

# The 'Hangout Factor' in Library Liaison Work: An Exploration

ELLEN HAMPTON FILGO

Associate Librarian & E-Learning Librarian  
Department of Liaison Services  
Baylor University Libraries

SHA TOWERS

Director of Liaison Services & Art Liaison Librarian  
Department of Liaison Services  
Baylor University Libraries

## Introduction

In the library literature, many formal attempts have been made to define and list the diverse and varying activities of liaison librarians. This poster is an exploration of the often-overlooked and seemingly insignificant interactions of liaisons. While social points of engagement aren't necessarily thought of as official liaison work, we believe they are the foundation on which all other successful liaison activity is built: the "Hangout Factor."

## Literature Review

Early definitions of liaison work specifically excluded any kinds of informal work. Liaison work often focused on collection development, bibliographic instruction and communicating about library policies/services to user communities.

In his seminal work on liaison activity, David Miller defined liaison work as "the formal, structured activity in which professional library staff systematically meet with teaching faculty to discuss strategies for directly supporting their instructional needs and those of students.... It differs fundamentally from the pattern of occasional contacts that have always been made and sometimes initiated by librarians."

Miller, L. D. (1977). Liaison work in the academic library. *RQ*, 16(3), 213-215.

The RUSA guidelines still define liaison work primarily as collection development. "Liaison work is the process by which librarians involve the library's clientele in the assessment of collection needs and services and the measurement of user satisfaction with the collection."

RUSA. (2010). Guidelines for liaison work in managing collections and services. Reference and User Services Association. Retrieved from <http://www.ala.org/rusa/resources/guidelines/guidelinesliaison>

However, liaison work has changed since the early days.

"The liaison paradigm has morphed from the traditional one-way communication model of librarian to faculty member to a more dynamic, interactive, responsive, service-oriented design."

Kozal-Gains, M.A., & Szodart, R.A. (2009). Experiences and challenges in liaison activities: Lessons from new librarians in integrating technology face-to-face, and follow-up. *Collection Management*, 34(2), 130-142. <http://doi.org/10.1080/016627092729150>

While hangout activities are not often listed directly as responsibilities, the skills needed for them are often noted to be important.

An article that focused specifically on outreach to faculty, stated that one essential trait for a Faculty Outreach Librarian was "a willingness to be proactive, to seek out users in their offices, parties, and departmental meetings."

Sebelian, S., Siggins, J., Nitty, D., & Long, C. (1999). Improving library relations with the faculty and university administrators: The role of the faculty outreach librarian. *College & Research Libraries*, 60(2), 121-130. <http://doi.org/10.5860/crl.60.2.121>

"The types of skills and attributes that are relevant to the enhanced liaison role would include the following:

- confidence;
- communication and presentation skills of a high order;
- risk taking;
- flexibility and comfort with ambiguity;
- networking skills, being able to build coalitions and cultivation of clients and supporters;
- relationship or "account management" skills;
- negotiation, persuasion and influencing skills;
- reflection on practice and ability to learn/teach;
- project management skills;
- promotion and marketing skills; and
- high level technical knowledge – not only for any production/publishing work, but also to be able to facilitate or mediate between parties to achieve outcomes."

Rodwell, J., & Fairbairn, L. (2008). Dangerous liaisons? Defining the faculty liaison librarian service model, its effectiveness and sustainability. *Library Management*, 29(1/2), 116-124. <http://doi.org/10.1108/01453130810844694>

Recent studies of liaison work have begun to include hangout activities in descriptions of responsibilities.

"Liaisons should identify and attend open events associated with their liaison areas (lectures, meetings, films, social events, departmental student groups, etc.) as ways to develop personal relationships with faculty."

Miller, J. (2014). A method for evaluating library liaison activities in small academic libraries. *Journal of Library Administration*, 54(6), 483-500. <http://doi.org/10.1080/01930826.2014.953387>

"Intensely contacts with users; for example, invite key people, such as student leaders, graduate coordinators, and faculty to coffee breaks or lunch (everyone needs to eat lunch!). ... Welcome new faculty and offer to provide a library orientation; consider following up the orientation with a meeting over coffee to further the personal relationship."

Silver, L. D. (2014). Outreach activities for librarian liaisons. *Reference & User Services Quarterly*, 54(2), 8-14.

There have even some examples of liaisons engaging in hangout activities that have been published in the literature.

With faculty: "By rehearsing with the band, I'm serving the library by creating a stronger bond with the music department in my role as liaison with that department. I'm in the fine arts building every week and I visit the music resource center more often."

Kinnin, J. (2002). Making a case for the tenure banjo. *American Libraries*, 33(10), 58.

With students: "It was found at Mansfield University that continued involvement with play participants outside the library increased student comfort level both with the library in general and the librarian for their major. This study confirms that students are more comfortable with librarians once they have the opportunity to get to know them."

Kasperok, S., Johnson, A., Fotta, K., & Craig, F. (2007). Do a little dance: The impact on students when librarians get involved in extracurricular activities. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 33(1), 118-126. <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2006.06.006>

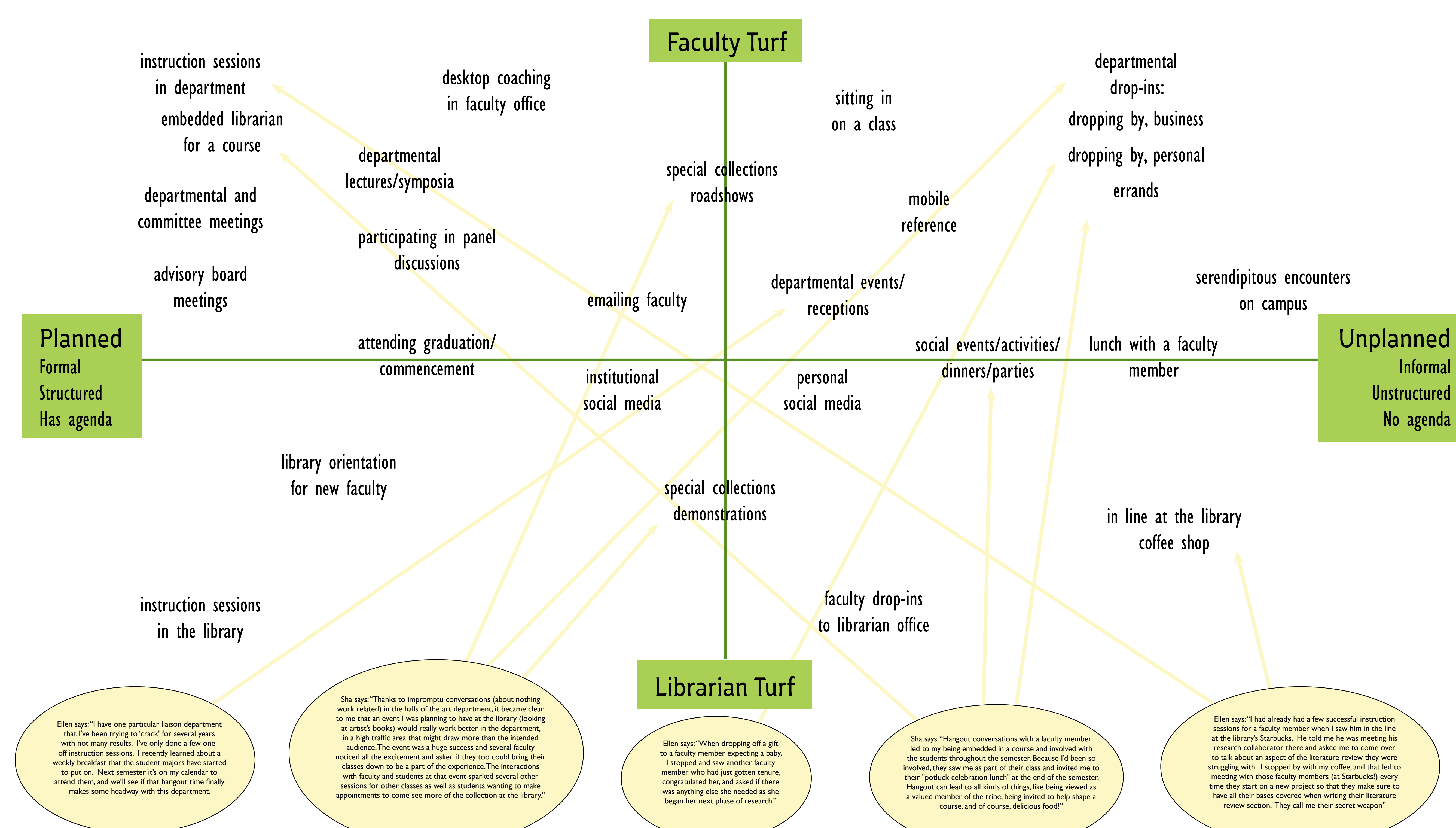
Creating good relations with faculty through hangout activities is the precursor to collaborative activities – it can even make or break them.

"Improved librarian-faculty relations are also claimed to increase the effectiveness of classroom faculty involvement in various library-centered activities, such as collection management and bibliographic instruction, as well as librarian involvement in areas of special concern to classroom faculty, such as non-library related teaching, research, instructional design, curriculum development, and university governance. The lack of a strong working relationship before collaboration sometimes results in miscommunication, tension, and even outright failure."

Kotzer, W. R. (1999). Bridging the great divide: Improving relations between librarians and classroom faculty. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 25(4), 294-303. [http://doi.org/10.1016/S0099-1333\(99\)80030-5](http://doi.org/10.1016/S0099-1333(99)80030-5)

"In many ways, both advocacy and collaboration building rest on the ability of librarians to simply build personal relationships with faculty by knowing their names and interests, the particularities of their schedules, and their current projects."

Anthony, K. (2010). Reconnecting the disconnects: Library outreach to faculty as addressed in the literature. *College & Undergraduate Libraries*, 17(1), 79-92. <http://doi.org/10.1080/10691310903584817>



Ellen says: "I have one particular liaison department that I've been trying to 'crack' for several years with not many results. I've only done a few one-off instruction sessions. I recently learned about a weekly breakfast that the student majors have started to put on. Next semester it's on my calendar to attend them, and we'll see if that hangout time finally makes some headway with this department."

Sha says: "Thanks to impromptu conversations (about nothing work related) in the halls of the art department, it became clear to me that an event I was planning to have at the library (looking at artist's books) would really work better in the department, in a high traffic area that might draw more than the intended audience. The event was a huge success and several faculty noticed all the excitement and asked if they too could bring their classes down to be a part of the experience. The interactions with faculty and students at that event sparked several other sessions for other classes as well as students wanting to make appointments to come see more of the collection at the library."

Ellen says: "When dropping off a gift to a faculty member expecting a baby, I stopped and saw another faculty member who had just gotten tenure, congratulated her, and asked if there was anything else she needed as she began her next phase of research."

Sha says: "Hangout conversations with a faculty member led to my being embedded in a course and involved with the students throughout the semester. Because I'd been so involved, they saw me as part of their class and invited me to their 'potluck celebration lunch' at the end of the semester. Hangouts can lead to all kinds of things, like being viewed as a valued member of the tribe, being invited to help shape a course, and of course, delicious food!"

Ellen says: "I had already had a few successful instruction sessions for a faculty member when I saw him in the line at the library's Starbucks. He told me he was meeting his research collaborator there and asked me to come over to talk about an aspect of the literature review they were struggling with. I stopped by with my coffee, and that led to meeting with those faculty members (at Starbucks) every time they start on a new project so that they make sure to have all their bases covered when writing their literature review section. They call me their secret weapon!"

## Defining the Nebulous

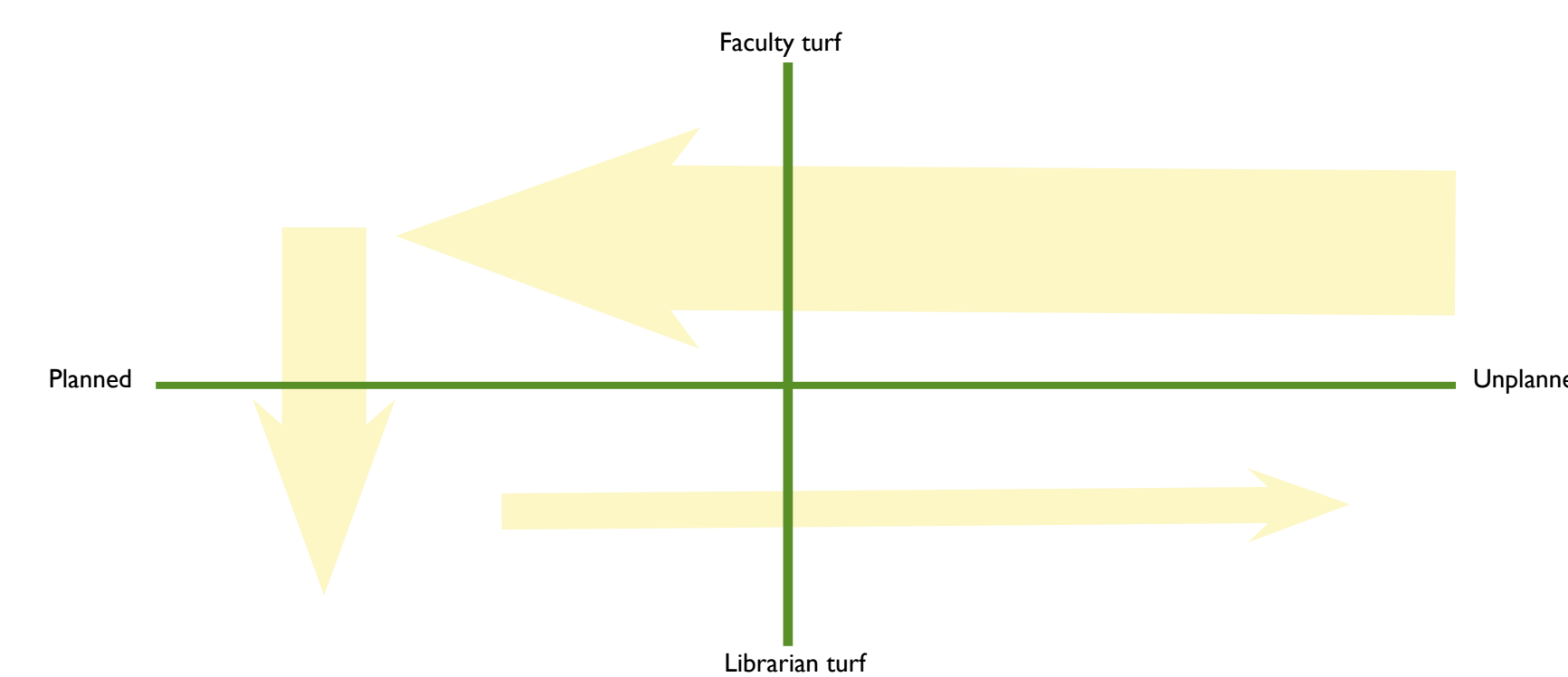
What does it mean to "hangout" with faculty or students in liaison work?

- Hangout encompasses the social and informal activities that can be a part of liaison work, but it also can happen during more formal activities too.
- While hangout is networking, not all networking is hangout.
- While hangout activities are face-to-face contact (whether that's formal – in a classroom, or informal – at a social activity), some hangout can happen in social media spaces as well.
- Hangout involves people/relationship skills, risk taking, being comfortable with ambiguity and playfulness.

## Our Theories

- More of the hangout activities take place on "faculty turf" or outside the traditional haunts of the librarian, which means good things can happen when we step outside of our comfort zone.
- Informal hangout activities can have a positive influence on the number and quality of the more formal liaison activities (such as collection requests, information literacy instruction, requests for collaboration, etc.)

Direction of influence



- Creating good relations with faculty through hangout type activities is necessary to bring about successful collaborative work.

## A Few Suggestions

- Be willing to stretch your comfort zone and experiment with different kinds of hangout activities in your liaison work.
- Keep your eyes open to recognize hangout opportunities as they arise.
- View hangout activities with a long lens, because there is a cumulative effect.
- Do not stigmatize the social/informal hangout activities as "not real work."
- Do not simply view hangout activities as distractions from your "real work" or as a sacrifice for something "greater," but enjoy them in and of themselves.
- Make sure to record and assess the hangout activities that you do.

Here's how we've been recording liaison activity (in LibAnalytics) and we will be reassessing these capture points with our whole liaison team soon.