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Founding a Group for New Business Librarians: The First Six Months

Being new in a profession that centers itself on specialized knowledge, such as business librarianship, can be intimidating. A new librarian may hear of colleagues' fantastic faculty relationships, the library's rich collection, and varied and lively reference services, and ask, "Where do I even start?"

Greta Wood of Mississippi State University and I met at ALA Anaheim in June 2012. I had been a business librarian for a month, and she was on the verge of transitioning from Instruction Librarian to Business Librarian that July. Earlier that morning Greta attended an ALA program which centered on a group of new distance learning librarians who created a small community of practice by meeting once a month. This seemed to both of us like a great idea.

At our first meeting in October, we set the goals and general policy for membership. The group was meant for librarians who had been business librarians or liaising to a business department for two years or less. We wanted to serve as a networking and support group for these new business librarians in order to promote knowledge sharing and publication, though we had no intention of replacing the many great listservs and online resources which exist for business librarians. Rather, we strove to create a community of librarians at similar points in their careers who could learn from each other's baby steps.

We assembled our original group of five librarians through professional connections, but we grew quickly as we publicized ourselves through the Business Reference 101 class and through our professional networks. In two months the group swelled to seventeen new business librarians in the United States and Canada. This rapid growth of many perspectives challenged our informal style and cohesion, and we needed increasingly better organization. On the flipside, such growth benefited the group as those perspectives combined to make it more

robust.

We meet for an hour once a month via Skype, and each meeting has a general theme. The November meeting covered instruction, and the December meeting was about building liaison relationships. The upcoming January meeting is a Libguide show-and-tell. Each meeting also includes time for introductions, talking about successes and challenges in the last month, and tangents of various varieties, including vendor management and collection development.

I personally have already benefited greatly from the group, and my fellow group members have also expressed enthusiasm for informing practices as new librarians. For example, Beth Overhauser of Indiana University- Purdue University Fort Wayne mentioned that she sent out holiday cards to her faculty every year, a small practice that allows her and the faculty in her department to feel more connected, and Amanda Foster of Coastal Carolina University mentioned that she planned to do likewise. Amanda also talked about her project in which she delved into her liaison schools' course catalog, searching for any class with the word "research" or "information" in the title, to identify possibilities for instruction or partnership. I plan to do the same moving forward. None of these practices are career changing or world shaking by themselves, but sharing them augments our own daily practices so that we may progress from good new business librarians to great business librarians.

BRASS, as well as other professional associations, offers many great resources to new academic business librarians. RUSA offers a class on Business Reference 101, and the BRASS-L listserv offers steady and active advice on everything from instruction to finance questions to getting rid of old CDs. The section no doubt is a fitting place for a newbie like myself to become situated within the profession, but there was a lack of infrastructure for new librarians to identify and generate a community among each other.

It is my hope that this group will grow for the next year and then branch out into smaller groups of practice as it matures and new librarians enter the profession. Many of our group members are the only business librarians at their institution, so these meetings allow those who cannot attend conferences to feel that they are nonetheless part of a clique of specialized librarians. Groups like ours have the capacity to aid retention within the profession by building networks where none existed previously. I see our loose group as being a great testing ground for new projects, for collaboration among small and large academic institutions, and inspiration for future publications by newer business librarians.

Any new business librarians interested in participating are free to join our ALA Connect group "New Business Librarians Discussion Group," or by emailing Ilana Barnes (ibarnes@purdue.edu).