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?

http://embedded.sla.org
SLA Connect: Embedded Librarians Caucus (open)
Twitter: @SLAEmbedded
Convener: David Shumaker, shumaker@cua.edu
Co-Convener: Nadine Anderson, nfanders@umich.edu
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!