

What's in the research toolbox for a team of academic Liaison Librarians

Jasmine Castellano | Liaison Librarian

University Library, University of Adelaide, South Australia

Jasmine.Castellano@adelaide.edu.au | <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8048-6319>

Paula Everett | Liaison Librarian, Law

University Library, University of Adelaide, South Australia

Paula.Everett@adelaide.edu.au | <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5233-0912>

Vikki Langton | Liaison Librarian

University Library, University of Adelaide, South Australia

Vikki.Langton@adelaide.edu.au | <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8687-4216>

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors certify that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organisation or entity with any financial interest, or non-financial interest (such as personal or professional relationships, affiliations, knowledge or beliefs) in the subject matter or materials discussed in this paper.

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We would like to acknowledge and thank the organisers of the Asia Pacific Health, Law & Special Libraries Conference, and our colleagues in the Academic Liaison team at the University of Adelaide Library.

This paper highlights how the library uses technology and information to connect with people in the University Library. Multimedia content production, webinars, self-guided webpages, and cross-team collaboration have all enabled the Academic Liaison team to reach new audiences and provide accessible and targeted research support. From one-on-one consultations to workshops with over 400 attendees – the team combines online and in-person services to be the conduit between key research stakeholders and the library.

Background

A team of five Liaison Librarians at the University of Adelaide Library provide wide ranging research support and subject specific knowledge to numerous schools. As part of a presentation at the Asia Pacific Health, Law & Special Libraries Conference, the team shared three projects undertaken to provide sustainable, bespoke and targeted support.

Scalable support during COVID & beyond

Two of the key themes in the University of Adelaide Library's Operational Plan are 'Supporting Research Excellence and Impact' and providing 'a Compelling Student Experience'. The COVID pandemic provided some valuable lessons for the team in how they effectively support these objectives. Prior to lockdown, the team was finalising a suite of information literacy courses aimed at new undergraduate students. This timing was an opportune coincidence and helped enormously with teaching support over the coming months.

Other issues which arose during that time included health researchers having restricted access to their labs or fieldwork – so they turned to alternative projects like systematic reviews – and the team's workload increased quite significantly. In Law, it was necessary to quickly pivot by offering online consultations and workshops to help law researchers. Alongside this, the team continued to support research activities such as open access, research metrics, research data management, and strategic publishing.

The team's support model since COVID has included the development of an online workshop program for 2023 to provide scalable support to the research community. This had included sessions on research metrics, strategic publishing (including Read & Publish agreements), searching for systematic reviews, and targeted workshops for academics during grant application periods. The Library's Strategic Publishing webpages have also been updated to provide targeted and accurate information for researchers to guide them in the first instance when seeking support for publishing. Alongside a Systematic Review Fundamentals MyUni course, these projects have allowed the team to provide timely support to a large research community which we then supplement with one-to-one, or in-person sessions as needed.

The Academic Liaison team's planning for 2024 will be inclusive of these existing projects, with the aim to target key periods in the academic year to provide timely and useful support on a wider level without compromising service quality.

Research support toolbox

A high level of tailored and sustainable support is maintained across each research support area by the team's research support toolbox. Three of the tools in the box are: developing a Systematic Review charter, providing Legal subject matter expertise and creating a video for Clinical Titleholders.

Systematic review charter

In November 2023 the Library Systematic Review Service Charter was published and the existing Systematic Review LibGuide updated. With a growing demand for support in systematic reviews, it was important to ensure that a sustainable service could be provided despite having a small team. This charter sets out clear boundaries

for what falls within the scope of the assistance offered by the team when it comes to supporting systematic reviews, which helps manage researcher expectations.

In the charter, there are separate sections that provide links to existing support materials like the SR LibGuide and the Advanced Searching for Health Sciences course. The course is accessible on MyUni (the learning management system) and covers systematic searching methods for all the major health databases. Researchers are therefore directed to the self-help resources in the first instance. For those who wish to consult with a librarian, a level of preparatory work is required, and outlined within the charter. This ensures that researchers who meet with the Liaison Librarians come prepared with preliminary search strategies. The team also takes advantage of training opportunities offered by vendors, such as those provided by Covidence - a systematic review management tool.

The service charter has been a first step in providing sustainable support to researchers, and the team is now working on the next step to scale this support. This includes developing an online training course on systematic reviews, allowing users to access self-service support at any time, in line with the Library's Learning & Teaching Principles. This will also attract credit points for Higher Degree by Research students (HDR) completing the University's Career and Research Skills Training program.

The course is being developed by the Systematic Review Course Working Group, a team comprising two Liaison Librarians (subject matter experts) and four members of the Library's Learning Support Team (course design experts). The course will be completed by the end of 2023 and will guide students through each step of the systematic review workflow, with a focus on advanced literature searching and troubleshooting. It will be self-enrolled and self-paced. The content will include interactive activities, guides and quizzes that will meet the University's accessibility standards. Concurrently, the existing Advanced Searching for Health Sciences course is being updated to include additional database platforms, thereby giving it a broader appeal by making the content interdisciplinary. Finally, additional 'quick reference guides' are being created, that will be added to the Systematic Review Libguide, and will be linked in the new course.

Legal subject matter expertise

The law toolbox comprises a range of tools, developed for self-help and independent research within the Law School. These tools build on the researcher's skill set, developing critical legal research skills which they may not yet have or will assist them to consolidate and build on what they know already. These tools are built collaboratively, with the Law Liaison Librarian providing subject expertise for these resources which are then built by the Library's Learning Support Team.

This includes a comprehensive LibGuide on law resources complemented by a Law essentials course on how to research with links to all of the key legal databases used in Australian legal research and foreign and international law. There is additional material to improve research skills which demonstrate and model how to find primary source material: case law or legislation. This includes bite sized videos and quizzes within the LibGuide and a Library Essentials MyUni course.

During a presentation to undergraduates, a Kahoot quiz revealed that only half the students were aware of legal research referencing rules – this is evidence of a need for further training resources. The content in the online guides is modular and scalable, for use from first year to final year, supporting the development of digital capability skills that are used in university study and to deliver the University's graduate attributes for 'living, learning and working in a digital society'.

Building on the skills they gain from these resources, the liaison librarian can then collaborate with academics to deliver tailored sessions. Prior to COVID sessions were conducted face to face – the University Library now offers online, in person or hybrid learning experiences. Often recordings are created and then embedded into a course. The online support provided offers a comprehensive self-service support option for the students, enabling the Liaison Librarians to allocate more time supporting research excellence and engaging in strategic activities, such as exploring the use of Open Educational Resources (OERs) and discovering metrics with academic research and teaching staff.

This combination of tools produces positive learning and research outcomes and sets students up to utilise their legal research skills in the real world. At present, the Law Liaison Librarian is collaborating with law academics on refreshing the existing content to provide more targeted resources for research.

Clinical Titleholders' video

A targeted library services video was created for a specific cohort of Clinical Titleholders, or affiliated researchers, in the Health & Medical Sciences Faculty. It was discovered that this group of 1800 were not fully utilising access to the Library's services, unlike fulltime researchers and students. This group felt unseen and unrepresented proportional to the work they contribute to the University.

To address this, the Health and Medical Sciences Liaison Librarians developed a script, and alongside the University's talented video production team, they created a video emphasising the collection of journals and e-books, key online guides, and courses. It highlights access to research and teaching support, such as the Read and Publish Agreements for Open Access publishing, and eligibility to seek 1-1 support with the Liaison Librarians for their research and systematic searching needs. A

Medical School Titleholder was recruited to participate in the project, providing a testimonial that helped to further engage our target audience.

This video has enabled the Liaison Librarians to communicate with a large cohort of patrons in a sustainable and informed way. It has subsequently been shared at Titleholder events, included in mailing lists, and incorporated into the Titleholders intranet webpage, and has increased the understanding of Library services to a previously unserved but important research community.

Team approach & takeaways

These tools provide examples of how a more team-based, task-sharing approach is being utilised by the Academic Liaison team, which continues to expand as the team works to meet the key themes of the University of Adelaide Library's Operational Plan. With collaboration, the team found that they can work smarter and streamline content to further develop tools and resources to support research. In a busy team, these practices facilitate the support research excellence for the community. And importantly, the toolbox is not finite – it will grow and change over time, in response to the needs of researchers at the university, as demonstrated by the new projects and reviews being undertaken now.