Changing the Subject
We work at the Earl K. Long Library at the University of New Orleans.

The Library currently employs 11 librarians and 17 staff members. Everyone is multitasking, and librarians are frequently filling multiple roles (thanks to budget cuts and hiring freezes).

And we are no exception...
Before the change, I was the subject librarian for Anthropology, History, and Sociology (since 1994). I serve as the department chair for the Services Department, that was responsible for Circulation, Reserve and ILL and Instruction at the time of the change.

I had previously served as the subject librarian at some point for Geography, Political Science, Urban Studies, Psychology, Fine Arts, and Chemistry, and had worked as the evening librarian for Education and the Sciences. Notice the lack of Business!

Connie Phelps
Before the Change, I was already the Federal Documents librarian, and I also helped manage our virtual reference program and oversaw our social media accounts. I was also the Geography, Political Science, Planning and Urban Studies, Public Administration and Transportation Studies Librarian.

Immediately before the Change, I had agreed to take on responsibility for our microforms and analog media collections. I had also agreed to take over processing of Louisiana State Documents.
In the Fall of 2012, two librarians had announced that they would be retiring at the end of the calendar year. The librarians would frequently discuss that plans should be made to spread the responsibilities around...

But it never happened.

As a result, at a meeting in January 2013, two unsuspecting librarians ended up as part-time Business Librarians with no warning.
Think that you’re the only one with a subject that you have no experience in? Think again! According to Liu & Allen (p.557), you are not alone.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject Area</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Humanities</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>55.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social sciences</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional schools</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sciences and engineering</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>147</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
According to Gonzalez, et al. (p.234), a business background isn’t as important as you’d think.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Importance Rating</th>
<th>Public Librarian</th>
<th>Academic Librarian</th>
<th>Special Librarian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very Important</td>
<td>20.69</td>
<td>25.00</td>
<td>11.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important</td>
<td>44.83</td>
<td>27.27</td>
<td>33.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat Important</td>
<td>27.59</td>
<td>31.82</td>
<td>44.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Important</td>
<td>6.89</td>
<td>15.91</td>
<td>11.11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Connie spent a couple of weeks hoping that it was all a mistake and that someone would see that it was a bad idea.

She rationalized that at least Management and Economics & Finance had some similarities to her familiar subjects, and that she hadn’t gotten Accounting!
Of course, there was resistance at first. Sonnet went through the regular stages of grief...

**Denial**... They can’t be serious!

**Anger**... Are you *trying* to kill me?!

**Bargaining**... Well, maybe this is temporary...maybe I can get away with not spending as much time on this...

**Depression**... I’m doomed to fail!

**Acceptance**... Sigh...well, on the plus side, these are skills that a lot of libraries would appreciate down the road...

**How Sonnet handled that**
In March, we realized it made sense for each of us to manage only one broad subject. Since Connie had been the Social Sciences Librarian for so long, it made more sense for Sonnet to trade Connie’s business subjects - Economics & Finance and Management - for her social science subjects.

Since we were in the midst of serials reviews (for cutting, of course), it made more sense to maintain the status quo and then trade our subjects at the beginning of the new fiscal year—July 1st.
Connie ended up with all of the Social Sciences (Anthropology, Geography, Planning & Urban Studies, Political Science, and Sociology) and History.

And Sonnet ended up with all of the Businesses (Accounting, Economics and Finance, HRT, Management, and Marketing.)

Changing the Subject...Again
How Connie Coped
How Connie Coped
How Sonnet Coped (is still coping)
How Sonnet Coped (is still coping)
It has been 8 months since we switched subjects last time (but not necessarily for “the last time”), and we are doing well.

Connie has probably had an easier time, because her subjects are similar to her longstanding ones, with the exception of Transportation Studies. Connie spends time reading in her new areas.

Sonnet spends some of her time reading various business news sources to improve her skillset. She’s also continuing to take free courses online and read business books.
Read: books about reference sources, textbooks, articles in subject literature, blog posts

Network and communicate: sign up for listservs, “meet” other librarians in that subject

LibGuides: Look at those from other libraries and make one for your subject (if your library has LibGuides).

Take classes: about reference in that subject or classes in that subject

Advice from Connie
Remember that you are a librarian. You have a Master’s degree in FINDING INFORMATION. You can handle this.

Find books and articles on your subject (duh). But also look into free classes online.

Also, check out your library’s reserves. Reading a couple of chapters from an Intro class can go a long way.
Thank you!

Connie Phelps
cphelps@uno.edu

Sonnet Ireland
sebrown3@uno.edu

Resources
