

Realizing Partnership Potential: A Report on a Formal Collaboration Between a Teaching and Learning Centre and Libraries at the University of Toronto



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In 2010, the University of Toronto's Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation (CTSI) and University of Toronto Libraries (UTL) jointly launched Partnering for Academic Student Success (PASS), a partnership to foster new opportunities for collaboration between academic librarians and those involved in developing excellence in university teaching. This article describes the challenge of professional education in support of the teaching mission for librarians, and a partnership designed to address this need. The article reports on the genesis, goals, and key principles contributing to the partnership's success, while discussing implications and recommendations for those seeking to develop similar programs of intentional collaboration that enable teaching/learning goals.

Partnership Genesis: University of Toronto Libraries and the Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation

As Canada's largest academic library, the University of Toronto Libraries (UTL) is a decentralized system of 44 libraries spread across three campuses in the Greater Toronto Area. Of the 145 librarians employed at the University of Toronto (University of Toronto, 2013), approximately 60 are engaged in teaching and learning. The University's Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation (CTSI) was created in 2009. It provides leadership in teaching and learning, as well as support for pedagogy

and pedagogy-driven instructional technology to over 12,500 faculty members and over 4,300 teaching assistants. UTL and CTSI came together with the goal of supporting librarians wishing to enhance their teaching expertise.

The challenge of teaching librarians' roles and approaches to professional learning

Although instruction has long been part of academic librarianship (Hopkins, 1982), there has been a sharp upward trend in the amount of librarians' time and effort dedicated to teaching (Walter, 2008), which is now seen as a core service (Sproles, Johnson, & Farison, 2008). Librarians' teaching responsibilities are expanding, as their work extends beyond

classrooms and into online platforms (Walter, 2008). Librarians increasingly develop and deploy information literacy instruction, often with faculty (O'Clair, 2012), and have been making inroads into instructional design and educational technology (Shank & Dewald, 2012).

This increase in responsibility has generally not been accompanied by a matching increase in relevant professional education. A national survey of Canadian librarians revealed low pre-service training for their teaching roles (Julien & Genuis, 2011). The survey also found that teaching preparation by Canadian librarians tended to be self-generated and informal (Julien & Genuis, 2011). Many librarians expressed anxiety, uncertainty, and insecurity about their teaching and pedagogical expertise (Julien & Genuis, 2011).

The interplay between professional identity and pedagogy for teaching librarians contributes to complex relationships with faculty vis-à-vis their own teaching (Austin & Bhandol, 2013; Julien, 2009). Comparing their work and skills to those of faculty, however, has given teaching librarians a renewed sense of the importance of their teaching mission, not just to the students, but also, increasingly, to the faculty (Marcum, 2012).

Provenance of the PASS initiative

Early in her mandate the CTSI's new director, a Professor of Education, advocated a collaborative model for building teaching capacity at the University. In alignment with her Centre's teaching-focused mandate, the director collaborated with a chief librarian from one of the University's campuses to propose an initiative that would integrate the work of librarians and teaching centre staff in complementary ways while supporting librarians' pedagogical competencies. The *Partnering for Academic Student Success* (PASS) initiative signalled the start of a capacity-building investment in connecting teaching librarians to the teaching faculty, and to the learning goals they share for University of Toronto students.

Following the 2010 approval of PASS by the chief librarians from each of the three campuses, the director of CTSI and the chief librarians developed the vision that has guided the program:

To create a partnership between professionals engaged in supporting instructor pedagogical development, including support in the integration of information literacy and use of library resources. The overall goal is to increase capacity for integrative learning and academic excellence within classrooms. (Bellamy, Fedko, & Hook, 2011, p. 13)

Specific goals for and the criteria for success of PASS include:

- building a strong partnership between CTSI and instructional librarians;
- collaborating to support existing CTSI programs and initiatives;
- identifying and developing new initiatives;
- refining and informing sustainable and scalable best practices in faculty-librarian collaboration, and identifying challenges that influence collaboration between instructional librarians and faculty; and
- advancing the focus on learning outcomes and the integration of information literacy to influence systemic changes enhancing student success at the course, program, and institutional levels.

Structuring the PASS workflow

In 2010-2011, three librarians, one from each campus and each holding leadership roles in information literacy, were seconded to work two days a week at the CTSI. Beginning in 2011-2012, the time commitment was reduced to one day per week to create a more sustainable model. UTL's

information literacy coordinator was added as an ex-officio participant, with the remaining three positions opened up to annual applications. Over time the goals have been slightly adjusted to permit greater focus on librarian teaching development and collaboration with existing CTSI programs and in the creation of new ones. To provide continuity and ongoing mentoring, at least one seconded librarian remains in the program for a subsequent year. Accordingly, each cohort benefits from having members with PASS experience as well as members who are new to the partnership.

PASS librarians attend weekly CTSI staff meetings and report regularly on activities alongside other CTSI staff members. Additional bi-weekly meetings between the CTSI director and PASS librarians provide opportunities to work through project challenges, connect librarians to new opportunities, and optimize the integration of CTSI and library activities.

Building the PASS foundation

Much of the work in 2010-2011 consisted of laying the groundwork for the future. PASS librarians worked with the CTSI's director on projects that supported the overarching goals described above. Some key accomplishments included:

- integrating PASS librarians within the CTSI workplace, leveraging the benefits of co-location and embeddedness, and deepening participation in CTSI;
- participating as learners in CTSI instructor workshops for personal development and to observe the CTSI learning strategists model teaching practices;
- regularly sharing insights with other UTL librarians through committees, reports, and emails;
- producing and synthesizing material to support the promotion and integration of librarians in workshops and courses; and
- conducting research, surveys, and background studies to understand teaching librarians' professional development needs.

Creating a Community of Teaching Librarians

Key in CTSI's overall vision has been the commitment to capacity building as a way of promoting instructional excellence and the development of teaching expertise. The motivating factor is the ideal of building a community of librarians with enhanced pedagogical knowledge and teaching strategies in order that they can extend their expertise as resource people across the UTL. The PASS team has focused on concrete strategies to help move toward this vision.

Growing through integration and serendipity

Participation of the PASS team in weekly CTSI staff meetings has led to their inclusion in CTSI projects where librarian expertise can be both leveraged and enhanced. PASS librarians are included in the planning and delivery of major CTSI-sponsored events, including the university's annual Teaching and Learning Symposium, New Faculty Orientation, Back-To-School week, the annual two-day Course Design/Redesign Institute, and the two-day Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) Institute. Often, seemingly small-scale opportunities for librarian participation have evolved into ongoing and more dynamic engagements. As an example, librarians developed connections with online learning leaders who attended CTSI meetings, which led to librarian participation in the development of online and hybrid courses, including high-profile University of Toronto Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs).

Learning alongside faculty

CTSI's *Fundamentals of University Teaching Course* is an eight-week, 16-hour program that is taught by award-winning faculty. All UTL librarians are eligible

to apply for one of six spots reserved for librarians, with the remaining 12 available to continuing appointment faculty. PASS librarians admitted into the course learn alongside faculty colleagues, leveraging this work with regular post-class meetings and facilitated discussions focused on teaching contexts and strategies unique to librarians. Through this course experience librarians have developed different kinds of relationships with faculty and their co-learning has fuelled deeper understanding of instructional issues.

Creating resources for all librarians

PASS librarians have not only contributed to CTSI online and print resources but have also produced a number of resources specifically for teaching librarians, based on expressed needs identified through surveys. These have included outlines, lesson plans, promotion ideas, and faculty testimonials that can be used by librarians to demonstrate support for their teaching-related functions. The *Guide for teaching librarians* (2014), for example, is a one-stop guide to showcase these resources and provide easy access by UTL's teaching librarians.

Lessons Learned

Ongoing research and reflection have been integral to the PASS initiative, and have been used extensively throughout the entire life of the initiative to determine community priorities and needs, to ascertain the effectiveness of various initiatives, and to guide the monitoring and adjustment of our collective work. The PASS team uses a variety of methods, including formal surveys, focus groups, weekly evaluations, and reflective writing to gather information that, in turn, guides modifications to existing PASS programs and shapes future PASS activities. This body of evidence allows PASS participants to build on the work of previous years

while developing fresh initiatives grounded in expressed needs.

Surveys and focus groups

A discrete example of an evidence-based evolution in programing is illustrated through librarian participation in CTSI's *Fundamentals of University Teaching* course. The first year PASS team, tasked with exploring ways to develop instructional excellence among teaching librarians, surveyed thirty-eight University of Toronto teaching librarians to learn about their attitudes toward information literacy instruction, their pedagogical knowledge, and their interests in professional development. Survey results revealed a wide-variety of teaching backgrounds, skill sets, teaching environments, and opportunities for embedding information literacy into courses. Most respondents expressed a need for pedagogical training.

As a result of the librarian pedagogical needs evident from the survey, in 2011-2012, the second year of the PASS program, six librarians participated in CTSI's eight-week *Fundamentals of University Teaching* course, which had previously only been offered to faculty. Those librarians wrote reflections related to weekly classes and participated in a focus group at the end of the course to evaluate its potential for building librarian teaching capacity. In response to the evidence gathered from their reflections and the focus group, in the third year the PASS team established post-class discussion groups for librarians participating in the next offering of the *Fundamentals* course, and these discussion groups are a continued yearly feature. The discussion sessions immediately follow each class and are moderated by librarians who attended the previous year's course. These discussions provide librarians in the *Fundamentals* class with an opportunity to collaboratively reflect on their learning and immediately relate it to their own teaching contexts. This specific example has resulted in building a stronger community of support for ongoing pedagogical learning.

Reflections and debriefs

At the end of a secondment year, each PASS librarian writes a personal reflection relating their most significant learning experience, their most significant challenge, their most significant group achievement, and their suggestions for improving the experience for future participants. This document becomes the basis of a one-on-one discussion with the CTSI director, who is in a non-evaluative role related to the PASS participants. Participant reflections provide qualitative evidence of personal transformations such as the following example from one librarian: “Immersion in the CTSI culture has helped me shift my focus from teaching to learning.”

Reflections also identify values that librarian secondees have solidified or that they wish to nurture, such as the two following examples:

The internalization of changed values for instruction and collaboration is the most significant learning experience from my PASS experience.

I know I felt that trust—and the excitement about collaborating—from the first day at CTSI. With trust came the permission to dream, think, strategize, collaborate, and care. Without trust, it would have been much harder to commit and engage.

Finally, reflections also help PASS participants to analyze new behavioural patterns and see the change in their actions, as described by the following secondee:

One of the great pleasures of participation is watching librarians on the team each assume leadership in an important area of teaching and learning, reaching out to support and educate their library colleagues across the system to become more engaged with teaching and learning at the U of T.

Seven key lessons

From a variety of data-gathering methods utilized throughout the three years of the PASS initiative, including survey, focus group and reflection data highlighted in this report, we offer seven key lessons from which others considering similar partnerships may benefit.

1) Formalize the partnership

The intentionality of PASS through a formal agreement by CTSI and UTL leaders, combined with the accountability of regular meetings and an annual report, allows CTSI staff and PASS librarians to develop new perspectives and see patterns in their work through ongoing cycles of reflection and analysis. As a result, new opportunities to support and engage faculty and students have emerged, reducing silos and de-privatizing teaching practices.

2) Assess needs and set goals

A retrospective look at PASS drives home the importance of its sequential and long-term goals. PASS’s initial goals were reasonable and achievable, yet still aspirational in terms of the potential difference this partnership could make to the teaching and learning structures and culture of the University. Rigorous initial background research and diagnostic work (e.g., librarian survey), combined with ongoing formative assessment (e.g., focus groups, annual reflective writing, and interviews) have helped ensure that we are identifying librarian needs, interests, and goals so that these continue to serve as the basis for ongoing professional development and programmatic initiatives. As well, emerging institutional priorities provide ongoing opportunities for PASS and CTSI colleagues to be responsive and look for new ways to combine and extend their collective expertise.

3) Prioritize face-to-face interaction

Many PASS successes have emerged serendipitously, but face-to-face interaction continues to be key. Time spent by librarians, CTSI, and faculty not just in close proximity but regularly engaging with one another, has created connections that have been leveraged in later projects. For example, the CTSI and UTL connections were harnessed in a joint proposal to the University for the renovation of shared space. The new space was designed to optimize the many ways that future collaborative work might take place, for students, faculty, and staff. Finally, the social and informal nature of interactions between PASS librarians and CTSI staff created a sense of familiarity and shared purpose that fuels continued collaboration.

4) Give it time

Repetition of experiences has deepened librarian engagement in PASS activities. Years two and three of PASS, for example, featured a pattern of greater integration and expansion of successful initiatives. The benefits emerged with time, and without the extended time period available to the PASS team, these benefits may not have been evident. For example, a fledgling community of practice for UTL teaching librarians emerged only after the second year of librarian participation in the *Fundamentals of University Teaching* course.

5) Create an environment where risk taking is encouraged

Strong norms for trust and risk-taking have provided PASS participants confidence in their individual and collective leadership ability, and the assurance that they will not be judged negatively for less-than-successful experiments. The latitude is counterbalanced with built-in accountability, including regular reporting to library supervisors, the writing of a yearly report shared with the broader

University community, and a year-end individual written reflection and discussion with the CTSI Director. Participants consistently remark on the balance of risk-taking and accountability when describing why they think the PASS program is able to generate so many successful initiatives. The balanced atmosphere is also a direct product of monitoring and support by an engaged leadership.

6) Let opportunities reach out to you

PASS experimented with two different approaches: PASS librarians entered their secondments with a proposed individual project versus no individual project proposal. While both approaches have benefits, our experience suggests that the former approach was less successful and that the most valuable outcomes have arisen from discovering projects that only became apparent in the context of partnership activities. To the extent that the partnership is aimed at creating an environment of possibility, it may be best to allow opportunities to arise organically but, importantly, within a broader frame of identified partnership goals. As the authors of the 2011-2012 PASS report noted, “we learned the value in letting the opportunities reach out to us” (Bellamy, Kemble, Szurmak, & Vine, 2012, p. 1).

7) Ensure that communication takes place often and at all levels

Communication at many levels is essential to increase visibility and maintain administrative and community support for the program. To that end, CTSI and the UTL both communicate PASS activities to their communities through a variety of channels including list-servs, mailing lists, website announcements, and blog postings. As well, the CTSI director reports regularly to library leadership on PASS successes and challenges. In addition to annual reports that outline progress related to PASS goals and criteria for success, PASS librarians provide monthly updates to a university-wide librarian

committee and report regularly to their managers. This is especially critical in balancing workload; the time and effort required by the PASS initiative sometimes means that other work must be absorbed by the secondee's home library. Indeed, this has been one of the challenges that PASS continues to address.

Implications for Implementation at Other Universities and Colleges

This report provides evidence of a partnership model that specifically addresses the challenge raised in the broader literature: The increase in instructional responsibility for librarians that has generally not been accompanied by increased support in the form of relevant professional education. The PASS initiative is generating evidence that through formal partnerships such as this, ongoing pedagogical development for librarians can be better supported. Just as important, however, is that through such partnerships the collective expertise of librarians can be intentionally leveraged in realizing the broader teaching and learning goals of an institution. Drawing on our key lessons learned, we connect back to the literature related to academic librarianship and identify a number of broader implications for those wishing to develop similar partnerships.

Recent research and writing related to leadership in higher education, including the changing landscape of academic librarianship, reflects new perspectives on traditional leadership models that have a much greater emphasis on "flexibility, agility, innovation, and team-based structures" (Garson & Wallace, 2014, p. 42). Commitment from top administrators is a prerequisite for a PASS-type program. Relationships need to be built intentionally from design through implementation. While libraries and teaching support centres have much in common, their cultures and habits are different enough that ad hoc approaches may not be the most successful.

Deliberate, planned measures by leaders to inculcate partner relationships are required from the outset and increase the chances that individual and organizational goals can become more closely aligned and that sustainable capacity-building models develop over time. As Garson and Wallace (2014) note, "Employees become active participants if they believe the change will create opportunities for themselves as well as for the organization. They are motivated by and participate in an environment replete with new tasks, functions and goals" (p. 43).

Initiatives like PASS require some elasticity to meet emergent priorities and to be able to respond to these new opportunities in an agile manner. Indeed, creating an environment that fosters such outcomes is likely one of the goals of this type of partnership. Just as important, however, are documented, achievable goals and scheduled formal and informal progress reports to immediate and senior leadership as they build an important level of accountability into the initiative.

Partnerships like PASS require partners who are change agents and believe they can have impact and influence on the other and are willing to work through the challenges. Receptivity to new ideas and new ways of thinking about teaching, service and delivery are required at operational and leadership ends for the partnership to work to its fullest. This type of shared leadership necessitates "a willingness to explore and engage with curiosity, a readiness to learn and adapt, and above all a questioning as to the relevance and applicability of established and new models to the organization" (Gwyer, 2010, as cited in Garson & Wallace, 2014, p. 47). The effect of shared leadership, boundary spanning, and an eagerness to experiment with new models of intentional partnerships can be a lasting change in the cultures of both teaching centres and libraries. As a result, teaching centres and libraries can better realize the shared goal of empowering and supporting the instructors and students they serve.

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