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Open for Library-Faculty Collaboration: A Liaison Librarian Use Case at the University Library of Freie Universität Berlin

Abstract: This article addresses the concept and practice of liaison librarianship newly introduced in 2019 at the University Library of Freie Universität Berlin. Chances and challenges of library-faculty collaboration of two liaison librarians assigned to work with the Department of Earth Sciences and the Seminar of East Asian Studies, respectively, are discussed. The contribution seeks to give a stimulus for liaison librarianship in academic libraries and to connect to the well-established discourse on liaison librarianship in the Anglophone academic library world.

Keywords: Liaison librarianship, organisational change, research librarian, subject librarian, Earth Sciences, East Asian Studies

Offen für die Bibliotheks-Fachbereich-Zusammenarbeit: Ein Liaison-Bibliothekar*innen Anwendungsbeispiel aus der Universitätsbibliothek der Freien Universität Berlin

Zusammenfassung: Dieser Artikel stellt das Konzept des liaison librarianship, das 2019 an der Universitätsbibliothek der Freien Universität Berlin neu eingeführt wurde, und die Praxis der Liaison-Arbeit vor. Es werden Chancen und Herausforderungen der Liaison-Arbeit im Zusammenspiel mit dem Fachbereich Geowissenschaften bzw. dem Ostasiatischen Seminar diskutiert. Der Beitrag zielt darauf ab, einen Impuls zum liaison librarianship in die wissenschaftlichen Bibliothekslandschaft zu geben und dieses mit dem etablierten Diskurs zu liaison librarianship in der anglophonen Bibliothekswelt zu verbinden.

Schlüsselwörter: Fachreferat, Organisationseinwicklung, Liaison-Bibliothekar*in, Forschungsbibliothekar*in, Geowissenschaften, Ostasienwissenschaften

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1 Introduction

How can we best support our faculty and student patrons is THE essential question of academic librarianship at any given university library? However, the answers will depend not only on the fundamental macro-societal changes over time outside the library – the effects of the "technological transformation of scholarship" being one of the main topics currently discussed. Answers will also depend on how the job descriptions and organisational structures of university libraries are open to change and on new approaches to fulfil these tasks. In our paper we want to shed a light on the concept and practice of liaison librarianship as a "system for framing our [librarian's] work and organisational structures in order to effectively meet the needs of faculty and students"[1] newly introduced under this term in 2019 at the University Library of Freie Universität Berlin. Thereby and by publishing this paper in English, we aim to connect to the long- and well-established discourse on liaison librarianship in the Anglophone academic library world[2] as well as to the debate on the transformation of academic librarian's service spectrum in Germany[3] connected with the prevalent job position terms "Wissenschaftlicher Dienst" (academic services) or "Fachreferat" (subject specialist).

Before we elaborate in more detail on the concept and praxis of our liaison librarian work at the University Library of Freie Universität Berlin, we want to begin with a selection of introductory citations, which have shaped our understanding of the meaning of "liaison librarianship".

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1 Canuel and Crichton (2021) 1.
2 For a selected bibliography list see Vine (2018) and especially ARL (2018), Canuel and Crichton (ed.) (2021), Delaney and Bates (2015), Drewes and Hoffmann (2010), Ducas et al. (2020), Filgo and Towers (2021), Jaguszewski and Williams (2013), Kenney (2014), Lach et al. (2021), Research Library Issues (2018), Rodwell and Fairbairn (2008), Miller and Pressley (2015), Totleben and Birrell (2016), for a concise liaison librarianship literature review summary see Ippoliti (2021) 299.
3 Blaser-Meyer (2019), Figge et al. (2017), Tappenbeck (2015), Tréfás (2018), o-bib special issue "Aufgabenspektrum Fachreferat" (2022).

Liaison librarians function as intermediaries:

"Liaisons are playing two new roles, that of advocate and of consultant, both with an emphasis on campus engagement. As advocates, they have become a research library's "sales force," speaking on a wide range of topics and trends in higher education, influencing and persuading campus stakeholders on important issues, and serving as ambassadors of change. [...]
As consultants, liaisons identify faculty needs and then make referrals to colleagues with more specialized, often technical, expertise."[4]

Liaison librarians provide specialized, just-in-time services:

"This conception of library services, wherein liaison librarians support the missions of specific departments and programs, allows these librarians to pursue more focused disciplinary specialization in service of the varied needs of our diverse academic communities."[5]

Liaison librarians as embedded or field librarians:

"Embedding brings librarians out of the centralized libraries they have landed in and puts them back into the academic spaces in which they originated in several different ways".[6]
"Embedded librarianship is a relatively new term but an old concept in academic libraries. Specialized services have existed in academic branch libraries since their inception. Branch libraries are examples for embedding services. [...] Key concepts for successful programs include location, communication, services, flexibility of librarians, and collaborations among librarians and faculty, staff, researchers, and students. These concepts, combined with non-traditional socialization opportunities, encourage librarians to provide specialized programs for their subject-focused user groups."[7]

"Field Librarianship" is another concept and job title to be found in the literature on US-American university libraries, which situates the embedded librarian in the department with an "enormous latitude to create a unique role" with services tailored to the specific "discipline, departmental culture, politics and academic directions".[8]

Liaison librarians as research librarians: "[T]he title 'Research Librarian' [...] may be understood as a role that centres on assisting others in conducting research, rather than one where the core work is research in the domain of librarianship."[9]

"By using their data science and digital skills, research librarians have the opportunity to make an impactful contribution to the workflow of their faculty colleagues."[10]

These excerpts from the literature exemplify only a selection of major aspects of liaison librarians' roles as they are practiced and discussed in the Anglo-American library context since the 2010s, but for us they provide inspiring impulses for strategic liaison librarians' development processes. In the Anglo-American context roles and responsibilities of liaison librarians are often already translated into detailed job descriptions, available e. g., on the library's homepage like at the University of North Carolina Greensboro. Here, four main areas of service are defined – teaching and learning, research services, collection and resources, and scholarly communications – and illustrated with a list of tasks as well as best practices.[11]

One might argue, that in the German context the responsibilities of liaison librarians described at the University of North Carolina library example correspond to the tasks of a variety of academic librarian's positions, especially subject specialists (Fachreferent*in), subject librarians (Fachbibliothekar*in), research librarians (Forschungsbibliothekar*in) or functional specialists (i. e., Research Data officer, Open Access officer etc.). It is beyond the scope of this paper to elaborate in more detail about the differences of liaison definitions and recent discourses on the changing scopes of academic librarian's positions in Germany (see reference three on this topic[12]). However, regarding the openness for a specialized "just in time"-collaboration with faculty we see the liaison librarian (as well as the research librarian) in-between the roles of a subject specialist who is structurally integrated and whose office is in the library and that of an embedded or field librarian who is integrated – often with an office – in the academic department, or a research project team.

From the engagement with the literature on liaison librarianship an important lesson learned is that the concept is fluid and must be adapted to the specific structures and needs of the institution where it is introduced. Some would even argue that it is THE concept for enabling job positions which are related to a strict user-orientation with their ever-changing needs, and therefore per definition open to constant change.[13]

4 Jaguszewski and Williams (2013) 16.
5 Canuel and Crichton (2021) 1.
6 Schmehl Hines (2013) 4.
7 Drewes and Hoffman (2010) 81.
8 Rudin (2008) 69 f. Field Librarianship as an inspiring concept for subject specialists (Fachreferat) in Germany has also been discussed in Schröter (2009) and Askey (2009).
9 Hall (2010).

10 Ekstrøm et al. (2016).
11 See https://library.uncg.edu/info/library_liaison_responsibilities. aspx, accessed on 20.01.2023.
12 See also Hübner and Wagner (2022).
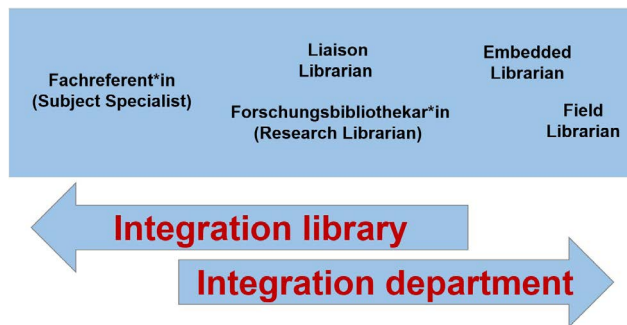13 Ippolito (2021) 301.

Fig. 1: Illustration of the terms used in the German context and the positioning of liaison librarians

In the following chapters we want to shed a light on how the positions of liaison librarians at the University Library of Freie Universität Berlin are conceptualised and present our own work as a use case. We will illustrate what challenges we have encountered and what chances we see/ expectations we have regarding liaison librarianship in the German context.

2 Organisational Change Strategy

In a major organisational change project (2019–2021), development and change processes were initiated in the University Library aiming at being optimally positioned to meet future requirements.[14] The central goals of this process included increasing user orientation and service quality as well as increasing agility, flexibility, innovative strength, and future orientation. In this context, a strategy for the University Library was developed, which is centred around the needs of users, not around the "needs" of a book/medium, and focussed on the digital future of academic libraries.[15] The strategy formulates six strategic goals, two of which will be highlighted here because they relate particularly to the work of liaison librarians in the University Library and lay a strategic foundation of the liaison librarian concept:

– "We are already a reliable and competent service provider for the people and organisations with whom we work. In the future, we will strengthen our role as an active and creative partner.
– We will systematically expand our expertise in supporting research and strengthen our relationships with researchers at Freie Universität Berlin."[16]

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14 Lee and Riesenweber (2022).
15 Lee and Riesenweber (2020).
16 Universitätsbibliothek der Freien Universität Berlin (2020).

It may be worth mentioning that the work of a liaison librarian is not new to the staff of the University Library of Freie Universität Berlin. Liaison librarian work, as described in chapter 1 (e. g., proactively approaching researchers and students regarding their information needs, and participating in information literacy course programs etc.) is done already by University Library staff. However, in the past this work has tended to be done along the traditional tasks of a library (acquisition, cataloguing, information literacy training for students), in a semi-structured or sometimes unstructured way. Sometimes, a too close orientation on researchers' needs was even discouraged.

Backed up by the strategy of the University Library, liaison work is now taken into spotlight and the focus was put on the question what it means for librarians to be an "active and creative partner" and to "strengthen our relationships with researchers". A concrete definition of liaison-related tasks was generated in a next step. A review on which of these tasks are already part of the library staff portfolio (and will possibly need strengthening or re-organisation) as well as which tasks and/or human resources need to be introduced additionally led to a structured development of liaison activities for each subject library and the central library.

As a result of this process, the University Library decided to establish new full-time liaison librarian positions. They have a disciplinary focus on East Asian Studies and Earth Sciences, respectively, and are integrated into the new division "Research and Publication Services" ("Forschungs- und Publikationsservices"), specifically to the "Research Data Management team". The discipline-focused approach of liaison librarian work allows to tailor services and support with the effect of a greater impact on campus research, teaching, and learning. For five of the university's subject libraries, liaison library work was explicitly specified in the job descriptions of staff positions that are to be filled in the future (10–50 % of the full working time of the respective positions).

Core duties for full-time liaison librarians at Freie Universität Berlin are defined as follows:
– Close exchange and strong cooperation with faculty of the respective disciplines,
– Observing trends in the disciplines,
– Advising researchers: research data management (RDM)/open science/digital scholarship,
– Conducting teaching activities,
– Cooperation with subject librarians in acquisition, subject information, and indexing.

The different organisational affiliations for full-time liaison librarians (affiliated with library central services) and part-time liaison work (affiliated with subject libraries) stem from the fact that part-time liaison librarians are very much integrated in the traditional day-to-day library business of the subject libraries. On the contrary, full-time liaison librarian positions are designed to interact much more closely with faculty and provide broad support for new services such as textual and data publications, open science, Digital Humanities (DH) and RDM, with a strong link to central library services. To be able to interact this close with faculty, full-time liaison librarians at Freie Universität Berlin are required to be educated academics with a PhD in the disciplines to which they are assigned. Ideally, they have additional experience or training in library work. The University Library of Freie Universität Berlin has filled its two new positions accordingly.

It has been mentioned above that liaison with faculty is nothing new for the University Library. It has always been part of the library staff's work portfolio. Therefore, when explicitly defining this work and attributing it to job positions with a denomination as "liaison librarian" it was important for the University Library to take an integrative and co-operative approach regarding existing library staff. Furthermore, it is important to take care that staff who performed liaison work (but never labelled it like this) would not get additional workloads. On the contrary, by placing the users and their needs into the focus of the library strategy all librarians are invited to take a new, fresh look to their work and reflect upon the ways this work is accomplished.

In the case of the restructuring of liaison work within an existing library team, it was also important to pay careful attention to fears of loss of status, i. e., whether staff would suspect that liaison librarians were 'taking away' tasks that they had previously performed (and enjoyed very much). The University Library took an approach to stress cooperation and the complementing character of liaison librarian work with existing and new tasks and to allow for overlaps in work profiles of co-working staff, where appropriate.

3 Open for library-faculty collaboration: liaison librarianship at Freie Universität Berlin

Here we provide examples of library-faculty collaboration of the two full-time liaison librarians at University Library of Freie Universität Berlin. The liaison librarians are assigned to work with the Department of Earth Sciences and

the Seminar of East Asian Studies, respectively. Full-time liaison librarians are still rare positions at German university libraries; thus, these examples might serve as a use case for other institutions who are developing potential future liaison librarians or new academic services positions.

3.1 Liaison librarian for Earth Sciences

The position for a liaison librarian for the Earth Sciences was advertised in early 2021 with four main task areas: 1. Liaison with the Department of Earth Sciences to ensure close exchange and strong collaboration; participation and monitoring of trends in related disciplines and collaboration in community building. 2. Advising researchers in the context of RDM and open science, 3. Conducting teaching, and 4. Cooperation with subject librarians in acquisition, subject information and indexing as well as collecting, collating, and expanding the supply of subject-specific information and literature.

The Department of Earth Sciences is not located at the central campus area of Freie Universität Berlin in Berlin-Dahlem, but two of the three institutes of the department are located on the "Geocampus" in Berlin-Lankwitz, and one is in Berlin-Steglitz. From a library perspective, one of the implications of this physical separation for students and, even more, for researchers in Earth Sciences is a sense of "remoteness" from the Central Library and its services. This feeling of "remoteness" is supported by the fact that researchers very rarely visit the Central Library in person and, additionally, Central Library staff is barely present on their premises. The Earth Sciences library on the Geocampus is therefore an important intermediary and link to Central Library services of Freie Universität Berlin. Consequently, the liaison librarian spends working time both at the Central Library, where the Research Data Management team is based, and at the Geocampus.

As the liaison librarian for the Earth Sciences was a newly created staff position in the library, the potential benefits for the Department of Earth Sciences had to be communicated to the department's faculty. This was achieved by personal introductions on departmental and institute board meetings and by arranging appointments with individual professors.

After this initial stage, the start of a variety of liaison activities described below, as well as new open information formats like a coffee lectures series in the Earth Sciences library increased the visibility of the liaison librarian and – as important – added to the profile of the Earth Sciences library as a valuable information partner. Additionally, the introduction of discipline-specific seminars and workshops

as well as the establishment of a mailing list for the distribution of library and liaison work news fostered the relationship.

The coffee lecture series was established with a range of topics selected by the liaison librarian together with the Earth Sciences library staff. Lectures addressed, among others, basic information literacy competencies (e. g., search strategies and referencing) as well as topics for the advanced researcher (e. g., research data publishing and licensing). In the future, a strategy will be evaluated to involve students and faculty of the Department of Earth Sciences in the choice of topics for the coffee lectures with an online survey, with the potential to provide a further opportunity to deepen library-faculty collaboration.

Discipline-specific seminars and workshops on open access publishing as well as data management plan writing established additional contact with numerous faculties. The latter seminars were prepared and conducted by the liaison librarian together with team members of the Central Library services on Open Access publishing and RDM, respectively. The benefits were twofold: the services and, more importantly, the staff of the Central Library became better known to the faculty of the Department of Earth Sciences; and the discipline-independent, standard workshop concepts of the Central Services staff could be enriched with the discipline-specific knowledge of the liaison librarian.

Apart from the above-mentioned activities, library-faculty collaboration in the Department of Earth Sciences was explicitly developed in three areas: curriculum teaching, advice and consulting for researchers, and linking with external projects/activities.

3.1.1 Curriculum teaching

Teaching good scientific practice including the basics of RDM and concepts of open science to students is firmly integrated into the curriculum of the Department of Earth Sciences and is conducted by researchers of the department. These are usually trained Earth scientists with sometimes good, but often variable knowledge and aplomb on the above-mentioned topics.

Teachers of these courses very much welcome the offer of input from a library professional to support them in areas where they were less confident or felt unsure of their expertise. Liaison work in this case includes, besides the actual co-teaching in BSc, MSc, and PhD courses, to interact closely with the lecturers about the integration of the respective topics into the courses. Usually, both lecturers and the liaison librarian alike benefited from these discussions: lecturers often got a better understanding of e. g., copyright,

open licenses, or the meaning of FAIR data, and the liaison librarian a better understanding of the target student group. As an add on, this often was a perfect opportunity to engage with the researchers on Central Library services which were often unknown to them, i. e., supporting good scientific practices or about library's short courses on novel teaching methods.

3.1.2 Advice and consultation to faculty

Once the potential scope and breadth of liaison librarian work was increasingly known to faculty, researchers sought advice on topics related on RDM and open science. In some cases, these contacts resulted in projects where the liaison librarian took the lead in. One example is the request of the dean of the department to conceptualise and implement a project to increase awareness of and skills in research data publication, including a module to increase the visibility of the department's research data output to the public. Another example is a project on open science within the Institute of Geographical Sciences: a professor at the institute approached the liaison librarian for advice on a possible future collaboration with an external project on open science indicators, leading to a major involvement of the liaison librarian in this project.

A list of further activities is provided to illustrate the range of topics where advice was sought for:
– Supporting the publication of large and complex datasets in Freie Universität Berlin's institutional open-access-repository,
– Guidance on the data licensing policy of one of the department's institutes,
– Advice on a data policy for a large, co-operative research project,
– Advice on open access to text-based publications: open access article processing charges, licensing issues.

3.1.3 Link with discipline-specific external initiatives

Liaison work in the Earth Sciences includes the participation in discipline-specific external initiatives and projects. One aim of this participation is to bring external initiatives to the attention of faculty, to spark interest and stimulate participation. On the other hand, it is important to communicate results from these initiatives to the researchers (and additionally to Central Library services, where relevant).

To work with discipline-specific initiatives fits very well into the portfolio of discipline-specific liaison work at University Library of Freie Universität Berlin because

these initiatives are often too specific to be covered by the Central Library services departments. Relevant projects with liaison librarian participation in the Earth Sciences are "NFDI4Earth", which is the Consortium Earth System Sciences within the German NFDI initiative[17] (Nationale Forschungsdateninfrastruktur; Eng.: national research data infrastructure), the Geo.X-Network (a regional geoscientific competence network in Berlin and Potsdam), and the Germany/Austria/Switzerland-wide information portal for research data management, "forschungsdaten.info".[18]

Within NFDI4Earth, the liaison librarian leads the sub-project "Rewarding Systems: status and recommendations" which is part of the project "Towards a Cultural Change in ESS [Earth System Sciences] Research Data Management". Together with the GFZ German Research Centre for Geosciences and the Geoinformatics group at Technical University Dresden, current incentives for researchers to adopt FAIR and open data practices are investigated over five years. The work on this topic has the potential to transcend disciplinary boundaries. It has led the University Library together with faculty to start an initiative regarding the recognition of research data publications as a performance indicator for all members of Freie Universität Berlin in the future. Different central units of the University Library of Freie Universität Berlin work together in this joint initiative, thus emphasising the potential of liaison work to introduce new topics and collaborations within a library system.

Within the Geo.X network, the liaison work focuses on a six-month project for increased visibility of research data repositories of all Geo.X partner organisations. The (combined text and research data) repository of Freie Universität Berlin will benefit from this marketing effort. Also, researchers from the Department of Earth Sciences will profit from a comprehensive guide on research data repositories for Earth Sciences data in the region.

Regarding the project "forschungsdaten.info", the liaison librarian for the Earth Sciences is member of a group of research data support staff, from academic libraries and research data initiatives in Germany/Austria/Switzerland, which supports this information portal for research data management. Being part of this project provides great networking-opportunities in general as well as the opportunity of taking advantage of the platform's outreach formats: sparked by discussions in the Department of Earth Sciences on the ownership and copyright status of research data, a webinar with legal experts on "Who has what rights to re-

search data at the university?" was organised by the liaison librarian. This topic is of high interest also to the legal office of Freie Universität Berlin, providing the chance to reach out and strengthen relations of the University Library to the legal office.

3.2 Liaison librarian for East Asian Studies

The position for a liaison librarian for East Asian Studies was newly designed and advertised in 2020 with four main task areas: 1. Liaison to the three East Asian Studies departments (Chinese Studies, Japanese Studies, Korean Studies) by mirroring trends in the respective disciplines, facilitating collaboration and community building, 2. Consulting for researchers regarding research data management and digital humanities, 3. Conception, coordination and realisation of teaching activities, 4. Coordination of the East Asian Studies subject librarian's team[19] regarding acquisition, information literacy and subject indexing.

It is worth noting that as Freie Universität Berlin has a strong commitment of being an international network university area studies disciplines like East Asian Studies are seen as flagships for supporting the internationalization strategy of the university.

An active community of area studies patrons comes with the need of specialized library staff not only for managing acquisitions via direct contacts in the regional areas, but also for being trained in the respective discipline to be able to give specialized information literacy trainings on how to access multilingual infrastructures in non-European countries or to engage in research support for a wide range of subfields. In her comprehensive study on "Supporting Research in Area Studies: A Guide for Academic Libraries" Lesley Pitman summarizes, that area studies librarians must address

> "a broader range of research support issues than the traditional subject librarian, if only because he or she will be the focus for all the issues that their research community encounters, whether that is struggling to deal with foreign character sets in reference management software, or trying to establish the copyright status of something published abroad"

and that they have

> "to serve as an essential bridge between researchers and the library on such technical matters as understanding and advising on cataloguing standards, transliteration and original script cat-

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17 https://www.nfdi.de/?lang=en, accessed on 20.01.2023.
18 https://www.nfdi4earth.de/; https://www.geo-x.net/; https://forschungsdaten.info/, accessed on 20.01.2023.

19 The team comprises of five subject librarians: Chinese Studies (1,5 full time equivalents – FTE), Korean Studies (1,5 FTE), Japanese Studies (1 FTE) as well as three student assistants.

aloguing, authority control, and searching across library systems and databases in multiple languages and scripts."[20]

At Freie Universität Berlin being that "essential bridge" requires a constant bundling and translating of East Asian studies' needs within the static euro-centric library technology and classification systems. This has become a continuous task of the liaison librarian, leading to a lot of communication and exchange with other departments within the library and beyond.

Therefore, from the perspective of area studies support, the new liaison position provides – in the German context – a rare and innovative possibility not only for being open to collaborate more closely with faculty on new fields of research support like digital humanities and RDM. It is also a great opportunity to work with an East Asian Studies librarians team, which works closely with faculty and students. Their efforts provide a solid foundation for the liaison librarian to build upon.

3.2.1 Curriculum teaching

Here, the liaison task of conceptualising and realizing teaching activities can be mentioned as an example. How to search and access sources in original scripts is a core competence in the education of area studies specialists, a task which requires continuous training for scholars of all levels as the digital transformation of knowledge infrastructures "at home" and in the specific regions are adept to constant development. What is more, as most library infrastructures of the Global North are in the hands of so called "global" market players they are only catering for the needs of the Anglophone academic world.[21] As a consequence, trainings for workarounds, e. g., on dealing with discovery systems which do not support multilingual search queries or retrieval in non-Latin scripts to the full, are of high demand. Information literacy courses of the East Asian Studies librarians team have traditionally targeted undergraduate and graduate students. Courses were mostly designed according to direct requests of faculty for their specific seminar

topic or as introductory discipline specific information literacy trainings for all course levels. The collaboration of the liaison librarian with the East Asian Studies librarians team and faculty has now led to new formats targeted at and co-designed with junior and senior researchers:

– A yearly library onboarding workshop (2,5 hours) for each new cohort of PhD candidates at the Graduate School of East Asian Studies (GEAS): The graduate school "combines area studies research on East Asia with discipline-based methodological training and strong language and cultural competence. Its training program is interdisciplinary with a special emphasis on social sciences."[22] It hosts a PhD program for five to ten doctoral candidates per year. The liaison librarian co-designed a new library onboarding workshop in English together with the subject librarians for East Asian Studies and senior PhD student tutors of GEAS. The collaboration provided valuable insights on the needs of (international) doctoral candidates and led to the development of two workshops on handling empirical sensitive research data (see below). Also, it strengthened the exchange of the East Asian Studies librarians team on didactical strategies for catering to the needs of more experienced scholars in comparison to Bachelor or Master students as well as developing teaching formats in English.

– An international workshop on "Quality criteria for selecting academic literature and searching Japan-related digital sources" with a partner institute of the Japanese Studies department at the Hebrew University Jerusalem as a test format for supporting the internationalization strategy of Freie Universität Berlin in the field of information literacy teaching: The workshop was organised together with the Japanese Studies subject librarian. Faculty members of both universities were invited to deliver a short praxis report about the "How?" of their research procedures: What quality criteria do they apply for selecting sources for their research? How do they access digital archives in Japan and manage the digital objects/data retrieved? The online workshop took place during the "International Week 2022" at Freie Universität Berlin. Nineteen faculty members and students from both universities engaged in a lively discussion in English about general quality criteria for academic literature, controversies of what is regarded as "academic", barriers for accessing academic literature in or about Japan and the praxis examples of faculty members. The positive feedback of all participants encouraged to think about the format as

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20 Pitman (2015) 23.

21 This fact is currently highlighted in "decolonizing the library" initiatives, e. g. Cambridge University Libraries Decolonisation Working Group: https://www.lib.cam.ac.uk/about-library/diversifying-collections-and-practices/cambridge-university-libraries-decolonisation, the "Netzwerk Dekolonialisierung von Bibliotheken im DACH-Raum: https://decolonizethelibrary.miraheze.org/wiki/Hauptseite (all links, accessed on 20.01.2023), a special issue of the journal "LIBREAS" in 2021 on "Dekolonialisierung" (Decolonisation) and the dissertation of Schmidt (2020).

22 See http://www.geas.fu-berlin.de, accessed on 20.01.2023.

a useful concept for initiating similar international exchange with other partner institutions (library as well as faculty) abroad, especially in China, Taiwan, Japan, or South Korea.

3.2.2 Collaboration and consultation to faculty

Not only the concept and position of a liaison librarian – especially in distinction to the subject librarians for each department – is new to the East Asian Studies faculty at Freie Universität Berlin. Also, the topics of research data management, digital humanities, and open scholarship are not yet as widely discussed in the community, let alone already part of scholarly routines, as is the case in Earth Sciences. However, research data management policies of research funding agencies have increasingly become mandatory parts of applications in the humanities and social sciences as well. Therefore, the liaison librarian receives more consulting requests for advice on discipline specific RDM requirements and research literature recommendations on best practices for RDM in area studies/East Asian Studies to be cited in applications.

As an outcome of the library onboarding course during the pandemic for new doctoral candidates at GEAS a series of online workshops on research data management in Area Studies was started. This was a joint project of the academic coordinator and PhD student tutors of GEAS, the liaison librarian and two RDM officers of the central RDM team at the University Library.

While the first workshop focused on "Discover your research data", the second was directed on "Sensitive qualitative research data and the CARE principles". In preparation for both workshops, participants read recommended articles on RDM, which were then jointly discussed. This was followed by short input presentations from the RDM officers and break-out sessions with peer-to-peer interviews on the partner participant's research data. A particular field of interest emerged from the fact that travel restrictions due to the pandemic prohibited fieldwork in person in East Asia and forced the PhD students to conduct digital fieldwork (through social media platforms) instead. Here, the topic of how to cope with the requirement of consent forms when conducting digital fieldwork on social media platforms or in sensitive qualitative research projects (e. g., in projects where personal data is collected) sparked an intensive debate.

Both workshops proved a valuable format for multiple liaison lessons learned: with the PhDs for a deeper understanding of their special needs at this stage of the academic career, with the RDM officers of the University Library for deeper insights into the complexity of research data in the area studies/social sciences and with the academic coordinator of a graduate school on how to bring in a new topic like RDM into the PhD curriculum.

Regarding promoting open scholarship, the liaison librarian took the opportunity of an invitation to collaborate with the Japanese Studies faculty at Freie University Berlin in a handbook publication project and co-authored a chapter on "How to conduct reliable and fair research: Good research practice". The chapter gave the occasion to bring in the topics of RDM, open access, the open science/open scholarship movement and "how it can nudge the Japanese Studies community and its research culture towards more openness and fairness and address some ethical challenges related to open scholarship".[23] However, the "nudging" process has only started and will be a field for more liaison activities for the future – together with other Central Library services (i. e., the RDM team, the open access & publication services team) as well as further open scholarship stakeholders in East Asia.

3.2.3 Link with discipline-specific external initiatives

External discipline-specific liaison work in the case of East Asian Studies is centred around the topics of "multilingual DH" and within the initiative for a national NFDI consortium "4memory"[24] regarding multilingual data in Global History research.

In line with the establishment of a Digital Humanities centre at Freie Universität Berlin opened in June 2022 ("Ada Lovelace Centre for Digital Humanities"[25]) and a research project in the framework of the Berlin University Alliance (BUA) on "Closing the gap in non-Latin script data"[26] for Arabic Studies, the idea emerged to collaborate more closely on the field of multilingually enabled knowledge infrastructures in general and multilingual DH in particular. The interdisciplinary collaboration of the liaison librarian with the project coordinator from the Arabic Studies department led to the launch of a "Multilingual DH (MLDH) lab" as

> "a place of networking and encounter for researchers, teachers, students, research software developers, librarians, and all those

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23 Reiher and Wagner (2020) 431.
24 4memory consists of collaborators from "disciplines that use historical methods or that rely on data requiring historical contextualization" https://4memory.de, accessed on 20.01.2023.
25 https://www.ada.fu-berlin.de/en/index.html, accessed on 20.01.2023.
26 https://www.berlin-university-alliance.de/en/commitments/research-quality/forschung/ongoing/closing-the-gap/index.html, accessed on 20.01.2023.

members of Freie Universität Berlin who depend on the use of multilingual digital tools (platforms, software …) in their work, and especially on the use of non-Latin scripts in digital environments."[27]

Activities include the setting up of a MLDH wiki[28], a bi-weekly community hour and the initiative to propose a Multilingual DH working group in the academic association DHd e.V. (Digital Humanities in the German-speaking regions). The latter is now fostering the (inter)national networking of MLDH researchers, librarians, and research software engineers.

Furthermore, the liaison librarian is member of a project team of Freie Universität Berlin in the NFDI consortium 4memory[29] for historical research data, which started in March 2023. For the liaison librarian, this project will enable a close collaboration with the East Asian Studies faculty specializing in historical research, the History faculty specializing in Global History (incl. a focus on East Asia) and the central DH-team of the University Library of Freie Universität Berlin on digital literacy and multilingual research data.

4 Challenges of Liaison Librarianship

Both authors of this paper can only look back on a short period of work experience as dedicated liaison librarians. However, not surprisingly for newly designed positions and ongoing change processes, there are of course challenges to be tackled.[30] In the following chapter we want to touch shortly upon what we learned so far.

One requirement of liaison librarian work, especially for newly introduced liaison librarians, is to seize every opportunity to proactively contact faculty and to offer extensive help and support. However, if faculty expects to extensively collaborate in the longer term or on topics that do not belong to the liaison librarian's area of responsibility, this could tie up inappropriate amounts of the liaison librarian's working time. Here it is necessary to adopt a clear stance, draw limits and – if needed – involve other (functional) specialists in the library and beyond. Otherwise, there may be

a risk that if support is promised and cannot be provided, disappointment on the part of the faculty will have a negative impact on the liaison librarian's image.

An easy way to mitigate the above-mentioned challenge would be if the liaison librarian's range of tasks were firmly defined and communicated publicly so that the liaison librarian could, in case of inappropriate requests, simply relate to such a listing. However, detailed and clearly defined service portfolios are often not available in libraries where liaison librarian work is newly conceptualised. Apart from that, a rigid definition of a liaison librarians work would be rather obstructive for effective liaison work: a not too tight and detailed service description is needed to keep opportunities open, to give liaison librarians room for manoeuvre and the possibility to respond to the diversity of user needs (which is in line with the request for a closer user-centred orientation of libraries). Additionally, tight job definitions from Central Library administration can often not account for discipline-specific requirements of liaison librarian work.

For the leadership of the library, this means to find a good balance in its liaison concept between a detailed definition of tasks for liaison librarians and to allow for certain degrees of freedom. The same balance must be found regarding liaison librarians and their relationship to subject libraries with whom they collaborate. This may become especially important if liaison librarians are organisationally located in central departments, but do cooperate strongly with subject libraries on campus, because the needs of the subject libraries may be different from the requirements of the central library departments.

For these topics, an international exchange with colleagues from Anglo-American university libraries who are already presenting detailed liaison responsibilities on their websites as mentioned above might prove an effective way to decide for next steps in the local context.

For the liaison librarians at the Freie Universität Berlin, it has proven fruitful to have a lot of leeway for shaping their work along generally formulated tasks in the job description. On the other hand, this presents liaison librarians with the challenge of always keeping an exceptionally good overview of what they themselves would like to do or which tasks they would like to take on (or refuse) from those expected to be taken on by the department.

Another challenge for a library introducing liaison librarians is an increased workload for other teams in the library. Active promotion of library services in the academic departments will certainly lead to more usage of these services. For example, increased requests from researchers regarding the publication of complex and large research data sets in the institutional repository will claim increasing

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27 https://www.ada.fu-berlin.de/en/ada-labs/multilingual-dh/index.html, accessed on 20.01.2023.
28 https://wikis.fu-berlin.de/display/nlsdh (in German), accessed on 20.01.2023.
29 https://4memory.de/, accessed on 20.01.2023.
30 Challenges of liaison librarianship are extensively discussed in the literature, e. g., Canuel and Crichton (2021).

time of the repository team due to high demand for communication with researchers and might require the development of new technical workflows in view of the complexity of the projects.

Other challenges which have also been raised in the literature refer to organisational change processes and liaison librarians as "change agents". Cynthia Ippoliti (2021) highlights in her article on "Beyond the Looking Glass: Applying a Futures Thinking Perspective for Managing Liaison Roles" the "transformational change as a context for liaison work" in which the liaison librarian can function as a "catalyst" or "change agent". However, this requires consideration of the readiness and ability of other stakeholders both within and outside the library to embrace change.[31] An example here would be the difficulty of building sustainable library-faculty liaison collaborations under the current academic working conditions, where more than 90 percent of faculty is hired only on non-tenured short-term or part-time positions in Germany. Consequently, the continuous building of trust with new faculty members is required and makes the development of sustainable innovative teaching or research consulting formats difficult just as it contradicts the aspiration of the library for a strong, sustainable relationship to faculty.

5 Outlook

The discussion at the University Library of Freie Universität Berlin on how to evaluate the success of the concept of liaison librarianship is far from finalized. We observe that the liaison librarians at Freie Universität Berlin are increasingly recognized by the academic departments and their services are actively requested by faculty, what may lead us to the conclusion that the implementation of liaison librarians is on the right track. However, our "data" to support this conclusion is founded mainly on anecdotal evidence; we do not benchmark liaison activities yet or rely on indicators such as the number of contacts to faculty or alike, used in other organisations.[32] Nevertheless, we believe that measuring success just by the numbers seems to be inadequate as figures don't answer the crucial question about how useful liaison services are from a faculty perspective

and how faculty rates the quality of these services in relation to other, more "traditional" library services they are used to. To capture such aspects, we might apply qualitative methods in the future, like sending out surveys to faculty or interview studies, in collaboration with our University Library's user experience expert.

As of the beginning of 2023, more full-time as well as part-time liaison positions are on the way. As soon as these positions are being filled, the exchange of experiences between librarians involved in liaison work at our institution will be strengthened. On the one hand, such cross-departmental meetings can provide a space for mutual learning on concrete liaison work for specific academic departments. On the other hand, the meetings can function as a forum to generate impulses for the evolvement of the liaison concept at Freie Universität Berlin University Library in general. The latter will include a regular review of the tasks and procedures of the liaison librarians that should involve all relevant stakeholders (obviously, library management, organisational development team, but also subject librarians, metadata and subject indexing experts, library IT, RDM & Open Access experts) in the library. Ideally, also the heads of the academic departments for which the liaison librarians work will be involved.

Having said this, we would like to emphasize that we are keen to network with colleagues at other institutions who are concerned with liaison concepts or who are practicing liaison work. Moreover, with this article, the authors like to instigate a discussion in the academic library community on liaison work as a method of enabling openness of academic libraries. Such debate may also include a discussion about job titles and a comparison of key directions of activity that liaison librarians start in the Anglo-American library world (see chapter 1) as well as the German context. Beyond that, a conversation about the role of liaison librarians in library organisational change processes, thinking about whether liaisons librarians are merely a "static result" or rather an active "catalyst" within forever ongoing change processes, will hopefully add to a better understanding of liaison librarianship in the future.

> "While much of futures work is speculative, thinking about liaison work as a change-related question rather than an infrastructure-related one might open new avenues of exploration. As we look ahead to stronger relationships with faculty, a greater sense of agency and urgency, and a renewed sense of the future where liaisons are as much catalysts for action as they are library representatives, hopefully, these approaches will make for a richer discussion."[33]

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31 Ippoliti (2021) 300 f.: "Furthermore, the current landscape of liaison work in libraries has not always been accompanied by these more radical and transformative cultural shifts where the very fabric of the organization has undergone a major transition. We have been integrating liaison work into our existing infrastructure and institutional contexts but not making changes to the surrounding framework itself."
32 Horowitz et al. (2016) 200.

33 Ippoliti (2021) 320.

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