Diving into the RA Pool:
Starting and Managing a Student Library Research Assistant Program

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Starting a Library RA Program

Initial Questions

- Where will approval and funding come from?
- If not from the library, propose benefits to administration:
  - Force-multiplier for library staff
  - Flexibility/responsiveness for faculty research
  - Work supervised/quality controlled by librarians
  - Practical experience for students; résumé; contacts
- Naming opportunity?
  - Lends appeal like a fellowship; honors namesake
  - Endowment/donor possibility
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Limitations & Parameters

- Student work hours
  - ABA limits (formerly 20 hours/week – future?)
  - Institutional limits (e.g., 10 hours/week at W&L)
  - School year vs. summer
  - Beware hour limits for benefits, “full time” designation

- Types of research services provided
  - Projects of a limited duration/scope
  - Limited by type? (e.g., scholarly but not administrative)
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Selection & Hiring

- Advertise in career office database, bulletin boards, email notices
- Interview candidates in person – look for:
  - Previous RA or research experience
  - Good LRW grades/performance (speak with professors as needed)
  - Availability, flexibility, interest, commitment, personality
  - Outline expectations – yours and theirs (amount and type of work)
- 2Ls: may continue in summer/next year; 3Ls: more experience, time
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Advertising & Promoting to Faculty

- Maximize effectiveness with a combination:
  - Email from senior administration (director, dean, assoc. dean)
  - Library newsletter/blog/formal communications office release
  - Lunch or special event with librarians, faculty, and RAs
  - Website/portal for faculty
  - Suggestion/reminder upon receiving a research request
  - Word of mouth; office drop-bys
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Training

- Refreshers/pro-tips on Westlaw, Lexis, BLaw, Hein
- WorldCat, ProQuest, EBSCO, specialized resources as needed
- Timekeeping/HR/payroll

Supervising

- Priorities are the professor’s preferences and satisfaction
- Librarian involvement/review depends accordingly
- Initial meeting or group email with librarian, RA, and professor
- Share feedback from faculty and acknowledge
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Managing Faculty Requests

- Determine how professors should submit requests
  - Requests best funneled to the RA-managing librarian
  - Website portal or direct email to a special inbox/account
  - Libraries with liaison models may differ

- Assigning Projects
  - Best when students are engaged/motivated
  - Expressed interest/experience in area
  - History with faculty member
  - Equity and availability
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Anticipated Issues & Problems

- Students become busy/priorities shift
- Work quality – RAs have differing skills and interests
- RA “poaching” and “capture” by faculty
- Summer availability
- Full/multi-year retention
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