What do Faculty actually think Librarians do?

Study Leave Report

By

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June, 2016

In January 2016 I began a 3 month study leave (January – March 2016) to find out what faculty members actually think librarians do in their jobs. I had applied for and received ethics approval from the UVic Human Research Ethics Board for conducting a series of personal interviews with faculty members from 6 departments in the Faculties of Science and Engineering. I am currently the liaison/subject librarian for those 6 departments (Biochemistry/Microbiology, Mathematics/Statistics, Civil Engineering, Computer Science, Electrical and Computer Engineering, Mechanical Engineering). In my position as Science Librarian, I have been responsible for faculty liaison, collection development, reference and research and library instruction for my subject areas and departments. I have developed some productive relationships with specific faculty colleagues, but in many cases I feel I have not had as much success developing library instruction for both undergraduates and graduate students as I wanted.

When I reviewed the literature, I saw that a number of studies had been done using surveys, but I wanted to get more in depth information that can be achieved from in person interviews.

I had a number of reasons for choosing this topic. I wanted to be able to document my results and make recommendations to the librarian who would replace me, and also to inform the libraries' strategic planning process. I also thought this project would be my own "capstone" project for my 30 year career as a librarian.

I devised a set of questions to ask each interviewee and in developing these questions I was assisted by my colleague Shailoo Bedi, who had recently conducted interviews for her dissertation research.

In January 2016, I searched the literature to see what I could find concerning faculty perspectives on the roles of librarians, especially liaison librarians working in the physical sciences and engineering. I was especially interested in faculty ideas about librarian roles vis a vis information literacy/information fluency.

I found many articles about how librarians had attempted to work with faculty on information literacy projects, and many surveys that had been done, but very few studies reported what faculty thought librarian roles were (i.e. what they did).

A 1987 survey at the University of Manitoba (Faculty perceptions of librarians – Divay, Ducas & Michaud-Oystyk) found that

"faculty at the University of Manitoba perceive librarians mainly in terms of their service role"

"The study clearly demonstrates that the functions of research, teaching and management play a negligible role in the University of Manitoba faculty's perception of librarians".

In February 2016 I sent out 156 email invitations to the faculty in my 6 departments.   Literally within minutes, I began to receive responses!  I sent out a reminder invitation email 4 weeks after the first invitation and I received a total of 32 responses.  A few faculty declined or could not be interviewed within my available time for interviewing.  I had hoped to get at least 25 interviews done and in the end, I interviewed 27 faculty members from all 6 departments.

These 27 participants were as follows:

20 males, 7 females

17 Professors

6 Associate Professors

1 Assistant Professor

2 Assistant Teaching Professors

1 Adjunct Professor

The years of experience as a faculty member ranged from less than one year to more than 33 years.

I interviewed the faculty using a set of questions to guide the discussion.  Almost every participant allowed me to record the interview so that I could refer to it later.  I took notes as well.  The interviews lasted between 25 and 45 minutes.  Interviews took place either in my office or in the participant's office on campus, except for one telephone interview.  Many participants began the interview by apologizing for their lack of understanding of what librarians do!  After that last interview, I coded the responses to the questions in order to analyse the comments.  I did not completely transcribe each interview.  (See Appendix A for the list of questions.)

Results

**Question 1:**  What do you think librarians at UVic do?

The most popular answers were (Numbers indicate how many participants gave this answer)

- Research support (access to literature) 18
- Teach (library instruction) 0
- Management of library (organize, maintain) 17
- Collection development (buy books, journals, make budget decisions) 18
- Reference/student support (answer questions) 7

Interestingly, none of the participants gave any of following responses: Research, Scholarly & Professional contributions, Service to the University. All of these duties are part of the job descriptions of UVic librarians and are listed in the collective agreement.

**Question 2:** How do librarians at UVic assist with student learning and information literacy/fluency?

The most popular answers were (Numbers indicate how many participants gave this answer)

- Classes/training by librarian (15)
- One on one help (9)
- Online resources (5)
- Don't know (4)

Other responses included "Reserve", "Be a resource", "Have a critical role", "provide computing facilities", "create digital repository for ETDs", "Make the library a welcoming place for students"

**Question 3:** How to librarians at UVic assist researchers?

The most popular answers were (Numbers indicate how many participants gave this answer)

- ILL (7)
- Collection development (8)
- Journal access (10)
- Finding materials (8)
- Literature searching/training (5)
- UVicSpace (4)
- Don't know (3)

Other responses included "Open Access issues", "geospatial data access", "AskUs help" (AskUs is a reference service provided via email and online chat by the UVic librarians)

**Question 4:** Tell me about a time when a UVic librarian assisted you in your teaching role?

The most popular answers were (Numbers indicate how many participants gave this answer)

- Reserve (10)
- Classes/training by librarian (10)
- Collection Development (5)
- Never happened (7)

Other responses included "facilitate use of library space for classes"  This was for ENGR141, a first year engineering course that used learning commons room 129 in McPherson Library for 2 terms so far.

**Question 5:** Tell me about a time when a UVic librarian assisted you in your research?

The most popular answers were (Numbers indicate how many participants gave this answer)

- ILL(9)
- Collection development (5)
- Finding materials (5)
- Literature searching/training (5)
- Not applicable (5)

Other responses included "Open Access vouchers (Royal Society of Chemistry)", "UVicSpace", "reduced conference fees because library had membership to association".

**Question 6:** In your opinion, what is the most important thing librarians do at UVic?

The most popular answers were (Numbers indicate how many participants gave this answer)

- Research support -access to literature (16)
- Teach – library instruction (1)
- Management of library – organize, maintain (14)
- Collection development – buy books, journals, make budget decisions (7)
- Reference and student support – answer questions (5)


Interestingly, these were the same top answers to Question 1 (What do you think librarians at UVic do?) and the level of responses were similar for each answer, except Collection development which was tied for the top response of Question 1, and was only the 3$^{rd}$ ranking answer for this question about what is the MOST important thing librarians do at UVic.  Apparently, even given that journal access and reserve are highly ranked by faculty in other questions, and these depend on the Collection development activities of librarians, faculty do not consider them the most important activity of the librarians. Certainly, this shows the need for more communication with faculty about librarian activities and their implications.

**Question 7:** What do you personally value about the work librarians at UVic do?

The most popular answers were (Numbers indicate how many participants gave this answer)

- Research support and access to literature (15)
- Support for students, teaching and courses (8)
- Idea of the library or the university as a place of knowledge (6)

Only one of the answers included in the "most important things librarians do", Research support, was represented in the answers to the "Personally value" categories.  This seemed to be the question that

brought out the philosophical side of the participants.  Apparently even with scientists and engineers there is a mystical or mysterious side to libraries.

**Question 8:** Do you feel you get sufficient access to your subject librarian?  Why or Why not?

25/27 participants answered yes to this question, even though a number of times they first replied "Who is my subject librarian?"  Sadly, this seems to be just another example of not enough communication on the part of the subject librarian (i.e. me).

**Question 9:** How would you like to communicate with your librarian?

The suggested methods of communication were Email, in person, telephone and online chat.  None of the participants chose online chat or telephone as their preferred method.  A number of participants preferred multiple communication methods, depending on the situation. Email was the most common response with 22 answers of which 11 said it was their preferred method.  In person (face to face) got 12 answers and 4 said it was their preferred method.  Telephone was mentioned by 8 participants although none had it as a preferred method.  A number of participants noted that they received "too much email" and would probably just ignore email from the librarian.

**Question 10**: If you have had experience with academic librarians at other institutions, how does your experience there compare with your experience at UVic?

Many participants noted that since there had been so many changes in libraries in recent years they felt comparisons were not useful and that they had received good service both at UVic and their previous academic libraries.  In retrospect, this was probably not a good question for a personal interview and might have elicited different responses in a survey.

**Question 11:** Before today, have you ever met an academic librarian?

Every participant answered yes to this question.  Not surprising, as I had worked with almost all of the faculty members who participated in the survey.

After answering the set questions, I asked participants if they had any other questions for me, or if they wanted to talk about anything else.  Some of the faculty had some particular issues they were interested in and made the following recommendations:

**Recommendations   from faculty interviews**

Engineering Librarian should have face to face meetings with faculty members to update faculty on new/altered library services and to remind faculty of what librarians can assist them with:

- Teaching
- Research Data Management Planning
- Literature searching skills

- Open Access journal information
- UVicSpace for promotion of faculty research publications

Recommend to the Provost that orientations for new faculty occur more often (suggest 3x per year as at some other Canadian universities). Librarians should be included as presenters at these orientations since "librarians help people get tenure". Librarians could focus on new and untenured faculty.

Engineering professor suggests "more librarian involvement" in ongoing courses – at the upper level as well as 1st & 2nd year courses.

Engineering librarian should work with capstone project students in Faculty of Engineering.

Librarians could do more for graduate students in general, more activities like the Thesis Boot Camp.

Librarians should give regular sessions on what Open Access means for faculty and students.

The Library should charge faculty and researchers for Interlibrary Loan requests ($.99 per article) and the faculty could charge back to their research grants. The ILL Office could produce an invoice once or twice a year to facilitate this.

Librarians are "by and large good writers" and faculty/researchers could use librarians to strengthen grant proposals. Librarians are excellent proof readers and provide alternative knowledge sources.

Librarians should "take on the publishers" – promote and support Open Access publishing.

Librarians should be more "science literate". Faculty would like to hear more about science resources in messages from librarians (e.g. ArXiv)

**My recommendations**

After completing these interviews and reviewing the literature I realize that all my best work in information literacy and library instruction happened when I had a personal relationship with a faculty member, when they knew me and I knew something about them and their research. These relationships often developed when I was serving on various University committees, and I had an opportunity to explain my job in the library. I would recommend that librarians continue to get to know their faculty, and use many and varied methods to communicate with faculty to remind them of what librarians can do to help them and their students. Also, one of the most rewarding experiences I had was when I helped a graduate student in Engineering, who eventually returned to UVic as a professor. Since we already had a good working relationship, we were able to discuss how to improve information literacy for engineering students and eventually to put those ideas into practice.

This study leave was a positive experience and although most of the participants were known to me before the interviews, I was pleased to meet some new faculty and encouraged that they took the time to help me out. I think most participants found the interview interesting and probably most of them learned something new during that time. Often participants were given information about current library services and practices that will be useful to them in the future. A number of future opportunities

for library instruction were discussed and forwarded to the new Engineering librarian (as I will retire shortly).  Also it was very clear that most UVic faculty are unaware of the Research, Scholarly & Professional and University Service that makes up at least 20% of librarian duties at UVic.  Somehow, someway, librarians must improve their communication with faculty at UVic so that our jobs are better understood, in order that the goals of the university, the library and each librarian can be fulfilled.

In May 2016, I presented the results of this research to my colleagues at the University of Victoria Libraries, and at the annual conference of the Canadian Association of Professional Academic Librarians at Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences in Calgary AB.  The ppt slides from the presentation are attached to this report.

I wish to acknowledge the guidance and assistance of my colleagues at UVic Libraries over my career and especially leading up to my 2016 study leave.  Special thanks to Christine Walde, Shailoo Bedi and Elena Romaniuk for encouragement, advice and editing.  I also wish to thank all the professors from the Faculties of Science and Engineering who agreed to be interviewed for this project, I really appreciate their time, their participation and the ideas they shared with me.

Appendix A – Interview Questions

1. What do you think librarians at UVic do?

2. How do librarians at UVic assist with student learning and information literacy/fluency?

3. How do librarians at UVic assist researchers?

4. Tell me about a time when a UVic librarian assisted you in your teaching role?

5. Tell me about a time when a UVic librarian assisted you in your research?

6. In your opinion, what is the most important thing librarians do at UVic?

7. What do you personally value about the work librarians at UVic do?

8. Do you feel you get sufficient access to your subject librarian? Why or why not?

9. How would you like to communicate with your librarian?

10. If you have had experience with academic librarians at other institutions, how does your experience there compare with your experience at UVic?

11. Before today, have you ever met an academic librarian?

Appendix B - Sources consulted

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# Who, what, when, where, why

# Literature review, methods

- Few studies, mainly focusing on information literacy collaborations – health sciences, social sciences

- Conclusions from 30+ years ago still relevant (Divay, G., Ducas, A. M., & Michaud-Oystryk, N. (1987). Faculty Perceptions of Librarians at the University of Manitoba. *College & Research Libraries*, 48(1), 27–35.

- Interviews with faculty members from my departments

- Ethics review

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# Participants

- 156 faculty invited, 27 interviewed
- Faculties of Science and Engineering
- 6 depts represented (2 Science, 4 Engineering)

# Participants cont.

- 20 males, 7 females
- 17 Professors
- 6 Associate Professors
- 1 Assistant Professor
- 2 Assistant Teaching Professors
- 1 Adjunct Professor
- Years at UVic from <1 to >33 years

# Interviews

- 15 – 45 minutes, audio recordings
- 11 questions

# The questions

- What do you think librarians at UVic do?
- In your opinion, what is the most important thing librarians do at UVic?
- What do you personally value about the work librarians at UVic do?

# Analysis

- Coded answers
- Common response – *"I don't know"*
- Noted follow up actions for new Science & Engineering librarian

# What do Librarians do?

- Research support (access to literature) 18
- Teach (library instruction) 0
- Management of library (organize, maintain) 17
- Collection development (buy books, journals, make budget decisions) 18
- Reference/student support (answer questions) 7

# What is the MOST Important thing Librarians do?

- Research support (access to literature) 16
- Teach (library instruction) 1
- Management of library (organize, maintain) 14
- Collection development (buy books, journals, make budget decisions) 7
- Reference/student support (answer questions) 5

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# Comparison of what librarians do and what is MOST Important thing librarians do

| What librarians do | Category | Most important |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 18 | Research support | 16 |
| 0 | Teaching | 1 |
| 17 | Manage Library | 14 |
| 18 | Collection | 7 |
| 7 | Reference assistance | 5 |

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# What do you personally value about the work Librarians do?

- Research support (access to literature) <span style="color:red">15</span>
- Students, teaching, courses (support) <span style="color:red">8</span>
- Idea of a library or a university (place of knowledge) <span style="color:red">6</span>

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# Direct quotes from faculty

*"help me do my job"*

*"cannot envision a university without librarians and library"*

*"support in the undergraduate curriculum"*

*"ease of access to resources and guidance finding weird stuff"*

# More questions

- How do librarians at UVic assist with student learning/information literacy?
- Tell me about a time when a UVic librarian assisted you in your teaching role?

- How do librarians at UVic assist researchers?
- Tell me about a time when a UVic librarian assisted you in your research?

# Comparison: how librarians assist with student learning to how librarians assist faculty in their teaching role

| Student Learning | Category | Teaching Role |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Reserve | 10 |
| 15 | Classes/training by librarian | 10 |
| 0 | Collection | 5 |
| 9 | One on one help | 0 |
| 5 | Online resources | 0 |
| 4 | Don't know/never | 7 |

# Comparison: how librarians assist researchers to how librarians assist you (faculty member) with your research

| Assist Researchers | Category | Assist with your research |
|---|---|---|
| 7 | ILL | 9 |
| 8 | Collection | 5 |
| 10 | Journal access | 0 |
| 8 | Finding materials | 5 |
| 5 | Literature searching/training | 5 |
| 3 | Don't know/ NA | 5 |

# Even more questions

- Do you get sufficient access to your subject librarian?  Why or why not?
- How would you like to communicate with your librarian?
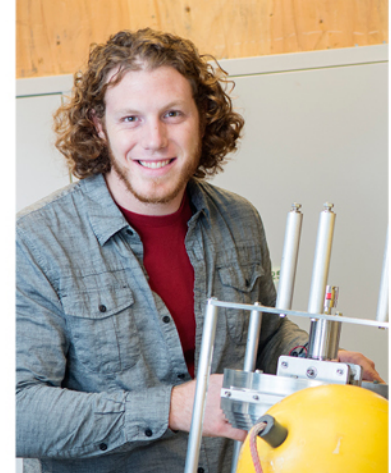- How does your experience with academic librarians at other institutions compare with UVic?

# Access & contact

- Almost every (25/27) interviewee said Yes to sufficient access to subject librarian
- Preferred contact – often multiple responses

| Email | 22 (11 preferred) |
|---|---|
| In person (face to face) | 12 (4 preferred) |
| Telephone | 8 (0 preferred) |

# Recommendations from faculty

- Face to face meetings with faculty
- Provost to schedule more new faculty orientations with librarian presenters
- More librarian involvement with grad students & upper level undergrads
- Open access sessions for faculty
- Charge researchers for ILL ($.99 per article)
- "Take on publishers" support OA publishing
- Provide support to grant proposal writing
- Librarians be more "science literate"

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# My recommendations

- Develop relationships
- Promote your services continuously
- Don't assume faculty understand your role

# Conclusions?

- Positive experience
- Relationships
- SERVICE (Professional Practice) is only known job for librarians
- Future collaborations for library instruction
- Faculty members learned about library services and librarian jobs

## Questions?  Comments?

- Study leave report will be deposited in UVicSpace in June 2016

- https://dspace.library.uvic.ca/ (browse author Katy Nelson)

- Bibliography available upon request (katnel@uvic.ca)

- Thank you!