

The Future of University Libraries: 2012 Midwinter Report

Prepared by Michelle Dunaway
for the Committee on the Future of University Libraries
January 2012

Committee: Miranda Henry Bennett, Theresa S. Byrd, Christopher Cox,
Michelle Dunaway, Rafia Mirza, Chair: Marilyn Myers, Laura K. Probst

Abstract: The ACRL/ULS Committee on the Future of University Libraries is charged with exploring and documenting emerging issues, trends, and services in university libraries, and identifying and articulating means through which ULS can support university librarians in the future. In support of this mission, the Committee on the Future of University Libraries initiated a review of recent literature relating to university libraries in order to identify publications and resources that support university librarians in their efforts to plan and prepare for changes in university libraries and higher education broadly. This report outlines the themes that emerged from publications between June 2011 and January 2012, and discusses identified issues and trends centering around three principal elements of university libraries' futures: missions, money, and people. This report aims to provide university librarians with an appreciation and understanding of current and future leadership and management challenges, and to encourage university librarians to engage in forward-looking discussions of how to best contribute to the effectiveness of universities and university libraries.

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It's the Mission

Articles published in 2011 pertaining to university libraries reflect academic librarians' recognition that university libraries' missions must evolve in order to address various changes that are already occurring within universities and across higher education broadly. In general, authors emphasize the importance of recognizing and responding to such changes, and numerous articles describe methods that university libraries can use to meet the challenges associated with demands to improve the effectiveness of university libraries and to increase libraries' responsiveness to the needs of universities and campus communities. Several themes emerge from the collection of articles relevant to university libraries' missions; these themes relate to (a) demonstrating value, (b) rethinking library services, (c) reconfiguring library spaces, and (d) preparing psychologically for the future.

Demonstrating Value

Numerous authors noted that it is increasingly important for university libraries to be able to demonstrate that library resources and services contribute to university students' success. In October 2011, the ACRL Board of Directors approved a revision of the association's Standards for Libraries in Higher Education (SLHE) (ACRL, 2011). These standards differ from previous versions by providing an evidence-based approach to measuring success, impact, and value (ACRL, 2011, Standards Structure). In response to Oakleaf's (2010) report on the value of academic libraries, Wong and Cmor (2011) and Wong and Webb (2011) explored the impact that library instruction and library use (as defined by book checkouts) have upon students' GPAs, and found a positive correlation between both instruction and GPA and book loans and GPA. Price and Fleming-May (2011) note, however, that as library resources and services move increasingly into electronic form, evidence of students' and faculty members' use of library

resources is not always easily measured; therefore, Price and Fleming-May suggest that “the academic library community must refine its understanding of the meaning of ‘library use’, and take a more comprehensive approach to communicating the ways in which library resources and services contribute to university outcomes” (p. 197). Specifically, Price and Fleming-May stress that statistical measures alone are not sufficient to prove that libraries are a valuable asset, nor are statistical measures the only way of identifying value.

The emphasis on value is also evident in Besara and Kinsley's (2011) discussion of their use of assessment data to create high impact programs and services. The authors note here that this approach allows the university library to achieve two related objectives simultaneously: first, by tailoring programs to students' needs as identified through assessment, the library creates programs that align with institutional goals and are likely to have a significant impact; second, the library can leverage the assessment data to create buy-in from other university departments, which are then more willing to collaborate with the library to create a greater impact on student success than the library could have alone (p. 416). Both of these outcomes support the university library's effort to demonstrate the value of the university library; furthermore, the library created added value through collaboration and campus partnerships.

Demonstrating the value of university libraries to university administrators is clearly a central concern. However, as Germano (2011) points out, the value of academic libraries must also be communicated to patrons in order to provide potential customers with specific reasons to choose to use library services. Germano advocates making marketing a critical operation, and urges librarians and library administrators to focus marketing efforts on communicating the library's benefits and value to the users that it serves.

Services

As university libraries' missions evolve, library services evolve as well. Frances, Fletcher, and Harmer (2011) describe how the University of New South Wales Library reconfigured existing services and implemented new eResearch services in order to better support the learning, teaching, and research missions of its parent university, emphasizing the library's ability to respond to the changing needs of the university's faculty and students. The authors note that at research universities, faculty continue to rely heavily on electronic research support services; similarly, Searing and Greenlee (2011) describe how a physical library at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign was successfully replaced by a virtual library and an embedded librarian. Gerolimos and Konsta (2011) explored how well Web 2.0 tools contributed to 200 university libraries' services, and found that such services do not consistently contribute to user engagement. Therefore, the authors suggest that librarians focus on drawing attention to the physical and virtual library by offering exceptional services that focus on the content delivered, rather than the popularity of the medium (Discussion, para. 3).

In addition to discussion of specific library services, several authors note that library services can build and, unfortunately, damage relationships with users. Flegg (2011) suggests that alumni are a group that can be better served by the libraries at their universities, and that by providing services to alumni, university libraries can support the institution's efforts towards building relationships with this group. Moreover, libraries can justify their budgets by

pointing to the ways that library resources and services help cultivate potentially valuable relationships with alumni.

Whereas Flegg discusses the potential for library services to create roads towards symbiotic relationships, a noteworthy blog post at The Social Justice Librarian blog by an individual who posts under the mononym Greyson describes, from a non-library faculty member's viewpoint, how library services can, at times, feel less than accommodating and can potentially threaten relationships between users and libraries. This perspective provides a useful reminder that as library services evolve, the librarians who implement those services must strive to understand the needs and perspectives of library users.

Rethinking the Library's Space

As library services are increasingly transformed into virtual services, the future of the physical library remains unclear. Frances, Fletcher, and Harmer (2011) describe the transformation of six specialized libraries at the University of New South Wales into one unified library building, noting that this restructuring made possible a "fit-for-purpose" library that allowed the specialized departments to work better together to respond to the university's changing scholarly communication landscape. Joint (2011) describes the potential benefits of the convergence of library space and IT department space, and suggests that many of the disadvantages of non-convergence are becoming increasingly apparent. Neal (2011), noting that library space offers a plethora of opportunities for collaboration, suggests that the research libraries of the future will be defined by collaborations and partnerships; for example, operations such as acquisitions, cataloging, electronic resource management, and preservation might be based in regional operations centers rather than in each individual library (p. 67).

Jackson and Hahn (2011) conducted a study that explored whether the library as place supports students' desire to feel connected to their university's mission. The authors found that students prefer libraries that look and feel traditional rather than modern, and that students indicated that they would be inclined to use traditional libraries more often than their current libraries. These findings have clear implications for new construction and remodels. Also, the authors argue that assessing the library as place in terms of whether the library is perceived as supporting the university's mission is a unique way of measuring the value of the university library (p. 430).

Futures Thinking

Numerous authors encourage academic librarians to think beyond the foreseeable future. Building upon ACRL's (2011) *Futures Thinking for Academic Librarians: Higher Education in 2025* report, which discusses numerous possible futures of higher education, Dr. Charles Lowry and M. Sue Baughman of Association of Research Libraries (ARL) emphasize the value of

scenario thinking in the discussion of the future of the university library (Lowry & Baughman, 2011). Scenario planning, the authors argue, can be useful in university libraries' strategic planning processes, and, perhaps more importantly, can be used to facilitate discussion about critical uncertainties (p. 893). Steele (2011) takes the idea of thinking about uncertainty a step further by pondering "the Singularity", the idea that human intelligence will eventually be surpassed by artificial intelligence; specifically, Steele wonders, how might such a scenario impact libraries? For example, if automation and artificial intelligence replaces nearly all of the jobs that humans can do, will libraries still continue to help unemployed human patrons with job searches? What would librarians' role be if artificial intelligence evolved to the point that humans could retrieve resources and metadata just by thinking about them?

Heather Monroe-Blum of McGill University echoes Neal's (2011) emphasis on envisioning research libraries of the future as entrepreneurial institutions (Monroe-Blum, 2011). However, Monroe-Blum defines entrepreneurship in terms of innovation, noting that "innovation begins with a problem, and entrepreneurs, broadly speaking, are people who identify new problems and crystallize the benefits of solving them." (p. 6). Monroe-Blum describes the research universities of the future as entrepreneurial, connected, and balanced (p.5). "If an entrepreneurial approach is one goal, then building connections, partnerships and collaborations, both within and beyond our campuses, is a major means of reaching that goal," Monroe-Blum writes. However, the third characteristic, balance, is essential to ensure that research libraries successfully harmonize their roles in partnerships and as entrepreneurs with their roles as servants of learning, teaching, and knowledge. University libraries will continue to be important places for contemplation and study, and this role should be balanced against the need to increase revenue and build collaborations.

It's the Money

Continuously shrinking budgets are "the new normal" for university libraries. Finding that ARL member libraries experienced three consecutive years of flat or reduced budgets beginning FY 2008–2009, Dr. Charles Lowry of ARL concludes that "We do not expect a return to systematic and regular additions to Association of Research Libraries' (ARL) budgets in order to support ever-increasing prices that are out of proportion to inflation. These are facts that ought to be understood as matters of survival not only by librarians but also in the library market place generally" (Lowry, 2011, p. 757).

Guarria and Wang (2011) articulate several best practices for coping with budget cuts and touch on the importance of communication between library administrators and library staff as a way of calming employees' fears regarding reductions in funds. Cuillier and Stoffle (2011) provide a detailed discussion of a number of ways that university libraries can reduce costs,

including techniques for creative cost-cutting, streamlining operations, and reevaluation and reconfiguration of services. The authors also discuss at length ways that university libraries can increase revenue; of particular significance are the authors' suggestions that go beyond the traditional fundraising activities. For example, the authors suggest exploring commercial advertising on the library's web pages, offering for-credit courses, and exploring various e-commerce initiatives, such as e-library services for specific patron groups, selling books online, and print-on-demand services. Cuillier and Stoffle's suggestions summon Neal's (2011) statement that research libraries of the future are "more entrepreneurial organizations, more concerned with innovation, business planning, competition, and risk, leveraging assets through new partnerships to create new financial resources" (p. 67).

It's the People

Entrepreneurial action can be accomplished through leadership, human resource management, and organizational structure and planning (Carpenter, 2012, p. 27). Carpenter (2012) expands upon Neal's (2001) idea of academic libraries as entrepreneurial institutions by suggesting that "entrepreneurial leadership" allows library directors to create change and remove barriers to innovation by imagining, finding, seizing, and exploiting opportunities (p. 28). Entrepreneurial leadership, Carpenter argues, will enable research libraries to transform to meet the changing information and service needs of users, despite fiscal constraints (p. 12). Carpenter describes the elements of entrepreneurial leadership and suggests several courses of action that university libraries can use to improve finances, create partnerships, and foster innovation (Carpenter, 2012, p. 27–28).

The future of academic librarianship continues to be an important part of the future of university libraries. Blakiston (2011), Mavodza (2011), and Sun, Chen, Tseng, and Tsai (2011) encourage academic librarians focus on continuous learning, re-tooling, and transformation of their existing skills and roles. Thus, evolution emerges as a dominant theme. Blakiston, arguing that librarians require ongoing training and professional development in order to successfully respond to changes in the profession, advocates taking steps to integrate continual learning into academic librarians' position descriptions and annual reviews (Blakiston, 2011). Mavodza (2011) highlights the potential impact that relationships with faculty can have in the process of transforming the professional role of academic librarians, and urges librarians to look for opportunities to integrate library resources and services into courses. Similarly, Sun, Chen, Tseng, and Tsai (2011) encourage librarians to work closely with faculty, and to look for opportunities to teach students and faculty alike about new technologies and tools for teaching and learning.

Changes in academic librarians' roles are an important part of the future of university libraries, and as these roles change, so too will the interpersonal dynamics between academic librarians and library administrators, and between academic librarians and the universities they serve. Strothmann and Ohler (2011) note that librarians from various generations tend to have different motivations, professional expectations, and communication styles (p. 195), suggesting that as university libraries are infused with an increasingly diverse workforce, university libraries may want to consider how they can increase retention of motivated and talented librarians who move the library and the profession forward.

The status of academic librarians at universities will continue to be a topic of discussion. Many authors have discussed the merits of faculty status for academic librarians; others have argued that as academic librarians increase the scope and impact of their roles, they should have access to the established system of awards available to teaching faculty (Donovan & Cunningham, 2011). Vix and Buckman (2011) provide a comparison of salary, status, and contract terms for librarians at institutions in Arkansas, and although this study does not focus specifically on university libraries, the study points towards questions about numerous issues that academic librarians face in their changing environments. For example, it is absolutely clear that academic librarians' roles and responsibilities must evolve in order to meet the changing needs of their universities; however, aside from tenure and promotion incentives, how can university library administrators motivate librarians to engage in the activities that are necessary in order for university libraries to evolve? Although "doing more with less" is accepted as the new normal in terms of library budgets, it isn't yet clear that academic librarians have accepted as normal the idea of "doing more *for* less" in terms of recognition and status.

In addition to motivation, academic librarians must also have sufficient time to devote to activities that move university libraries forward. Vix and Buckman (2011) cite an earlier study which found that academic librarians do not have support for conducting research as other faculty do, and often have difficulty finding time for such activities in a 40-hour work week; the same could certainly be true for the time that is necessary to devote to collaborating with faculty, gathering assessment data in order to provide valuable services, and teaching, all while keeping current with new information technologies. Library managers may find it necessary to reconfigure departmental workflow in order to allow librarians to dedicate time to new activities; for example, librarians may spend less time providing in-person reference services and more time outside of the library, building collaborations with faculty.

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