

Florida State University Libraries

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Core Competencies for Subject Librarians at the Florida State University Libraries

Dan Schoonover, Kirsten M. Kinsley, Gloria Colvin, Renaine Julian, Sarah A. Buck Kachaluba, Micah Vandegrift, Lindsey Wharton, Jenni McKnight and Trip Wyckoff



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Sarah Buck Kachaluba
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Trip Wycoff

INTRODUCTION

There is a consensus among academic research communities that the role of the subject librarian is changing. Words such as *re-orienting*, *re-visioning*, *re-tooling*, and *re-thinking* are all being used as research libraries adjust to the shifting academic environment. This shift is evidenced by the current evolution of research, teaching, and scholarly communication methods, along with rapidly changing technologies and digital formats.

As roles change, in any profession, it is important to articulate values-based core competencies. Values are the *beliefs* that define our identity and culture, and ultimately, prescribe our behaviors. Core competencies are the *behaviors*, or the skill sets, that make us unique and competitive on campus, adding distinct value to the process of research, teaching and learning. Core competencies inform our expectations and superior performance, and they provide strategic direction for training, professional development, assessment, and hiring. In particular, at Florida State University, the core competencies of the subject librarian give strategic direction to fulfilling the university's initiatives for Preeminence and performance funding and a top 25 ranking.

This document identifies three basic, overarching values of the subject librarian program, and flowing out from those values, five core competencies. The values—engagement, advocacy, and collaboration—are a priority of all subject librarians and help to define a common identity. The core competencies—research services, scholarly communication, use of digital tools, teaching, and collection development and access—are benchmarks for superior service. While the competencies are the skill sets that make us distinctively unique on campus, it is not expected that every librarian be an expert in every area. The core competencies and their best practices are something to work towards; they provide the subject librarian program with a structure for goal setting, assessment, services, hiring, and training. However, because of our commitment to our guiding values, it is the priority of all librarians to be deeply involved with each of the five competencies as advocates, facilitators, and team builders.



Core competencies provide the subject librarian program with a structure for goal setting, assessment, services, hiring, and training.

BASIC VALUES

1. Engagement

- As active partners in the academic community, we take the initiative to develop strong relationships with faculty, students and researchers.
- We are a presence on campus, and are deeply involved in the entire lifecycle of the research, teaching, and learning process.

2. Advocacy

- We are the face and voice of the library, therefore we advocate for its support to faculty, students, campus administrators, and other stakeholders. Likewise, we are committed to promoting the needs of students and faculty to our campus administrators and other stakeholders.
- We intelligently and persuasively advocate for important issues within the research community.

3. Collaboration

- We embrace an attitude that, though we may not share the same strengths or mix of competencies, we share the same values, and will work together to meet our goals, at times leaning on each other to provide the skills and knowledge needed for success.
- We are dedicated to networking with faculty, students and other professionals to build effective research and learning teams that advance the mission and goals of the university.



This document identifies three basic, overarching values of the subject librarian program, and flowing out from those values, five core competencies.

CORE COMPETENCIES

1. RESEARCH SERVICES

Subject librarians actively participate as partners in the research of their assigned departments. They engage faculty and students throughout the entire research lifecycle. Subject librarians know what constitutes successful research and they develop a strong understanding of the research development, processes and output in assigned disciplines.

Best Practices:

- Create, refine and assess research and information services and programs in multiple formats.
- Provide in-depth, specialized research consultation and reference to students and faculty for assigned subject areas
- Develop partnerships and research teams within the library and beyond on collection building, teaching and learning issues, and grants or research projects.
- Foster interdisciplinary collaboration across campus.
- Collaborate with functional specialists to provide more in-depth research services on research teams.
- Advise and consult on intellectual property questions, publication opportunities, management of research products, and the promotion of the work and analysis of its impact.
- Advise and consult on digital research tools.
- Advocate for issues and resources related to data management.
- Offer regular virtual or in-person office hours in assigned departments.
- Create research guides, video tutorials, research blogs, or other unique learning objects.
- Be aware of research trends and issues within assigned subject areas.

2. SCHOLARLY COMMUNICATION

Subject librarians function as both advocates and consultants for changes in academic publishing, including shifts toward open access, an expanded understanding of author rights, and the practical implications of research compliance related to dissemination of research.

Best Practices:

- Leverage existing departmental connections to begin discussions about scholarly communication.
- Inform and educate faculty about scholarly communication issues, including author's rights, benefits of open access, metrics and measurement, ease of open access archiving, changing structures of academic publishing.
- Promote DigiNole Commons and assist faculty and students with depositing materials into the institutional repository.
- Monitor faculty publishing habits and proactively advocate for open access archiving and its benefits.
- Advocate for best practices in data management planning, description, access and discovery.

- Advocate for sustainable models of scholarly communication, including open access.
- Advise faculty and students on basic copyright matters related to academic publications.
- Refer faculty and students to functional specialists for deep knowledge and assistance with publishing and copyright topics.
- Adopt personal open access principles for your own research
- Monitor patterns of research and emerging issues in scholarly communication.
- Promote effective strategies for the sharing and promotion of scholarship.

3. USE of DIGITAL TOOLS

The subject librarian promotes the use of subject-specific information resources and services to meet user needs and expectations, utilizing current technologies and digital information tools.

Best Practices:

- Promote new online learning and digital tools to place the library more deeply into the flow of teaching, learning and research.
- Engage in the coordination and integration of online tools in support of teaching, learning and research.
- Analyze emerging technology trends with faculty members, and the implications for teaching and research.
- Collaborate with functional specialists within the libraries and beyond to provide effective digital tools for assigned subject areas.
- Provide consultation and referrals for interdisciplinary research teams.
- Promote the use of data management tools to faculty, researchers and students.

4. TEACHING

The subject librarian collaborates with colleagues within and beyond the libraries to implement strategic information literacy instruction that supports university curriculum and student research.

Best Practices:

- Adopt the ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards.
- Understand basic principles of instructional and assignment design appropriate to information literacy instruction.
- Create library curriculum to support FSU's current QEP theme: *Think FSU*.
- Deliver strategic and effective instruction to support the curriculum within assigned subject areas, using active learning teaching techniques when appropriate.
- Develop strategic plans to embed library instruction within particular courses in assigned subject areas.
- Stay aware of current curriculum course offerings in assigned areas, and encourage faculty to call on you for library instruction.
- Engage with faculty members to integrate information literacy into the curriculum.
- Offer instruction sessions for research methods courses and upper-level undergraduate courses.

- Deliver alternate learning opportunities such as research guides, research consultations, and video tutorials.
- Offer additional workshops beyond library instruction on specific topics germane to your strengths and the department's needs or interests.
- Write learning outcomes for information literacy appropriate for assigned disciplines.
- Perform regular student learning assessments.
- Continually assess and improve teaching skills.

5. COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT and ACCESS

The subject librarian develops and manages collections and works to provide on-demand access to content to support research and teaching in assigned subject areas.

Best Practices:

- Establish relationships to support cooperative collection development to enhance access to shared resources both within the FSU community and beyond.
- Remain familiar with the library collection, review sources, approval plans, and the ordering process so as to identify and order appropriate materials to support research and teaching.
- Work with users to provide access to content that meets research and curricular needs.
- Remain aware of research trends and projects within assigned disciplines.
- Collaborate with resource-sharing professionals to provide users with immediate access to content.
- Use library content to engage users through events, exhibits and digital collections.
- Communicate with faculty about opportunities to order materials.
- Coordinate with vendors, faculty, and Acquisitions to review and purchase new or updated resources.
- Coordinate with vendors to inform students and faculty about new or updated products, collections, and/or services impacting the research cycle.
- Inform users of new publications or other resources in subject areas.
- Monitor departmental ordering/spending to meet deadlines.
- Promote the New Faculty and Robert Bradley Faculty Research Grants
- Develop and update collection development policies for assigned subject areas.
- Monitor database usage in assigned areas and make recommendations regarding renewal or cancellation.
- Serve on appropriate statewide and/or national committees and task forces relevant to subject areas.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The following section summarizes outstanding resources relevant to shifting subject librarian or liaison responsibilities in research libraries:

Association of Southeastern Research Libraries. Proposal Summary: Liaison Librarians of the 21st Century: A Professional Development Program (2009). Retrieved from <http://ittybittyurl.com/X1s>

Association of Southeastern Research Libraries. Draft Prospectus: Liaison Librarians of the 21st Century: A Professional Development Program (2009). Retrieved from <http://ittybittyurl.com/X1t>

In 2009, ASERL proposed the creation of a professional development program for the liaison librarian “of the near future.” Unfortunately, the program never gained support and the idea was abandoned. However, the intent of the program remains significant: transitioning the traditional collections-focused role to a teaching and research enterprise role that “positions the expertise of the librarian more integrally into the teaching/learning workflow and research practices of scholars, researchers, and students.” The proposal advised that liaisons focus their development in the following areas:

1. Digital libraries
2. Institutional repositories
3. Scholarly communication
4. Data services
5. E-science
6. Collaborative research practices involving interdisciplinary groups of faculty.

The proposal further suggested that liaisons be equipped to develop strategic partnerships with academic computing, IT staff, instructional designers, faculty development specialists, data specialists and computational scientists, media developers, and others. Finally, the proposal planned for the curriculum to be developed around the following clusters of topics:

1. Research/client services
2. Scholarly communication and collection development
3. Teaching and learning issues in the academy
4. Outreach, advocacy, and persuasion

Cawthorne, J., Lewis, V., & Wang, X. (2012). Transforming the Research Library Workforce: A Scenarios Approach. Retrieved from the Association of Research Libraries <http://www.arl.org/storage/documents/publications/ff12-cawthorne-lewis-wang.pdf>

The purpose of the ARL scenarios report was not to *predict* the future of the library, but, based upon current trends and observation, to *imagine* what the research library might look like, and to use the scenarios as a planning and discussion tool. Scenarios were presented to three different groups: the ARL Directors, the ARL Leadership Fellows,

and the UCLA Senior Fellows, and conversations followed. One of the major findings from both the scenarios and subsequent conversations was the need for “a greater mix of credentials.” Some suggested forgoing the MLS in favor of advanced degrees, but overall, it was expected that librarians work alongside other professionals such as data and GIS specialists. Interestingly, the term “broker” was used twice to describe the future librarian: the ARL Directors said that the concept of the single author, single institution is gone, and that librarians will work with other institutions to be “mega-library brokers;” and the UCLA Senior Fellows stated that the librarian of the future will be “a broker of deep collaboration with others.” The following is a list of suggested skills and competencies for the future librarian:

1. Deep subject expertise
2. Deep IT skills
3. Copyright and rights management
4. Cultural sensitivity
5. Deep collaboration
6. Entrepreneurialism
7. Creativity
8. Project management
9. Leadership
10. Competitive intelligence
11. Risk taking
12. Geospatial analysis
13. Data visualization
14. Data management

Daniel, L., Ferguson, J., Gray, T., Harvey, A., Harvey, D., Pachtner, D., & Troost, K. (2011). Engaging with Library Users: Sharpening our Vision as Subject Librarians for the Duke University Libraries. Retrieved from <http://library.duke.edu/sites/default/files/dul/about/subject-librarian-report-2011.pdf>

The purpose of the document is to help liaison librarians at Duke University define their changing roles and responsibilities. The document proposes a shift from a collection-centered to an engagement-centered model—a model in which the library is “an essential partner in research, teaching and scholarly communication.” Six responsibilities of all subject librarians are listed in order of importance. Each responsibility includes a summary statement suitable for use in job descriptions, details of the summary, and examples of best practices. The document is intended to be used as a basis for assessment and training, as well as for position descriptions and annual evaluations. The six responsibilities are:

1. Engagement
2. Teaching and Learning
3. Research Services
4. Collection Development
5. Digital Tools
6. Scholarly Communication

Haricombe, L. (2013, August). *Embracing Change, Empowering Scholarship*. Closing keynote address at the ASERL Summertime Summit: "Liaison Roles in Open Access & Data Management: Equal Parts Inspiration & Perspiration," Atlanta, GA. Retrieved from <https://smartech.gatech.edu/handle/1853/48695>

In the closing keynote address of the 2013 ASERL Summertime Summit, Lorraine Haricombe, Dean of the University of Kansas Libraries, spoke on the changing roles of the liaison librarian. She encouraged liaisons not to wait until they are asked for help, but to anticipate needs and actively insert themselves into the “researcher’s space.” In addition, she insisted that liaisons no longer think of collections as a product, but as an opportunity to make connections—we must shift, she says, from a product paradigm to a paradigm of connection services. Liaisons need to advocate for and explain OA policies, promote the institutional repository, partner with OA and data specialists, and understand the basics of copyright principles. In regards to organizational structure, Haricombe stated that some critical individual roles should be developed, but not every liaison needs to be an expert. Everyone, though, should be able to know something and advance the conversation. For example, every librarian at the University of Kansas now has the following statements in their position descriptions:

Actively communicate issues implicit in scholarly communication and open access in discussions with colleagues and with the KU community. Attend training and events designed and developed to promote understanding of trends and best practices in scholarly communication. Reflect this understanding in her/his work as a librarian at KU.

Actively participate in, and advocate for, the educational role of the libraries through dynamic engagement in campus teaching and research, campus collaborations, or staff development and training. Identify and make use of teaching opportunities in any circumstance, promote the libraries’ instructional resources and support, and obtain instructional expertise from colleagues as appropriate.

Jaguszewski, J., & Williams, K., (2013). *New Roles for New Times: Transforming Liaison Roles in Research Libraries*. Retrieved from the Association of Research Libraries <http://www.arl.org/storage/documents/publications/NRNT-Liaison-Roles-final.pdf>

This significant report describes the shifting role of the liaison librarian from the original bibliographer model, to the liaison model, and now to the engaged model in which the liaison plays both advocate and consultant. The overarching focus has shifted to what *users* do; thus, the *engaged* liaison seeks to “participate in the entire lifecycle of the research, teaching, and learning process.” The liaison is not expected to be an expert in all things, but he or she must be able to intelligently and persuasively advocate for important issues (and trends) within the research community. The ability to collaborate within and across institutions, to make connections and referrals, and to build teams of functional experts is fundamental to the new liaison role. In addition to collaboration and

working with functional specialists, the report highlights several other trends for the engaged liaison:

1. User-centered and collaborative collection development
2. Expanded roles in teaching and learning: embedding learning support into the student workflow (on campus and online)
3. “Re-skilling” to meet new and emerging needs in research support: digital scholarship, data and data visualization, geospatial literacy, copyright, scholarly communication, and interdisciplinary research
4. A *systems* approach to a flexible and blended workforce: entrepreneurialism, creativity, leadership, project management, communication, analytical and problem-solving skills, political savvy, and the *soft skills* of interpersonal and trusted relationships

Malenfant, K., (2010). Leading Change in the System of Scholarly Communication: A Case Study of Engaging Liaison Librarians for Outreach to Faculty. Association of College & Research Libraries. Retrieved from <http://crl.acrl.org/content/71/1/63.full.pdf>

The author documents the intentional implementation of a change process at the University of Minnesota Libraries, including the re-working of the liaison program. As part of the change, UMN required “baseline expertise” in scholarly communication for all liaison librarians. Position descriptions were updated, performance goals were instituted, and a Scholarly Communication Collaborative was created to support liaisons with training, information, and resources. The author states that liaisons can no longer be autonomous in setting their own priorities or remain isolated in the library: “They must talk to faculty regularly and be an active part of the academic life of campus.” It is critical that liaisons begin to think of themselves as partners with faculty in the research enterprise. Core competencies for UMN liaison librarians include: Cooperation, Advocacy, and Persuasion.

Ohio State University Libraries (2013). A Framework for the Engaged Librarian: Building on Our Strengths. Retrieved from <https://carmenwiki.osu.edu/download/attachments/37010332/Engaged+Librarian+Document.pdf?version=1&modificationDate=1362663472574>

In order to respond to increasing changes in higher education, OSU Libraries developed a new framework for their liaison librarians with *engagement* as the linchpin or guiding principle. Engagement is defined as a “deepened involvement with the academic community,” as well as “positioning subject librarian expertise within the workflows of users.” The framework lists five main categories of responsibilities and expectations for all subject librarians. Each category is then broken down into competencies and best practices, which serve as a guide for librarians in developing their annual goals (in consultation with their department heads). The five categories are:

1. Engagement
2. Research Services
3. Scholarly Communication

4. Collection Development
5. Teaching and Learning

Prahalad, C. K., & Hamel, G. (1990). The Core Competence of the Corporation. *Harvard Business Review*, 68(3), 79-91.

The concept of core competency was developed by C.K. Prahalad and Gary Hamel in the early 1990's. Prahalad and Hamel defined *core competencies* as those broad bundles of skills that are the "hallmark of the organization." They are what make the organization competitive and unique. Core competencies, state Prahalad and Hamel, should make a significant contribution to the value of the customer and they should be unique among peers or competitors. Prahalad and Hamel also specify that core competencies are not service or product specific, but broad and overarching. In other words, services and products flow out of core competencies. As trends and technologies evolve, core competencies will inspire changes and new ideas; therefore, an organization's commitment must be to its core competencies rather than to its services or products. The core competency is the driving force, and must be continually evaluated in order to produce relevant services in a shifting environment.

University of California Berkeley Library (2012). Re-envisioning Library Services Initiative: Role of the Librarian Self-Study Report. Retrieved from http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/AboutLibrary/re_envision_ROL_Report.pdf

UC Berkeley Libraries conducted a massive re-envisioning project in 2012, including the role of the liaison librarian. According to the report, the greatest and most significant area of change for the liaison was the organizational structure and interrelationships between librarians—they needed to move away from the stand-alone librarian to teams of librarians and library staff in more functional and supportive communities. In addition, the report called for both service models and collections to shift from "just in case" to "just in time," and instead of aiming to be a completely comprehensive collection, subject specialists should focus on ensuring access to information rather than ownership. Administratively, the library must support the universities' mission by giving higher priority to research and teaching support, and marketing must lead patrons to see the library as the principal starting point in the discovery process.

The focus of the new liaison position description is on "personalized interaction and assistance and being visible and accessible to their community." Activities include:

1. Promotion of services and collections
2. Intensive and personalized consultations
3. Community engagement and library visibility
4. User needs assessment and strategic planning
5. Relationship building
6. Engagement with and advocacy for emerging academic/research paradigms
7. Collaboration on special projects in conjunction with our partners
8. Internal facilitation and collaboration
9. Facilitation of external relationships

10. Fundraising and development

University of Washington Libraries (2014). Subject Librarian Position Description Framework. Retrieved from <http://staffweb.lib.washington.edu/units/cms/sl-portal/knowning/position-description-framework>

As part of their 2010 Strategic Plan, the University of Washington Libraries developed a new position description for their subject librarians. The position description lists seven core duties:

1. Outreach, marketing, and communication
2. Collection development and management
3. Teaching and learning
4. Scholarly communication
5. Reference services
6. Communication with other subject librarians
7. Contribute to the University of Washington's Commitment to Serve the Community

In addition, all liaisons are expected to team with experts in specialized areas such as copyright, digital initiatives, scholarly communication, knowledge management/data curation, and teaching and learning. Not every subject librarian is expected to personally perform all of these functions, but they are responsible for advocating, informing, and making connections.

APPENDIX

PREEMINENCE CRITERIA

<http://www.fsunews.com/article/20130429/FSVIEW/130428014>

<http://forwardflorida.com/florida-education/position-preeminence/>

1. Recruiting high-achieving freshmen (avg. 4.0 GPA/SAT score of 1800 or higher)
2. Top-50 ranking on at least two respective national public university rankings
3. Freshmen retention rate of 90 percent or higher
4. A 6-year graduation rate of 70 percent or higher
5. Six or more faculty members in national academies
6. Annual research expenditures of \$200 million or more
7. Annual research expenditures in diversified nonmedical sciences of \$150 million or more
8. A top-100 university national ranking for research expenditures in five or more STEM fields
9. One hundred or more patents awarded by the USPTO in the last 3 years
10. Four hundred or more doctoral degrees awarded annually
11. Two hundred or more postdoctoral appointees annually
12. An endowment of \$500 million or more

TOP 25 RANKING: *US News and World Report* Metrics

<http://www.usnews.com/education/best-colleges/articles/2013/09/09/best-colleges-ranking-criteria-and-weights>

<http://one.fsu.edu/top25>

<http://news.fsu.edu/More-FSU-News/24-7-News-Archive/2013/February/Florida-State-announces-plan-to-continue-rise-in-national-rankings>

1. Student selectivity
2. Retention and graduation rate
3. Graduation rate performance
4. Faculty resources
5. Financial resources
6. Academic reputation
7. Alumni giving

Current FSU initiatives include hiring 600 new faculty members (focusing on STEM disciplines), advancing career readiness and entrepreneurship, and becoming the most “veteran-friendly university in the country.”

PERFORMANCE FUNDING METRICS

http://www.flbog.edu/about/budget/docs/performance_funding/UniversitySlides.pdf

1. Percent of bachelor’s graduates employed and/or continuing their education further.
2. Average wages of employed baccalaureate graduates.
3. Cost per undergraduate degree.
4. Six year graduation rate.
5. Academic progress rate (2nd year retention with GPA above 2.0).

6. Bachelor's degrees awarded in areas of strategic emphasis (includes STEM).
7. University access rate (percent of undergraduates with a Pell-grant).
8. Graduate degrees awarded in areas of strategic emphasis (includes STEM).
9. Faculty awards.
10. National rank higher than predicted by the financial resources ranking based on a US and World News Report.