



# CHANGING USER NEEDS, CHANGING LIBRARIAN ROLES: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

Adelia Grabowsky & Toni Carter  
Reference Librarians  
Auburn University Libraries

Georgia Libraries Conference  
October 5, 2017



# Agenda

Audience discussion

Context

Findings

Next steps at Auburn





**How has your role as a librarian  
changed over the past five years?**

**[aub.ie/roles](http://aub.ie/roles)**





## Why?

- Open position
- Concerns about new trends
- Functional roles versus traditional liaison roles

## How?

- Qualitative Research
- Focus Groups

# Focus Groups

- ≠ consensus<sup>1,2</sup>
- collecting data from the discussion of participants<sup>2</sup>
- efficiently collect perspectives from a large number of people<sup>2</sup>
- Size matters<sup>1</sup>
- Structure can vary<sup>2</sup>
- Open ended questions<sup>1</sup>

(<sup>1</sup>Krueger, 2004; <sup>2</sup>Morgan, 2008)

# Process

- IRB approval
- 13/14 reference librarians participated
- 3 focus groups
- Participants had choice of 3 dates
- Incentive of bagels, fruit, coffee
- One of us led the discussion, the other worked the recorder and back up recorder
- Semi-structured



# The Hard Part!

## Transcribing interviews

- Transcriptions coded and analyzed for themes
  - Looked for themes related to prompts as well as emerging themes



## ► Theme 1: Subject Specialist Role

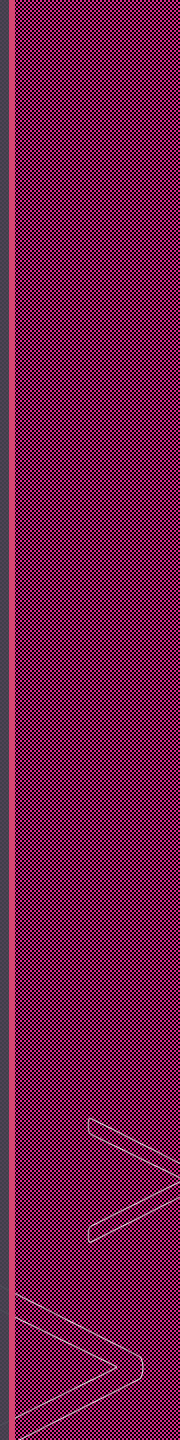
### Quotes from focus groups

“...much of our work I think happens through the liaison relationship with faculty”

“The faculty especially I think still like having a person that they can go to as opposed to an amorphous public services or reference department.”

“...where I would like to spend more time is developing those relationships with faculty and graduate students...”

“in terms of effectiveness of reference work, library instruction, and collection development, your knowledge of the subject is very important.”







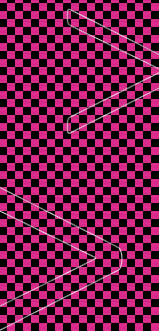
# Concerns with Existing Specialist Roles

- Gaps in subject assignments

“look at areas of research and umm, masters, PhDs, whatever teaching programs we have and see where we have voids, we have deficiencies.”

- Disparate subject assignments

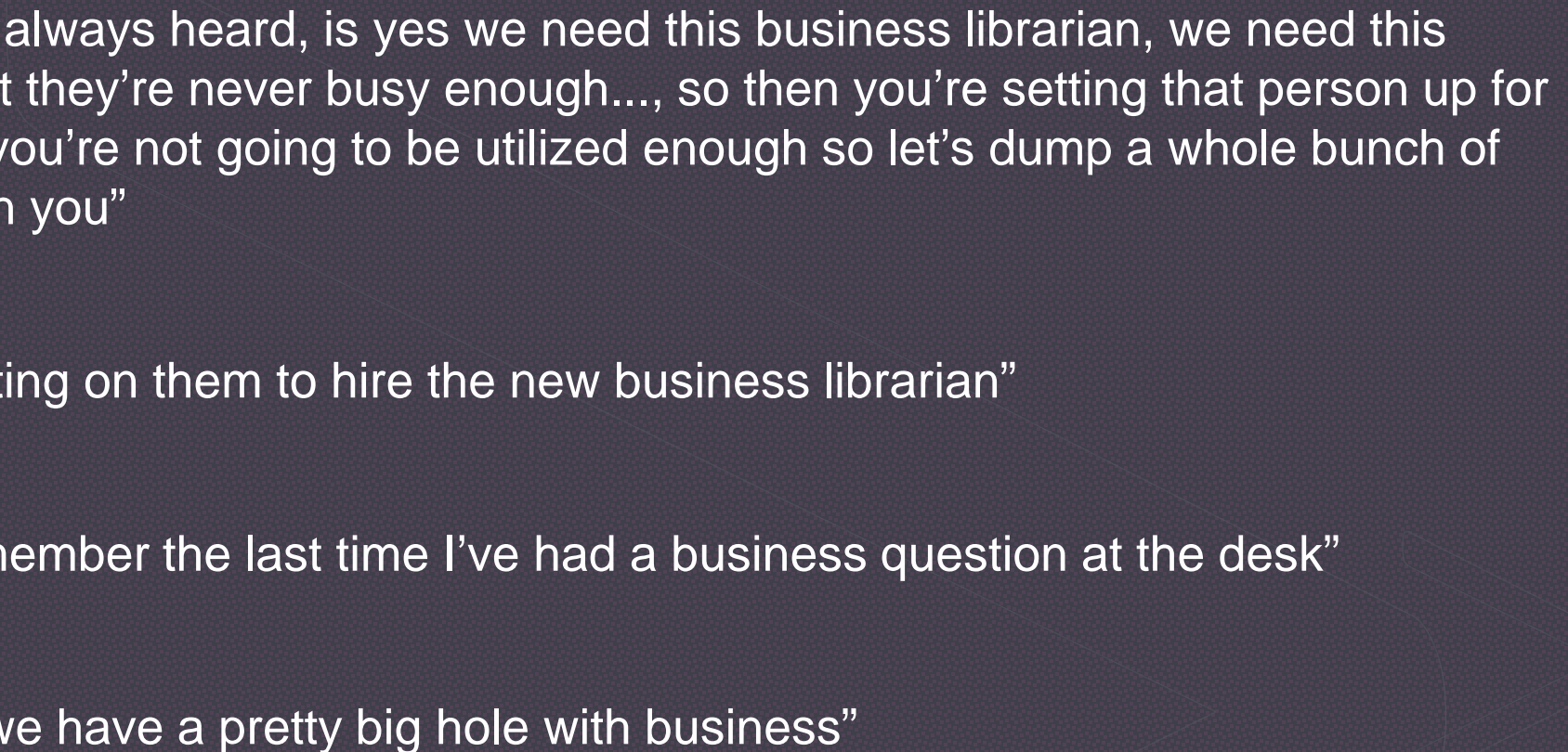
“keeping abreast of, of the subject areas and that is difficult specially when you’re, you’ve got all kinds of stuff”





## Business Librarian

### Quotes from focus groups

- “what we’ve always heard, is yes we need this business librarian, we need this expertise but they’re never busy enough..., so then you’re setting that person up for ...we know you’re not going to be utilized enough so let’s dump a whole bunch of other stuff on you”
  - “I’m just waiting on them to hire the new business librarian”
  - “I do not remember the last time I’ve had a business question at the desk”
  - “Right now we have a pretty big hole with business”
- 



## Theme 2: Trends in User Needs

Dealing with, but there's concern....

- International students
- New literacies
- Publishing
- eLearning

Don't feel qualified to deal with at all!

- Statistics
  - Copyright
  - Data management/visualization
- 
- 
- 
- 

# Theme 3: Libraries' role on campus

- Library as unique place

Things users are not getting elsewhere/how much is outside our control

exs., Microsoft office, how to write a lit review

- Specifically:

- Data manipulation/visualization

- Statistics

- Overlapping services


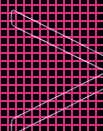
exs., Biggio Center (faculty center for teaching and learning, student writing center)



## ▸ Suggestions from participants

**“it’s helpful to have sort of the resident expert, so like you can handle these basic level things, but when it’s like I’m going to have to ask the person who knows more about this than I do, instead of you being the person at the end of the line. You don’t feel like you are capable or confident being the end of the line.”**

**“We need some sort of, like a mechanism, to be able to identify that these are the things that [someone] is really good at, so things that require these types of skills, maybe we should consider [that person] for this.”**



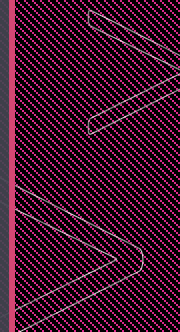


## ▸ Suggestions from participants

“Something **like statistics** maybe, something that’s harder to find in a librarian”

“I almost feel like we need, **maybe a scholarly communications team**. People from different disciplines to sort of talk, who know how it works in that area”

“Some of this could be helped by having multiple people that share knowledge, ...so **that way, it doesn’t fall all to one person** and people can have different strengths in different areas”





## ▸ Suggestions from participants

“Analysis of where we’re at now, and then decide ok, **what gaps do we have**, what can we fill in now that maybe we could have already done if we kind of looked at people’s skill sets and then **what is still missing** even if we do that.”

“There’s some value to that, whether we want to make official teams or if we want to make unofficial team or **unofficial backup**. ...**Because we can’t all be here every time.**”

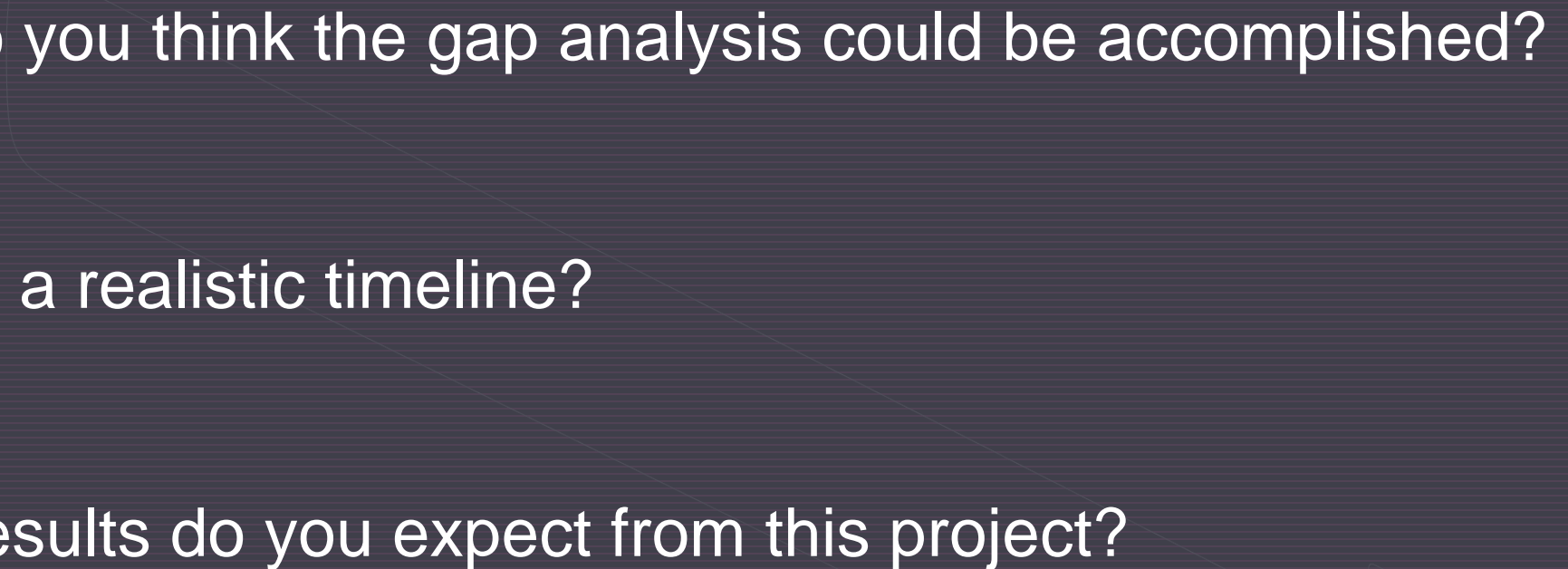
# Recommendations to Department

- Move to Assess/Identify gaps
  - Subject areas
  - Functional roles
  - When hiring new subject specialists, look for additional skills that fill gaps
- Hire Business librarian (possibly include an identified gap in the preferred qualifications)
- Start a discussion about AUL's role on campus





## Brainstorming session questions

- How do you think the gap analysis could be accomplished?
  - What is a realistic timeline?
  - What results do you expect from this project?
- 

# Brainstorming session theme: Timeline

## How

Submit in writing thoughts on gaps  
Analyze ref. transactions (4, 5, 6)

Card  
Sorting -  
group-like  
subjects +  
function

Outside consultants  
Other libraries' job ads

Lit review

What do we no longer need to do?

## Timeline

Depends on participants  
2-3 mos.

## Results

Identified teams - Subjects (areas)  
Backup people  
Subjects/Functions  
How to group

What do we  
not need to  
do anymore?

## Uncertainty

- 2-3 months
- “depends on participants”
- “Can’t rush this”

# Brainstorming session theme: Actions

## Gap Analysis

gather what we do

brainstorm what needs to be covered

SWOT model

Consultant

Who is qualified to lead this assess?

Compare org structure/roles to those at peer institutions (sklen # kasia)

Establish parameters (what will be no-gos/whats off limits)

Compare what we REALLY do w/ what our job descriptions say we do

Contract between us & admin - if we gather what we do & time it takes - it won't be used against us (no stick @ annual review time - not punitive)

organizational support for this project - different priorities for different disciplines/areas

### Timeline

- take the time to do this & do it well. we can't rush this - more than a summer
- it might shake out quickly

Who are we doing this for?  
Who benefits?  
internally (us), faculty, students, university

- don't want this + just be an exercise - need actionable items

# literally would

(sklen # kasia)

look for evidence (what has to be done on how we feel)

- Look at examples/ask others
- Survey what we do/what do we no longer need to do
- Outside consultants
- Consider models like SWOT

# Brainstorming session theme: Expectations

- functional roles
- a. Review of selected Peer libraries (w/tenure requirements)
  - b. I.D. what is currently covered.
  - c. Brainstorm where the gaps are after identifying what roles we should have
  - d. consulting (w/care) liaison depts  
(communicate/promote)
2. End of summer at earliest. \* Depends on who will be working on this (in the lead)  
Everyone will be participating or contributing.
3. a. Expect changes
- b. New order of priorities
  - c. Changes library-wide in some cases
  - d. learning new skills / training.
  - e. increase in teamwork.
  - f. Proactive culture
  - g. promoting the libraries

- New order of priorities
- Changes (library wide, librarian skills, increased teamwork)
- Proactive culture
- Promotion of libraries on campus

# Next Steps

## Gap Analysis

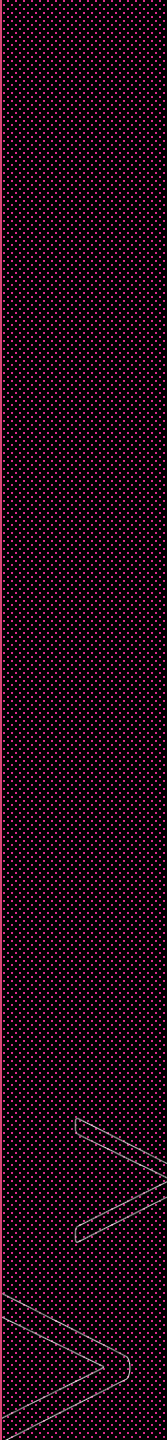
- Needs assessment of faculty
- Inventory of our current roles

## Outside Help

- Association of Research Libraries *Library Liaison Institute*  
*Final Report*
- Outside consultant



**Your suggestions on making change happen**



# References

Association of Research Libraries, Columbia University, Cornell University, University of Toronto. *Report of the Association of Research Libraries Pilot Library Liaison Institute Final Report*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Association of Research Libraries, June 2015.

<http://www.arl.org/publications-resources/3803-library-liaison-institute-final-report#.WdVMcGf35ds>

Krueger, R. A. (2004). Focus group. In M. S. Lewis-Beck, A. Bryman & T. F. Liao (Eds.), *The SAGE encyclopedia of social science research methods*. (392-395).

<http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412950589.n345>

Morgan, D. L. (2008). Focus groups. In L. M. Given (Ed.), *The SAGE encyclopedia of qualitative research methods*. (pp. 353-354).

<http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412963909.n178>

# ▸ Questions & Discussion

Adelia Grabowsky

[abg0011@auburn.edu](mailto:abg0011@auburn.edu)

Toni Carter

[tcarter@auburn.edu](mailto:tcarter@auburn.edu)