour of Indian higher educational institutions
  - Co-Chair, India Strategic Planning Committee

Activities conducted through one-to-one meetings, email, task forces, SASP executive committee, one part-time admin. assistant & student worker
Program in South Asian Studies (SASP)

2010-2011 programming coordination and activities – examples of engaging and working collaboratively with faculty:

» Girish Karnad at Rutgers: Multiple events. Feature event: Staged Play reading of Hayavadana. Performed by RU Theater students and Epic Actors Workshop (NYC).

» Kiran Nagarkar - Readings from his God’s little soldier, Ravan & Eddie, etc. (multiple events) - Renowned award winning author. Literature

» Medha Patkar, Behind 8% Growth: Development for whom and at whose cost? Renowned Indian social activist. Social sciences

» Vishwa Adluri: The Poetic Nature of the Universe in the Mahabharata - Well known scholar of Greek and Indian Philosophy, Sanskrit expert. History

» Ranjan Kamath, Agents of Change-An Immersion with Ranjan Kamath Films: Fishers of Men, The Die is Caste and Tanvir Ka Safarnama. Social change through Film

» Rutgers South Asia Conference: Beyond Nation-States: Networks, Communities and Diasporas. (Two days) - Multi-disciplinary

» Neloufer de Mel: Post-War ‘Settlements’: Locating Cultural Interventions in Sri Lanka Political Science/Social change

...
Two Hats
with multiple roles & responsibilities

- Director, SASP
- SASP Executive committee chair
- Programming planner, faculty advisor, & coordinator
- Manager of events
- Manager of budget
- Student adviser (forty SASP minors)
- Faculty adviser for Student Organization – RU Natya
- Grants review task force
- Planning for India Faculty Strategic team – Co-Chair
- Engaging four newly hired SASP faculty members
- Engaging and keeping everyone together during crisis and difficult exits and retirement of some key SASP faculty members
- Liaison librarian
- Instruction librarian
- Subject specialist
- Collection development
- ...
some thoughts on...
what wearing two hats entails

- Engagement, Interactions, and Conversations: key to the process of building rapport ...a process of bonding with similarities while bridging differences...

- Being (and becoming) reliable: Dependable; Informing, engaging, connecting, communicating, establish strong relationships... that enhances mutual respect, recognition, reliability, trust, value...and (sometimes) our collective identities...

- Rise to the occasion - learning on the go: Ask! ...till you understand! (especially since roles are not always well-defined) & communicate, share information honestly (not negatively) ...about possibilities, needs and constraints
Involvement in user’s environment...presence...

being a librarian and becoming engaged

- If an idea sparks and the advantage is for the user, then get ready to pursue that project to the maximum extent possible... Try to make it work even if not perfect ...[add on hats if necessary...]

- Although it is time-consuming and difficult on occasion to wait for an opportune time for things to materialize, I strongly believe in a participative and consultative type of leadership. I find this mutually beneficial. It also helps motivate and engage faculty in various ways

- ...no guarantees for success, but at least you know what and why something did not work. So there is always scope for improvement and change
Closer ties, deeper understanding, stronger relationships, permanent connections, greater trust in librarian and library.
Advantages for the liaison librarian

- **Improved image and identity** of the librarian within the university and among faculty and peers.
- **Increased presence** within faculty committees and activities; can show your skills & versatility of librarianship; great opportunity to run initial project ideas against faculty for their opinions, etc.
- **Increased trust:**
  - builds trust amongst constituencies that you are about service; shows that you care enough about the area/program (even in your role as librarian); and that you are looking out for the user’s success, which translates indirectly to the librarian and the library’s success.
- **Increased respect:** acceptance as a peer (rather than in a supportive role) that helps the liaison connect, share information, services and programs more meaningfully and as a colleague.
- **Increased understanding:** …helps apply your empathy skills. Liaison as a people-to-person, interactive, and perceiving individual (comes naturally to some liaisons…take advantage of this skill).
Advantages for libraries: some examples

- Increased library presence in the user’s environment through several co-sponsorships, and collaborations esp. for some of the high profile programs involving the South Asia faculty, students and the interested community. e.g. Girish Karnad program; NJ Assemblyman Chivukula presided over the Adluri program; and so on

- Capturing and creating unique material through faculty initiated programming - cataloging streaming and other South Asia video resources unique to RU. Collaborating with Libraries’ Media Center several videos have been prepared and will be cataloged, deposited in the institutional repository, and made available as unique library collections

- Indian poets archive…large multi-year project that will involve grants, digitization plans and video archival. Opportunity to create niche or unique resources

- Building and sustaining strong and unique relationships with users

Excellent opportunity to influence positively, build trust and relationships with library’s key stakeholders – faculty and students
Thank You

Questions?