CHANGING USER NEEDS, CHANGING LIBRARIAN ROLES: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

Adelia Grabowsky & Toni Carter

Reference Librarians

Auburn University Libraries

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

Why?

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

How?

- Qualitative Research
- Focus Groups

Focus Groups

- ≠ consensus[1,2]

- collecting data from the discussion of participants[2]

- efficiently collect perspectives from a large number of people[2]

- Size matters[1]

- Structure can vary[2]

- Open ended questions[1]

([1]Krueger, 2004; [2]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
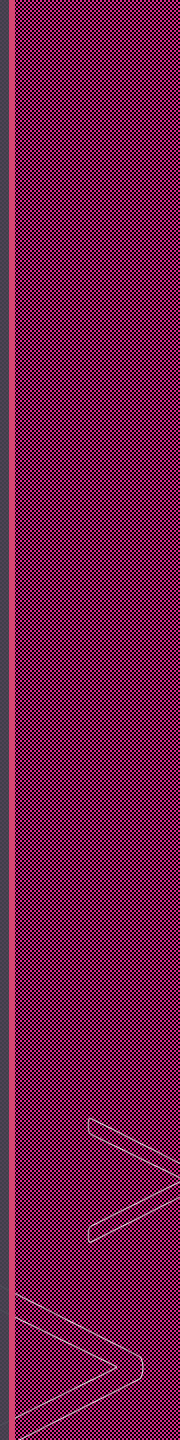
Theme 1: Subject Specialist Role

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."
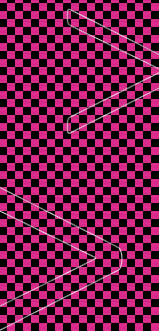
Concerns with Existing Specialist Roles

- 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."
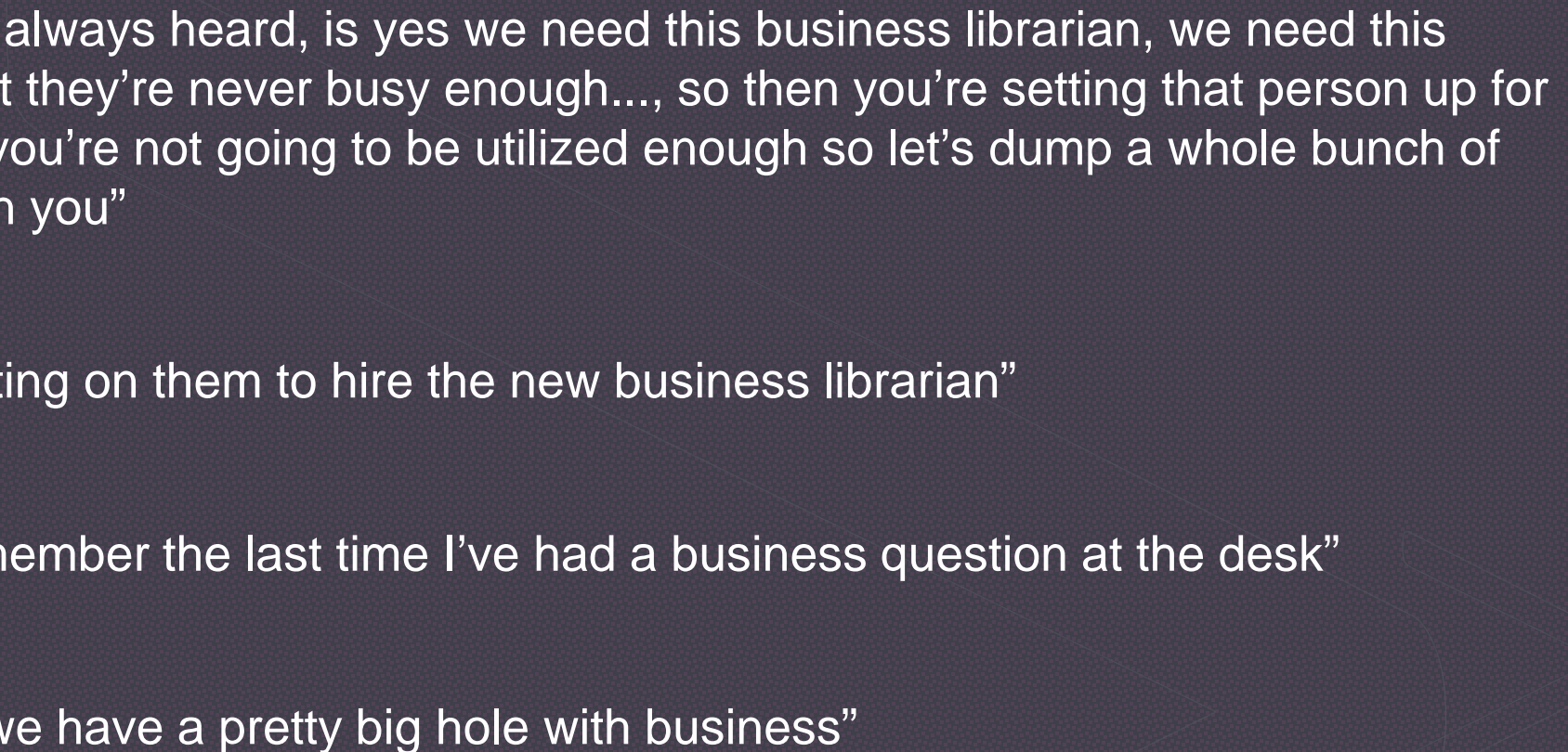
- Disparate subject assignments

  "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:

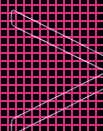   Data manipulation/visualization

    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."
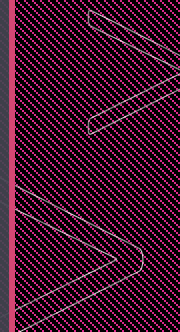
Suggestions from participants

"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**."
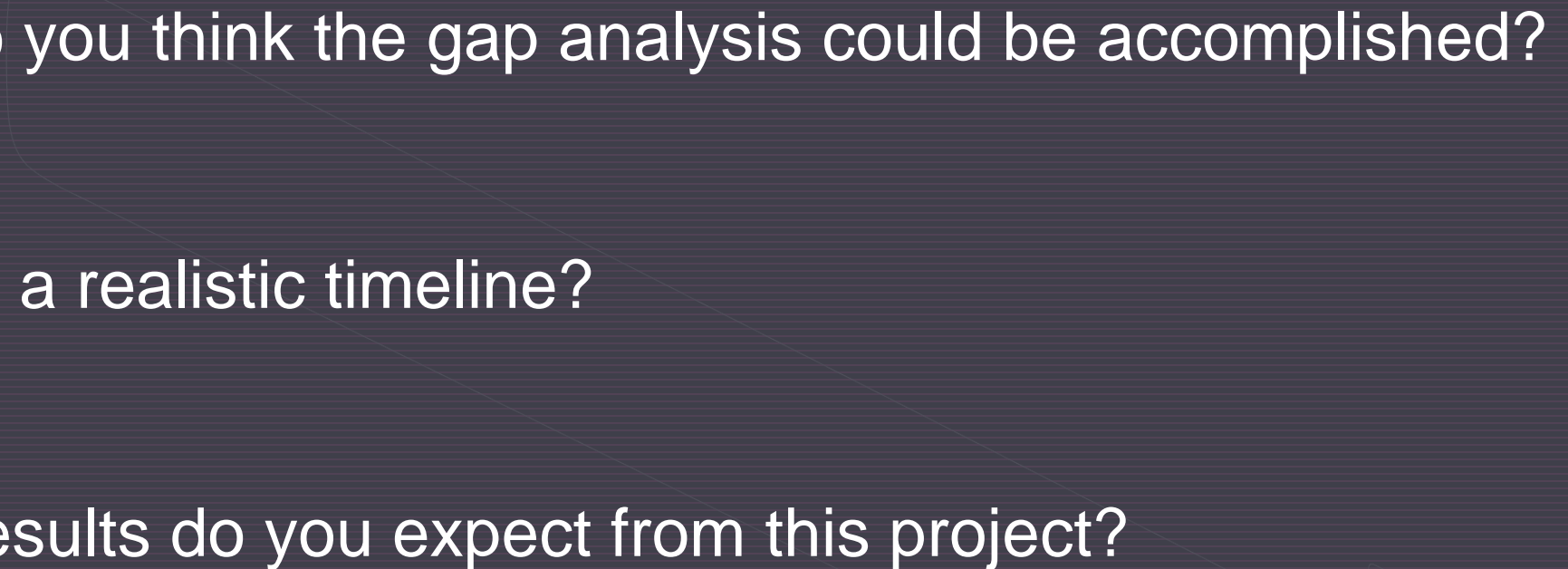
Recommendations to Department

- 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

Uncertainty

- 2-3 months
- "depends on participants"
- "Can't rush this"

Brainstorming session theme: Actions

- 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

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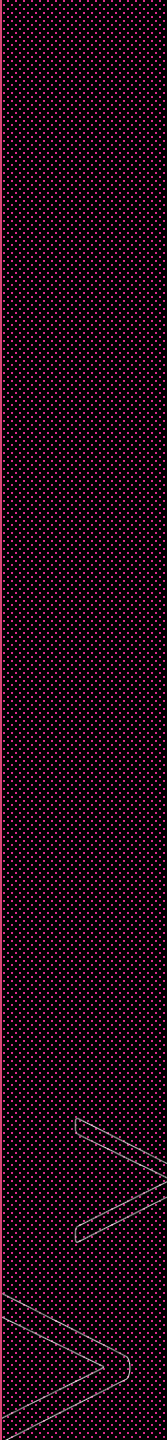- Promotion of libraries on campus

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

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Questions & Discussion

Adelia Grabowsky

abg0011@auburn.edu

Toni Carter

tcarter@auburn.edu