

# Librarians who lunch

## Liaisons with new faculty

by David Isaacson

I get paid for going out on dates with new faculty. Nice work if you can get it, and I get it every fall semester in our liaison program. The idea of soft-selling library services over a meal or a drink originated in 1993 with Lance Query, then dean of libraries and now dean at Tulane University. "Lunch with a Librarian" has proved to be well worth the time and money.

It's a simple idea: make the new faculty member feel special. The entertainment part of the library's budget can justify this as similar to sweet-talking a donor. What we are selling is service and good will.

Here's how the program works: As soon as the library knows the names and departments of new faculty at the beginning of the fall semester, library

liaisons call or e-mail them individually with an invitation to the library for a "date" to have a personalized orientation to library resources, followed by a meal or at least a drink.

### We almost never get stood up

Nearly all new faculty take us up on this offer. Who's going to pass up a free lunch? New faculty also enjoy being asked for advice in

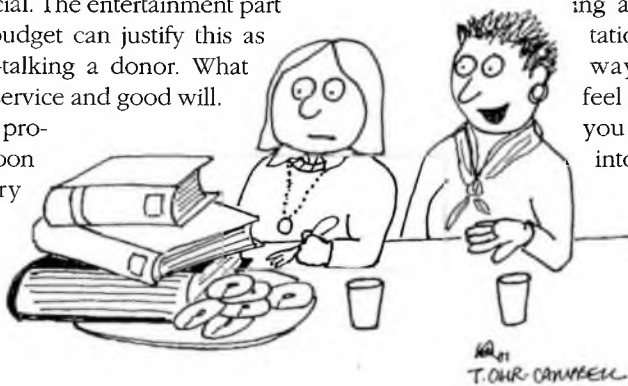
developing library holdings in their subject specialties.

I like to start these meetings with a brief tour of the parts of the library housing books and journals in the professor's research area. Then, we go to my office where I give them a packet of liaison brochures and handouts and try to get a conversation started about their dissertation subject. (Even if they are not newly hatched from graduate school, asking

about their dissertation is still a good way to make them feel at ease.) However you choose to enter into it, the main focus of the office visit should be the professor's major research interest. It should not be the overwhelming task of "pri-

mary resources in anthropology I want to make sure you know about." This session is about this faculty member's specific interests, not the whole discipline he or she is part of.

In the coziness of the office, I invite the professor to watch me as I give brief demos of the major databases pertinent to his or her research. Focusing on the professor's subject specialty virtually guarantees undivided at-



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tention. Usually, if I don't know something about the research specialty, I can at least ask questions about it. There's nothing more interesting to most people than a few well-placed questions about their life's work.

**Important relationships will be formed**

In the seven years since our liaison program started, I have met scores of new faculty and, incidentally, gained some new friends. The

social part of this first liaison meeting is critical to the success of the intellectual exchanges between librarian and new faculty member. Librarians are much more likely to persuade faculty to consult us about sources they want us to acquire or library instruction sessions they want us to teach if we establish this personal rapport first.

It is helpful to take notes in these sessions so you can surprise the professor later with a call or a note about some new resource in his or her area. But try not to oversell library services; you don't want to promise the moon.

I look forward to these meetings because they promote the library and they are fun. In fact, most of my requests for research and teaching assistance come from these new faculty.

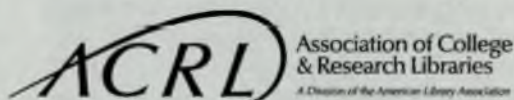
If we had the time and money, it certainly would be profitable to invite every faculty member (even those about to retire) for a liaison date. ■

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