TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE PARTNERSHIP:
Examining Cross Perceptions of Public and Technical Services Academic Librarians

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Outline

- Public Services (PS) vs. Technical Services (TS)
- The Great Divide?
- Cross Perceptions Study
  - Study purpose
  - Methodologies
  - Results and findings
  - Discussion
- Towards sustainable partnership
Public Services vs. Technical Services

• Assist users in finding information; facilitate research process
• “Dwell in the light” “Glory shall be great”

• Identify, select, acquire, organize, maintain library resources for easy discovery and delivery
• “Dwell in the darkness” “Shall not know the public”

*Carrier Library Learning Commons, Google image, captured April 22, 2016
** Fort Smith Public Library, Google image, captured, April 22, 2016
PS vs. TS - The Great Divide?

- Physical distance
- Lack of social interaction
- Differences in organizational culture (service-focused vs. product-focused)

Possible effects:

- Barriers to communication and understanding
- Potential formation of harmful stereotypes
- Hindering mutual understanding and effective collaborations

PS and TS Librarians Relationships

- Speak two different languages
- Look at the world from very different perspectives
- Did not relate well
- Rivalries, antagonism, narrowness and misunderstanding

*Business Rivalry image, taken from Dreamstime, April 22, 2016
TS work and TS Librarians

- Referred to by reference librarians as “support staff”
- Value of TS work was often discounted
- “Second-class” professional positions
- TS career has “little appeal” to library school students
Cross Perceptions Study
Cross Perceptions Study

- **Purpose:**
  - To learn perceptions of PS and TS librarians have of each other
  - To promote better understanding among librarians

- **Research questions:**
  - How do librarians in the two fields perceive the role and value of their colleagues?
  - What can be done to promote collegiality and foster long-term partnership?
Study Methodologies

- Survey distributed through professional PS & TS email lists in Spring 2014
- Using Likert-scale and open-text-response question formats
- 850+ responses
- 586 academic librarians
  - 360 identified as technical services librarians
  - 226 identified as public services librarians
Key Survey Questions

- Core qualities of PS and TS librarians
- Shared PS librarians’ perceptions of TS librarians
- Impact of TS work on library service
- TS only: what changes would you like to see that would help TS play a role integral to PS initiatives?
## Survey Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Institution</th>
<th>Percentage (all respondents)</th>
<th>Years of service</th>
<th>Percentage (PS)</th>
<th>Percentage (TS)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4 year Research</td>
<td>55.1%</td>
<td>&gt; 10 years</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 year Undergrad</td>
<td>39.3%</td>
<td>5-10 years</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>1-5 years</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&lt; 1 year</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Core Qualities of PS/TS Librarians

Q: What are the core qualities TS (PS) librarians need in order to support the library and its users?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core Qualities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Responsiveness to change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User-centered philosophy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptability to technologies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forward thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation to start new initiatives</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Core Qualities - TS librarians

- Responsiveness to change
- User-centered philosophy
- Collaborative nature
- Adaptability to technologies
- Forward thinking
- Motivation to start new...

TS feel important
PS feel important
Core Qualities - PS Librarians

[Bar chart showing the comparison between 'TS feel important' and 'PS feel important' for various qualities such as Responsiveness to change, User-centered philosophy, Collaborative nature, Adaptability to technologies, Forward thinking, Motivation to start new...]

- Responsiveness to change
- User-centered philosophy
- Collaborative nature
- Adaptability to technologies
- Forward thinking
- Motivation to start new...
## Other Core Qualities (Open text)

### TS Core Qualities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TS Respondents</th>
<th>PS Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Creativity, flexibility, problem solving</td>
<td>1. Creativity, flexibility, problem solving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Detail oriented</td>
<td>2. Ability to communicate with co-workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Ability to communicate with co-workers</td>
<td>3. Technology</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### PS Core Qualities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TS Respondents</th>
<th>PS Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Ability to communicate with patrons and co-workers</td>
<td>1. Ability to communicate with patrons and co-workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Creativity, flexibility, problem solving</td>
<td>2. Creativity, flexibility, problem solving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Appreciation of Technical Services</td>
<td>3. Outreach/advocacy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PS Perceptions of TS Librarians – Positive Perceptions

(* : P < 0.05)
PS Perceptions of TS Librarians – Negative Perceptions

(* :P < 0.05)
# Aggregate view of Shared PS Perceptions of TS Librarians

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Positive perceptions</th>
<th>Negative perceptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>TS agree (average)</strong></td>
<td>29.3%</td>
<td>67.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PS agree (average)</strong></td>
<td>39.5%</td>
<td>51.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PS perceptions of TS librarians - **PS respondents by years of service - positive perceptions**

![Graph showing perceptions of TS librarians by years of service](image)

- **Responsiveness to change**
- **User-centered philosophy**
- **Collaborative nature**
- **Adaptability to technologies**
- **Forward thinking**
- **Motivation to start new**

**Color Key:**
- Blue: PS Agree <= 10 yrs
- Red: PS Agree > 10 yrs
Shared PS perceptions of TS librarians - PS respondents by years of service - negative perceptions
TS Core Qualities and Perceptions of TS – Measuring Service Quality (PS respondents)
Measuring Service Quality

- A gap (82% vs. 40%) between the desired/expected performance and the actual performance of TS librarians as perceived by PS respondents.
- Suggesting that TS librarians were perceived as underperforming by PS respondents.
- Associating the perceived underperformance of TS librarians with the low status they were accorded.
97% of both TS and PS survey respondents saw Technical Services as having a direct impact on library users

- Major emphasis on TS role in providing access/discovery/delivery of library resources

Respondents comments:
- “[PS Librarians] are the frontline soldiers – [TS Librarians] provide the ammunition and equipment.

- “Without [TS] work, we would lose track of everything. The collection is useless if it isn't searchable!”
Changes TS Like to See (TS only question)

- More communication and collaboration
- Changes in management and leadership for better communication, joint goal-setting, and staffing decision-making.
- More respect and better appreciation from PS
What We Learned From the Study

- Confirmed negative PS perceptions of TS librarians
  - TS respondents expected a higher level of negativity than did PS respondents
- TS librarians were perceived as underperforming by PS respondents
- The longer a PS librarian had worked, the more he/she felt that TS librarians were perceived positively
What We Should Focus

- Work to narrow the gap and ensure more consistent experiences and expectations
- PS and TS librarians to adjust their expectations and also improve service behavior
- Education, communication and a participative approach can help increase the consistency of expectations and perceptions
What Can Be Done

- To enhance institutional communication and understanding between PS and TS librarians to alleviate negative perceptions
- To create a culture of collaboration
- To build trust and sustainable partnership
To Conclude

“... when we work together we each have important expertise to bring, and I think along the way we learn about each other that we each have important skills and qualities that together allows us to keep our institutions thriving.”
To Conclude

Both sides need to learn to focus on the needs of the user. ... The only possible winner should be the user."
Thank You!

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