Takeout from the
Embedded Librarians Knowledge Café

A highlight of Embedded Librarians Day, June 18, at the SLA Annual Conference was our Knowledge Café, moderated by our Embedded Librarians Caucus Co-Conveners David Shumaker and Nadine Anderson. About 25 attendees participated. They represented a diverse cross-section of organization types:

- 8 Academic
- 10 Corporate
- 7 others, including Federal, Law, nonprofit, and Health Sciences

In terms of experience, the largest group were those with 3+ years' experience in an embedded role:

- 9 people - no experience
- 4 people - 3 years or less experience
- 12 people - more than 3 years' experience

Suggested topics for small group roundtable discussions included:

- How do we onboard new embedded librarians? Do you have innovative tips, best practices, lessons learned, or "special sauce"?
- How do we market what we can do as embedded librarians to our non-librarian colleagues, many of whom profoundly misunderstand what we can do?
- How do we convince our non-librarian colleagues to move from a service to partnership orientation towards us as embedded librarians?
- Is embedded librarianship a sound survival strategy? Has embedded librarianship strengthened your job security?
- What organizational/reporting structures do you experience as embedded librarians and what challenges have you experienced with them?
- How do you assess your embedded librarianship programs and initiatives?
- How are embedded librarians consultants, and how do we communicate our potential?
- How is embedded librarianship funded at your organization?

There were two rounds of discussion. At the first, groups were randomly assigned to provide diverse perspectives on the topics. For the second round, groups were re-mixed by organization type. At the end of the session, each participant was invited to leave written comments.

The comments have been transcribed and grouped into three categories: basic issues and questions; specific success strategies; and key competencies for embedded librarians, as follows:

Basic issues and questions:
- There are different definitions of "embedded librarianship"
- There are many different ways to "embed" as a librarian
- Embeddedness is institution-specific
- Sustainable embeddedness
- How do you start up as an embedded librarian?
- Strategic embedding in curriculum
- Challenge for all librarians – being seen as professionals versus secretarial staff
- Embedded librarians rise and fall with, and follow the norms of, the groups and departments they're in

Success strategies:
- Strategic embedding in curriculum
- Have a long term plan to go more deeply
- Embed yourself into your clients/patrons social information sharing networks, i.e. email lists, department meetings, slack group
- Ask your customers, "what are they doing?' instead of "what can I do for you?" to find out what their needs are
- Sometimes you need to go to your superiors and tell (remind) them why your skills are needed and what you can contribute to the company
- Hold "office hours" in or near various departments
- Have an open house
- Get involved in curriculum planning
- Look into the students and faculty "Point of Need"
- Co-teach with faculty/advisors
- Brown bags with library patrons (staff/faculty/students)
- Use reference interview opportunities to help/partner with colleagues
- Regular communication and meet with other departments

Key competencies:
- Challenge for all librarians – being seen as professionals versus secretarial staff

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- Outreach/Inreach
- Leading from below
- Training – clear writing
- Self-initiative, curiosity, and self-confidence can go a long way
- Build relationships!
- Be flexible!
- Become the wizard – let people think you can find anything!
- Find a way of organizing your clients and information in a way that works for you – email folders by people/topic/company names, etc.
- Being very flexible – never refuse a request (helps to make yourself indispensable)
- Analytical skills to show your value as well as your cost

See you next year in Baltimore!