A Scoping Review of Personal Librarian Programs in Academic Libraries

Research Findings and Suggested Best Practices

Presenter:

James Murphy

Student Learning and Engagement Librarian

james.murphy2@ucalgary.ca

Collaborators:

Zahra Premji

Research and Learning Librarian, Business

Rhiannon Jones

EMBA/MBA Librarian

Libraries and Cultural Resources, University of Calgary, Canada

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Research Team

James Murphy
Student Learning and
Engagement Librarian

Zahra Premji
Research and Learning
Librarian, Business

Rhiannon Jones
EMBA/MBA
Librarian

Guiding Questions

- Interest in developing a personal librarian program
- We wanted to find out:
 - Which institutions have offered these?
 - What are common program characteristics?
 - How have they been assessed?
 - What were prominent assessment findings?
 - How can we customize the program to our institution?
- This research helped answer these questions, and more!

Our Institutional Context

- Located in Calgary – city of ~ 1.5 million
- Primary research institution in Southern Alberta
- Broad programming
- Libraries and Cultural Resources
 - Taylor Family Digital Library
 - 6 branch libraries
 - High Density Library
 - 2 Art Galleries
 - Archives and Special Collections
- Challenging budget environment in Alberta
- What were some of the influencing factors on our PLP

5
campuses

14
faculties

33,000+
students

26,000+
undergraduate
students

6,000+
graduate
students

Our research and scholarship

513
postdoctoral scholars
(2018-19)

\$487.8 million
sponsored research funding (2018-19)

360
new inventions
& innovations
(2018-19, 3-year running total)

#6 top research university
in Canada — in terms of
sponsored research funding

Top 6 in Canada
in research performance
European Centre for Science
and Technology, Leiden

169 research chairs
including the Canada Excellence
Research Chair in Materials Engineering
for Unconventional Oil Reservoirs

Presentation Overview

- Guiding Questions
- Our Institutional Context
- Definitions
 - What is a personal librarian program?
 - Personal librarian vs. Embedded librarian
 - Typical program goals
- Scoping Review Methodology
 - Databases and resources searched
 - Inclusion and exclusion criteria
- Results
 - Locations
 - Timeline
 - Audiences
 - Staffing
 - Program Components
- Assessment
 - Methods used
 - Findings
- Suggestions for Program Development
- What did we end up doing?
- Q & A Discussion

Definition: Personal Librarian Programs

PLPs are formalized outreach services that offer targeted communication with the goal of engaging with a defined student user group, outside of the course and subject based embedded services typically focused towards faculty by liaison librarians.

Embedded versus PLPs

Embedded Librarians are:

- Considered active team members of groups (usually course or program based)
- Often liaisons

Personal Librarians are:

- Part of an individual student's experience
- Not necessarily tied to a subject

Personal Librarian Program Goals

- What are the typical reasons for starting a PL Program?
 - Facilitate personalized connections with new students
 - Increase clarity for new students how librarians can help them
 - Introduce library related terminology
 - Increase student success, research skills, and retention
 - Decrease student feelings of isolation in their new environment

Scoping Review Methodology

Peters MDJ, Godfrey C, McInerney P, Munn Z, Tricco AC, Khalil, H. Chapter 11: Scoping Reviews (2020 version). In: Aromataris E, Munn Z (Editors). *JBIM Manual for Evidence Synthesis*, JBI, 2020. Available from <https://synthesismanual.jbi.global>. <https://doi.org/10.46658/JBIMES-20-12>

Research Question

- Population
 - Students in any educational program; face-to-face, distance or online
 - Concept
 - Personal librarian programs or personalized outreach programs directly to students
 - Context
 - Higher education setting including college, technical schools, universities, etc.
 - Both public and private institutions
 - Undergraduate and graduate levels.
- Inclusion criteria
 - Personal librarian or similar outreach program
 - Included evaluation, assessment or reflection
 - Published in English
 - Published in a scholarly, professional, or trade article, book, book chapter or conference proceeding/poster
 - Exclusion criteria
 - Embedded programs, not outreach programs
 - K-12
 - No assessment/evaluation/reflection
 - Not in English
 - From a newspaper article, newsletter, blog post, etc.

Methods: Information Sources

Electronic databases

Academic Search Complete (EBSCO)

Education Research Complete (EBSCO)

ERIC (EBSCO)

Library & Information Science Source
(EBSCO)

Library & Information Science Abstracts
(ProQuest)

Web of Science Core Collection (SCI-
Expanded, SSCI, A&HCI, CPCI-Science, CPCI-
SS&H, ESCI)

Supplementary sources/ strategies

- Reference lists & cited bys of all included articles
- Reference lists of all chapters from *The Personal Librarian: Enhancing the Student Experience*
- *Hand searched conferences (recent 3 yrs):* ACRL, ALA annual and mid-winter, OLA super conference, Workshop In Library Use, LOEX, IFLA, Personal Librarian & First Year Experience national conferences, and Annual Conference on The First-Year Experience.

Methods: Study selection

Title/abstract screening

- Pilot using 50 random records
- Each record screening by 2 independent reviewers
- Conflicts resolved by third reviewer
- All records with 2 "yes" votes move to next stage
- Full-texts retrieved for all included articles from this stage

Full-text screening

- Group discussion about the hierarchy of exclusion reasons
- Each full-text screened by 2 independent reviewers
- Conflicts resolved by a third reviewer
- All full-texts with 2 "yes" votes move to data extraction

Methods: Data extraction

Process

- Data extraction done in duplicate (2 independent researchers)
- Conflicts resolved by discussion and consensus as a team
- Used Excel

Data extraction categories

- Study (Author, year)
- Institution of program
- Country of institution
- Years/dates of program
- Target audience/student group
- Program staffing at outset
- Ratio of librarian/student
- Changes to program staffing at a later date
- Program components
- Evaluation methods & results
- Additional information

Results: Study Selection

South
Pacific
Ocean

Map Data: 2021 Google Maps

Program Timelines

- First program created in 1984 (Sam Houston State University)
- Peak of program initiation was 2013-2014

Year of Program Start

Program Audiences

- Undergraduates, transfer, and first year graduates most prevalent
- Specialized libraries focused toward their audiences (e.g. Law, MD)

General Program Target Audience

Staffing and Student Ratios

- Staffing often changed through program years
- Mostly adding more librarians to program staff

Student to Librarian Ratios (if reported)

Program Components

- Emails most popular, events second, then mailed letters

Programming Components

Program Assessment

- Assessment was an inclusion criteria for the study
- Assessment methods and reporting varied widely among the included studies
- Most common assessment was surveys (n=16), followed by email metrics (n=8)
- Anecdotal methods were also utilized
- Assessment was problematic due to inconsistency with reporting, low response rates, and issues with tracking statistics

Program Assessment: Positive Findings

- Positive anecdotes
- Increased event attendance
- Positive survey findings
- Students appreciated knowing their library contact
- Increased reference activity

Program Assessment: Negative Findings

- Low response rates
- Too many emails
- Emails not being relevant
- Include an opt-out option
- Program success can be difficult to measure

Questions for Program Development

- What is the program timeline?
- Who is the target audience?
- Will students be able to opt out?
- Who will staff the program?
- What will the student/staff ratio be?
- What programming will be included?
- What are the program goals?
- How will these goals be assessed?

Our Personal Librarian Program

- library.ucalgary.ca/mylibrarian

Personalized research and library support for you

What is myLibrarian?

Librarians provide personalized research and learning help to all University of Calgary students. Whether you need in-depth research help, searching strategies, advice finding good-quality information online, or a friendly expert to chat with, your librarian looks forward to hearing from you!

What can myLibrarian help me with?

- Understanding the scholarship in your field of study
- Suggestions for navigating academic resources on campus
- Searching effectively and efficiently for resources digitally and in print
- Connect you with innovative technology to support your projects
- Finding literature for assignments
- Determining quality of sources
- Managing the scholarly resources you find
- Getting familiar with academic resources including databases
- Focusing a topic you're interested in exploring
- And more!

- Opt-in program
- Curated newsletters
- Builds off liaison program
- New ways of connecting with a librarian (student background, language)
- Active since Sept 2020

Questions or comments?

Contact Information

James Murphy, Student Learning and Engagement Librarian

james.murphy2@ucalgary.ca

Zahra Premji, Research and Learning Librarian, Business

zahra.premji@ucalgary.ca

Rhiannon Jones, EMBA/MBA Librarian

rhiannon.jones@haskayne.ucalgary.ca

Libraries and Cultural Resources, University of Calgary, Canada