

# **Review of *Approaches to Liaison***

## ***Librarianship: Innovations in Organization***

## ***and Engagement***

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**Abstract:** Review of Canuel, R., & Crichton, C. (Eds). (2021). *Approaches to liaison librarianship:*

*Innovations in organization and engagement.* Association of College and Research Libraries.

**Keywords:** *liaison librarianship, faculty-librarian collaboration, academic libraries, outreach*



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Liaison librarianship is well-entrenched in academic libraries. While it is entrenched, however, liaison librarianship has flexible definitions; the countless models in place across North American academic libraries arise from their individual institutional environments. At the same time, post-secondary institutions are in transition. There is an invigorated focus on research input and output, open scholarship, skills training, equity, and metrics, among others. Reflective of this transformation are additions and alternatives to services provided by academic librarians. As a result, the liaison model is in flux as academic libraries reshape their role to better serve users. It is becoming increasingly common for academic libraries to hire functional specialists, providing services like GIS and research data management. Bearing in mind both flexible liaison models and transformations at post-secondary institutions, it is important to hear the experiences of practicing liaison librarians.

Robin Canuel and Chad Crichton's *Approaches to Liaison Librarianship* gives readers perspective on these tensions in liaison librarianship. This edited collection presents academic librarian and management perspectives, case studies, and diverse initiatives from a wide range of Canadian and American institutions. There is no better time than now, in this moment of transition, to listen to academic librarians' voices on how to approach liaison librarianship and use their experiences to inform your own. *Approaches* is an excellent book that adds valuable discussion of liaison librarianship and provides numerous examples of initiatives for readers to draw on for inspiration. Many of the chapter authors are practicing librarians, including liaisons and management. They provide case studies and descriptions of programs at their academic libraries, sharing how their approaches to liaison librarianship are both effective and challenging. Initiatives featured include on-site office hours, becoming an adjunct instructor, and working with faculty development groups, which readers can iterate and implement in their own liaison programs.

This edited volume is useful for all academic library staff, including liaisons undergoing transformations of their positions and administrators exploring what role liaison librarians should play in their library. Liaisons will find it useful to read the different initiatives offered by their peers. Administrators and managers will find it interesting to learn about the varying approaches to liaison librarianship, perhaps inspiring change. Library administrators will especially want to read the final chapter on the future of liaison librarianship.

*Approaches to Liaison Librarianship* focuses on North American academic libraries, which is appropriate, since the book is published by the Association of College & Research Libraries. As such, it is most relevant to librarians working in this geographic region. Academic librarians around the world, however, will find the book's content relevant.

*Approaches'* scope is broad, with twenty chapters discussing liaison librarianship. The first section (chapters 1 to 5) presents case studies of academic librarians designing and implementing models of liaison librarianship. For example, Kerry M. Creelman, Andrea R. Malone, Lisa Martin, and Veronica Arellano Douglas describe how the University of Houston Library reimagined the liaison and supervisor organizational structure to give liaison librarians management experience. The next section focuses on outreach (chapter 6), embedded liaisons (chapters 7 and 8) and curriculum mapping (chapter 10), a primary source information literacy initiative (chapter 11), and collaborations with faculty on information literacy (chapters 9, 12, and 13).

Collaboration is addressed again in subsequent chapters. Topics include serving as an adjunct instructor (chapter 14), deepening of faculty-liaison relationships (chapter 15), and a library initiative to decolonize the collection (chapter 16).

The following three chapters address tensions between liaison and functional roles. Authors describe similarities between liaisons and functional specialists (chapter 17), scholarly communications librarians collaborating with their users (chapter 18), and an overview and history of entrepreneur librarians (chapter 19). The final chapter, written by Cinthya Ippoliti, addresses new ways of imaging liaison librarianship. Ippoliti confronts head on the issue of liaison versus functional specialists. Ippoliti proposes using *futures thinking*, or conceiving of different future potential scenarios of workplace change, to envision transformational change to liaison roles.

An edited volume is the best way to discuss liaison librarianship. In *Approaches to Liaison Librarianship*, a multitude of authors share personal reflections on different aspects of liaison librarianship, and this would not come through in the same way if a single author or small number of authors had shared their perspectives. With such diverse initiatives described, readers can learn about a unique primary source workshop at McGill (chapter 11), decolonizing library collections at the University of Winnipeg (chapter 16), and an inter-institutional collaboration on an online information literacy resource run by liaisons at Western, Queen's, and the University of Toronto (chapter 13). Since *Approaches* is an edited collection, themes emerge across chapters. For example, change management is addressed in multiple chapters, specifically the challenges associated with changing liaison models. When librarians are asked to assume new roles or join a new team, challenges are common. In chapter five, Natalie Waters describes the low morale that resulted from the merger of two libraries at McGill University. Eventually a new library director implemented regular meetings, which established open and collegial dialogue among library staff and built a productive, cohesive team. In chapter two, Gary W. White and Yelena Luckert describe how the University of Maryland Libraries

created task forces to address the lack of core competencies in liaison librarians, in order to address emerging research needs at their institution.

Collaboration, a major touchstone of liaison librarianship, is another theme that many authors address. Since liaison work is largely relational, developing relationships with faculty through course development is valuable. Throughout the book, liaisons describe course development initiatives to move beyond one-shot instructional sessions and become collaborative members of the faculties they serve. Chapter 12 covers a collaboration between the education librarian and a faculty member on a graduate-level research methods course at Austin Peay State University. In chapter 10, Larissa Garcia and Jessica Labatte describe curriculum mapping information literacy concepts in creative arts courses. Each chapter on collaboration offers examples that liaisons in other libraries can implement. While *Approaches* is a well-written collection, there are areas where it could be stronger. *Approaches* could, for instance, have included coverage of differing models of liaison librarianship beyond the first five chapters. Since there are so many models of liaison librarianship, additional examples would have strengthened the book. Along the same line, the editors could have included additional chapters detailing other institutions' experiences in transforming liaison librarianship to fit their institutional environment, as this issue is relevant and timely. This is especially evident in the book's final chapter, where Ippoliti guides readers through upcoming transformational changes to liaison librarianship due to the emergence of functional specialists. More 'forward thinking' on how academic libraries can best provide library services, whether in a functional, liaison, or embedded model, would have provided additional space for consideration of the future of liaison librarianship.

Following chapter five, *Approaches* switches abruptly from changing the role of liaison librarians to liaison initiatives. The book should have more defined sections, with descriptive titles

used to organize chapters. This would have allowed readers to categorize chapters in order to find content relevant to them. Additionally, the topic of embedded librarianship is scattered throughout the book, as well as collaborative liaison initiatives. It would benefit the reader if these topics were organized more clearly.

It is important to continue to think about ways academic librarianship can evolve. Liaison librarianship has long been prominent in academic libraries, but are there effective ways to change the model? It is from case studies that others can learn, assess, and implement change throughout their libraries to push liaison librarianship forward. *Approaches to Liaison Librarianship* adds important voices to this discussion, describing many facets of liaison librarianship, and it is well worth the read for library administrators, managers, graduate students, and liaisons—seasoned and early-career alike.