

REPORT TO AAHSL
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Submitted by:

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Oregon Health & Science University (OHSU) is a public university that includes a medical school and allied health professions, as well as a suite of robust research graduate programs with ~4.5K students and trainees. Recently, I became the interim co-director of the library, and am now responsible for assisting the library in supporting education and outreach across basic, clinical, and applied research in health and biomedical sciences within the OHSU community and Oregon at large. As my background is in research science and not in library science, the AAHSL Scholarship and Harvard Leadership Institute for Academic Librarians (LIAL) was the perfect opportunity to grow my leadership skills, identify gaps, and to promote collaboration and knowledge transfer with other academic library leaders.

LIAL is a week-long immersion course in academic leadership. I really did not know what to expect – I had not participated in much management or leadership training in the past. LIAL well-exceeded my expectations. I garnered not only an enormous amount of insight as to what it takes to be a good leader, but I also learned a lot about my own strengths and weaknesses and what I will need to specifically develop in order to become the leader that I want to be.

We started the week with an introduction of the course and to academic leadership by Dr. Joseph Zolner, Education Chair of the LIAL. Throughout the week, activities were very nicely balanced between all attendees (106 of us, I believe!), working groups that stayed together and met every day (8-9 people), smaller interactions (2-3 people), and individual assessments. This diversity in group size was effective in promoting personal growth and learning. All attendees brought their own case studies – 2-3 page documents describing some leadership challenge that they were experiencing. The working groups met on Sunday and then every morning for the rest of the week, and focused largely on applying newly learned leadership strategies to these case studies. We also had an oath of confidentiality across the whole course; this was critical for open collaboration on leadership approaches that could be applied to one's own specific circumstances. My own working group became very tightly knit in the end, and we have since started our own list serve and have been communicating our activities and approaches to our respective problems. I believe that my working group will become a lifelong support network for each other and am grateful for their contributions and knowledge, and to LIAL for conceiving of training in this manner.

The training schedule itself was nicely arranged to gradually introduce concepts and apply them. The first set of concepts involved seeing things from different “frames” and was led by Joan Gallos. These frames were **Organizational Structure**, how we organize ourselves, design work processes, coordinate work, and adapt with in a context of collaboration and cooperation. **People/Human Resources**, our collective competencies, skills, knowledge, and abilities, as well as our commitment, self-responsibility and engagement. **Political/Culture**, understanding organizational dynamics, securing engagement and trust, and building relationships. **Vision**, our ability to create meaning, faith, and art in a specific future. We applied these frames to practice case studies as well as our own, and learned where our strengths and weaknesses were, with strategies for improvement.

We then worked through examples and processes for change management – something that all organizations inevitably require. How can one lead an organization in the context of constrained resources? What are the roles and responsibilities of middle management in planning initiatives and change? How does one define successful change and monitor progress?

We discussed how to change academic libraries to match evolving needs, using innovative disruption but with careful regard to library culture. This involved partnering the right strategy with the organizational culture; focusing on a few critical behaviors; honoring the strengths of one’s existing culture; integrating formal and informal interventions; measuring and monitoring cultural evolution; paying attention to organizational performance, critical behaviors, milestones, and underlying beliefs, feelings and mindsets.

On our final day we had the pleasure of hearing Chris Bourg, the MIT libraries director, tell the story of her personal journey. I found Chris’ story inspiring and it led me to create my own plan of action. Some of her themes were: she had no plan, and that that was just fine and unfolded into where she belonged; her fear of messing up, of getting it wrong; that her rank helped get help for those who were outranked and needed help - providing access, and permission to ask questions; a mantra, “No, I don’t know about that, what do I need to know?”; and intentional building of community with diverse faculty who are team players, well known, as partners in her vision.

Overall, I am deeply grateful to all of our excellent instructors and the extremely well-organized institute for equipping me with a much deeper understanding of organizational culture and strategy, of academia, and of libraries. This experience will have enormous impact on my ability to lead our library as an interim co-director, as well as to best position our library within the academic fabric of our institution. This is an area that has been difficult for me in the past with my non-library research-based background, but at which I now feel I can excel. With my newfound leadership skills, I feel I can also better position our library to be a pivotal and innovative resource that enables the biomedicine of the future. My career goals also involve promoting translational science between basic research, clinical care, and patients, and my training at LIAL will also assist me in creating the organizational structures, partnerships, and strategies for achieving these goals.