Evidence Based Library and Information Practice

Embedded Librarianship is Not Well Understood by Librarians at Chinese Universities, but Represents a Promising Service Model

Sun, H., Liu, Y., Wang, Z., & Zuo, W. (2019). Embedded librarianship in China: Based on a survey of university libraries. The Library Quarterly, 89(1), 53–66. https://doi.org/10.1086/700663

Judith Logan

Aller au sommaire du numéro

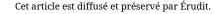Découvrir la revue

Citer ce compte rendu

Evidence Based Library and Information Practice

Embedded Librarianship is Not Well Understood by Librarians at Chinese Universities, but Represents a Promising Service Model

A Review of:
Sun, H., Liu, Y., Wang, Z., & Zuo, W. (2019). Embedded librarianship in China: Based on a survey of university libraries. *The Library Quarterly*, *89*(1), 53–66. https://doi.org/10.1086/700663

Reviewed by:
Judith Logan
Assistant Head, User Services, John P. Robarts Library
University of Toronto Libraries
Toronto, Ontario, Canada
Email: judith.logan@utoronto.ca

Abstract

Objective – To determine the extent to which embedded librarianship is understood and implemented with a focus on service models, best practices, and barriers.

Design – Survey questionnaire with follow up interviews.

Setting – Provincial and ministerial university libraries in China.

Subjects – Subject or liaison librarians from the 84 institutions with science and technology "information searching and evaluation centres" called S&TNS (p. 56).

Methods – The authors identified potential participants through the eligible institutions' library websites or by contacting the library's managers. Then they randomly selected three librarians (n = 252) from each library to be invited to participate. 56 responded from 41 unique institutions. When respondents indicated that their library had embedded library services, the authors contacted them for follow up interviews.

Main results – Results of the questionnaire revealed that most respondents were unclear about the concept of embedded librarianship with many mistaking traditional models of librarianship as embedded. Roughly half (n =

21) of respondents reported embedded librarians at their institution.

Follow up interviews revealed five models of embeddedness: (1) subject librarianship, (2) teaching information retrieval or library orientation sessions, (3) participation in research teams, (4) co-location with academic departments, and (5) assisting university administration with decision-making. Only half of these libraries (*n* = 11) conducted some form of assessment.

Conclusion – Embedded librarianship is a promising, but not yet widely adopted model in Chinese university libraries. More should be done to advocate for its implementation or libraries risk obsolescence.

Commentary

This study describes a situation that will be familiar to many academic librarians in North America. The information landscape has changed significantly in the past three decades, necessitating a transformation of traditional library services. In many cases, this transformation has been slow and often stalled at what Sun et al. (2019) call a "first generation" embedded service: liaison librarians (p. 63). In recent years, the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) has been exploring the current state of liaison librarianship through a series of two-day Liaison Institutes with member libraries. A summary of these Institutes echoes Sun et al.'s (2019) conclusions: "[Participants] struggled to find value in aspects of traditional services, but had little appetite for serious reconsideration of services that may have lost all or most of their value relative to the time and energy expended to deliver them" (Vine, 2018, p. 422). Academic libraries may want to be more embedded, but are unsure of what that might mean and afraid to let go of current practice. Sun et al.'s (2019) work demonstrates that Chinese libraries face similar struggles.

Authors of online questionnaires should consider using Eysenbach's (2004) Checklist for Reporting Results of Internet E-Surveys (CHERRIES) when composing their manuscripts to improve the comprehensiveness of their reporting. While the authors helpfully included their survey instrument in an appendix, several elements were missing from the CHERRIES survey administration, response rates, preventing multiple entries from the same individual, and analysis sections which makes it difficult for readers to appraise the study critically using a tool such as Glynn's (2006). Similarly, a tool such as the COnsolidated criteria for REporting Qualitative research (COREQ) could be used to describe qualitative work such as follow up interviews (Tong et al., 2007). For example, the authors of the present study did not mention how they analyzed the qualitative data collected during their follow up interviews.

Despite this, the study is useful as an exploration of embedded library practices in China. As this topic has been the subject of many recent publications in the Chinese library literature (Sun et al., 2019, p. 62), it is clear that there is growing interest in embedded librarianship. Practitioners can use it as an advocacy tool to promote the model. The authors have included several ideas for what would be needed to make this a reality including changing reward systems within libraries.

References

Eysenbach, G. (2004). Improving the quality of web surveys: The Checklist for Reporting Results of Internet E-Surveys (CHERRIES). *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, *6*(3), e34. https://doi.org/10.2196/jmir.6.3.e34

Glynn, L. (2006). A critical appraisal tool for library and information research. *Library Hi Tech*, *24*(3), 387–399. https://doi.org/10.1108/07378830610692154

Tong, A., Sainsbury, P., & Craig, J. (2007). Consolidated criteria for reporting qualitative research (COREQ): A 32-item checklist for interviews and focus groups. *International Journal for Quality*

in Health Care, *19*(6), 349–357.
https://doi.org/10.1093/intqhc/mzm042

Vine, R. (2018). Realigning liaison with
university priorities: Observations
from ARL Liaison Institutes 2015–18.
College & Research Libraries News, *79*(8),
420–424.
https://doi.org/10.5860/crln.79.8.420