



Challenges for Academic Library in the 21st Century

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Abstract:

Present article focuses on new paradigms and strategies that should to be considered from the perspectives of I.T. and the critical information needs of academic library users, amidst the stress of reduced budgets and decreased buying power. The paper also discusses the effective solutions to meet the evolving information needs of the campus and the larger academic community.

Keywords: *Academic library, Challenges, 21st century*

1. Introduction

Academic librarians all over the world are facing new challenges. As a result of rapid technological advances, all academic libraries experience escalating expectations and demands from library users. Like executives and managers in the business world, academic librarians are expected to achieve greater results with fewer resources. Many academic libraries have, over the years, consistently added new services as the opportunities and needs arose, to the point of adding a whole electronic services dimension, while discontinuing only the least significant services, if any. In view of the decline in general funding and the steady erosion of purchasing power caused by inflation, libraries have often accomplished these changes by reallocating internal resources, constantly defending existing human and financial resources, and successively adding to the workload of everyone. How can we better respond to these challenges?

2. Responding to the New Context

Among the things we urgently need to do are reshaping the vision of academic librarianship and adopting new concepts and principles to guide library management, especially in the light of what is going on in higher education. Of course, no librarian agrees that academic librarians operate in competitions due to distant learning opportunities created by other colleges, universities, as well as by profit-making institutions, have become the main concerns. At the same time, the international network of information and exchange is increasing connections within and across disciplines. Academic libraries are deeply involved in a global arena. Academic libraries need to, among other tasks, provide all students with the information-seeking skills needed not only to be productive learners but also life-long learners and efficient contributors to intellectual, cultural, and social endeavors no matter where they will eventually work and live.

3. Renewing the Service Orientation

Rapid technological changes and advances require an ever more adaptive and sophisticated workforce. We need to cultivate a new workforce of electronic resources librarians, information managers, system integrators, and the training and education providers. Academic libraries should consider establishing a central training center. The center would be enabled to charge to provide consistent, comprehensive training in electronic technical skills, instructional delivery

and design, managerial supervisory skills, and continuing education for librarians and staff. It could also develop computer-based instruction for student assistants and voucher personnel to provide training in core competencies needed for working in academic libraries. There is also a need to increase collaboration among library units. We need to be prepared to foster new endeavors that cut across traditional functional boundaries. To be successful in the 21st century, academic libraries need to be more proactive and more customer service oriented. The complex challenges of the next ten to twenty years require creative leadership, drawing the best from both library leaders and followers in order to meet the demands of their situations and achieve goals and processes that are beneficial to the academic and global community.

4. Learning Organization

Information technology has changed and will continue to do so both in form and substance in academic libraries. It is time to re-evaluate service models that have functioned for years. We have to creatively identify new solutions to old problems and achieve results. Academic libraries in the 21st century need to be learning organizations. The concept of the learning organization started in the private sector where continuous monitoring, updating, and changes are critical for staying in business. A learning organization is skilled at taking advantage of both formal and informal learning opportunities and changing its behavior and direction in response to what it learns. While this seems straight-forward and easy, it takes effort to focus attention on learn, an organization and relevant to its then to turn that learning into change. And we need to monitor change and effectiveness constantly.

5. Collaboration and Partnerships with Other Units on Campus

Enhanced cooperation between the library and the campus-computing center will provide significant opportunities for improvements in services. Because of the complementary relationships of academic computing, campus telecommunications centers, and libraries, some colleges and universities have questioned the appropriateness of their organizational structures, particularly when a significant investment in information systems, resources, and services is anticipated. It also suggests that we need to work more closely with people in the campus-computing center to bring about improvements in services. Some of us tend to think the role of librarians in the college-wide or university-wide planning and the decision-making processes is minimal. Actually, there are many opportunities in which academic librarians can participate in those processes. Contrary to the commonly held perception that university-wide planning activities are the purview of university administration and academic departments, librarians have the potential to contribute to the university-wide planning process. Librarians have planning, writing, communicating, and organizing skills that can contribute positively to the content and substance of these university-wide processes. Library cooperation with academic departments and units in site licensing for important software and research tools, and design of library instruction to complement classroom learning definitely supports teaching and research more directly.

6. Academic Library Consortia

Digital technology, being more about access than ownership, brings immediate benefit to library patrons. Public service staff brings the crucial perspective that a digital collection is not there for its own sake, but for what it can provide to library users in a more accessible format. The changes being experienced during the present transition to a largely digital environment question the value of investing in models based on a predominantly print environment. They also offer new are forming consortia to provide common access to electronic resources across the Internet, and they are forming these consortia on a nationwide basis. These projects provide a seamless network of information resources accessible to all institutions of higher learning in their group, thus contributing enormously to the teaching, research, and service missions of all its

participants. These models which offer new opportunities for cooperation and collaboration among college and university libraries, I think, should be seriously considered by all academic libraries if they desire to position themselves strategically for the new challenges of the next century.

7. Conclusion

To face the coming challenges of the 21st century, academic librarians will need to acquire more perspectives and new competencies. They need to focus on both the internal and external variables that affect libraries. No one would deny that this is both an exiting and challenging time to be in the field of librarianship. But this is also a time that necessitates innovative ways of thinking about services, collections, information access, and also our roles as academic librarians.

References

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