

2010 top ten trends in academic libraries

A review of the current literature

The ACRL Research, Planning and Review Committee, a component of the Research Coordinating Committee, is responsible for creating and updating a continuous and dynamic environmental scan for the association that encompasses trends in academic librarianship, higher education, and the broader environment. As a part of this effort, the committee develops a list of the top ten trends that are affecting academic libraries now and in the near future. This list was compiled based on an extensive review of current literature (see selected bibliography at the end of this article). The committee also developed an e-mail survey that was sent to 9,812 ACRL members in February 2010. Although the response rate was small (about five percent), it helped to clarify the trends.

The trends are listed in alphabetical order.

- *Academic library collection growth is driven by patron demand and will include new resource types.* Budget reductions, user preferences for electronic access to materials, limited physical space, and the inability to financially sustain comprehensive collections have led many academic libraries to shift from a “just-in-case” to a “just-in-time” philosophy. This change has been facilitated by customized patron-driven acquisitions programs from some major library book distributors, improved print-on-demand options for monographs, patron desire for new resource types, and resource sharing systems, such as RapidILL, offering 24-hour turnaround time for article requests. Still to be determined are the long-term effects of this change on the ability of academic libraries to meet their clientele’s information needs, the stability of

some of the new access methods, and implications for future scholarship. Increasingly, libraries are acquiring local collections and unique materials and, when possible, digitizing them to provide immediate, full-text online access to increase visibility and use. Access to full-text sources, not the discovery of the sources, is a major issue for scholars.¹

These materials may include special collections, university archives, and/or the scholarly output of faculty and students. Libraries also recognize the need to collect, preserve, and provide access to digital datasets.

According to a 2009 OCLC report, datasets are beginning to be made available online for “collecting,” but libraries still need to learn how to support discovery.² The 2010 Horizon Report identified visual data analysis tools as one of the emerging technologies most likely to enter mainstream use on campuses within the next four-to-five years.³ Additional collection development trends noted by survey

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respondents include the effect of Google Books on library collections, the monopolization of content resulting from consolidation in the publishing industry and the demise of a number of smaller publishers and publications, and a growth in shared collection development.

- *Budget challenges will continue and libraries will evolve as a result.* This is a trend no one wants to see continue, but one that is real for many postsecondary institutions. Many libraries faced stagnant or reduced operating and materials budgets for the 2009–10 fiscal year, and the near future will likely bring additional budget pressures.

According to the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, the average return for college and university endowments in the 2009 fiscal year was -18.7 percent, the worst since 1974. In addition, federal stimulus dollars for education are running out, with only 14.2 percent of the stimulus money set aside for states' education budget remaining for the 2011 fiscal year and 20 states with nothing left to spend; the proportion of state budgets spent on public colleges and the proportion of college budgets that come from the state were already declining, with the recession exacerbating a trend whereby state spending on higher education failed to keep up with enrollment growth and inflation; even when the economy improves, state revenues typically lag in their recovery by at least two years.⁴ Survey respondents are concerned about the effect of budget pressures on their ability to attract and retain staff, build collections, provide access to resources and services, and develop and implement innovative services.

- *Changes in higher education will require that librarians possess diverse skill sets.* As technological changes continue to impact not only the way libraries are used but also the nature of collections, librarians need to broaden their portfolio of skills to provide services to users. Academic librarians will need ongoing formal training to continue in the profession. We may see an increasing number of non-MLS professionals in aca-

ademic libraries with the skills needed to work in this changing environment. Graduate LIS programs and professional organizations will be challenged to provide new and relevant professional development while individual librarians and their institutions will struggle to fund such development. The profession may need to consider whether the terminal degree required for librarians should be changed or broadened.

A recent OCLC report calls for academic libraries to “reassess all library job descriptions and qualifications to ensure that training and hiring encompass the skills, education, and experience needed to support new modes of research.”⁵ The impending retirement of many library directors will also create changes. Are associate deans/directors ready for new roles? What about the middle managers who might step into higher-level administrative roles? Leadership training and mentoring, both formal and informal, are critical to a smooth transition. Survey respondents fear that positions will be eliminated as individuals retire and that widespread retirements will result in a leadership gap and loss of institutional memory. They also worry that older librarians are delaying retirement for economic reasons, thereby reducing opportunities for newer librarians.

- *Demands for accountability and assessment will increase.* Increasingly, academic libraries are required to demonstrate the value they provide to their clientele and institutions. This trend is part of a broader accountability movement within higher education, resulting from demands from federal and state governments, accrediting bodies, employers, parents, and taxpayers for institutions to show the value of a college education and results of student learning outcomes.

In the current economic climate, competition for limited funds has intensified with some institutions revisiting funding formulas for libraries. It is increasingly important to demonstrate the library's impact on student learning outcomes, student engagement, student recruitment and retention, successful grant applications, and faculty research

productivity. Several studies are underway that will help academic libraries document the value of their services and collections, using both qualitative and quantitative data. Of particular interest are ACRL's value of academic libraries research project and "Value, Outcomes, and Return on Investment of Academic Libraries (Lib-Value)," a three-year grant-funded study led by researchers at the University of Tennessee, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and the Association of Research Libraries.⁶

• *Digitization of unique library collections will increase and require a larger share of resources.* Digitization projects make hidden and underused special collections available to researchers worldwide. As Clifford Lynch (Coalition for Networked Information) has said, "special collections are a nexus where technology and content are meeting to advance scholarship in extraordinary new ways."⁷

Many digital projects have been funded in part by grants from sources such as the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) and the Mellon Foundation, while others are supported in total by institutional funds. Collaborative digitization opportunities abound: member libraries of the Association of Southeastern Research Libraries are creating a digital shared collection of 5,000 items from their rare and special collections that will help explain the intellectual underpinnings of the American Civil War. The University of California Digital Library used IMLS funds for the California Local History Digital Resources Project, to which more than 65 institutions contributed. Because of the staffing, equipment, and storage costs associated with digital projects, libraries often must reallocate fiscal resources to support these projects. Like other library collections and services, digitization efforts may be affected by stagnant or reduced budgets.

• *Explosive growth of mobile devices and applications will drive new services.* Smart phones, e-book readers, iPads, and other handheld devices will drive user demands and expectations. The 2009 ECAR study of undergraduate students and information

technology found that 51.2 percent of respondents owned an Internet-capable handheld device and another 11.8 percent planned to purchase one within the next 12 months.⁸ Students indicated that they most wanted to use their institution's e-mail service, administrative services, and course management system from their handheld devices. While only 14.8 percent of respondents indicated that they wanted to use library services, this percentage is likely to grow quickly, as vendors offer mobile interfaces to electronic resources, mobile applications for OPACs increase, and more libraries offer reference services via text messaging and mobile interfaces to their own digital collections.

Librarians will need to think creatively about developing services for users of mobile devices and take into account both user needs and preferences and the relationship of services to the academic program of their institution.⁹ Regardless of the services a library chooses to offer, there will be staffing, training, budgeting, marketing, and instruction implications.

• *Increased collaboration will expand the role of the library within the institution and beyond.* Collaboration efforts will continue to diversify: collaborating with faculty to integrate library resources into the curriculum and to seek out information literacy instruction, and as an embedded librarian; working with scholars to provide access to their data sets, project notes, papers, etc. in virtual research environments and digital repositories; collaborating with information technology experts to develop online tutorials and user-friendly interfaces to local digital collections; collaborating with student support services to provide integrated services to students; and collaborating with librarians at other institutions to improve open source software, share resources, purchase materials, and preserve collections.

The HathiTrust shared digital repository and 2CUL are two examples of recent, large-scale collaborations.¹⁰ Partnership in HathiTrust is open to research institutions worldwide who share its vision of collecting,

organizing, preserving, communicating, and sharing the record of human knowledge. The Cornell and Columbia University Libraries have formed an innovative partnership called 2CUL that will result in a pooling of resources and broad integration on a number of fronts, such as cataloging, e-resource management, collaborative collection development, and digital preservation. Collaboration epitomizes the service orientation of librarianship and will continue to help maximize the efficient use of resources. Librarians are making use of Google Docs, Doodle, wikis, and other tools that facilitate collaboration regardless of physical proximity.

- *Libraries will continue to lead efforts to develop scholarly communication and intellectual property services.* Academic libraries have recognized the importance of scholarly communication and intellectual property issues for many years. Recent developments illustrate a trend toward proactive efforts to educate faculty and students about authors' rights and open access publishing options and to recruit content for institutional repositories (IRs). Digital repository project managers report that scholars "lacked an understanding of copyright and the issues of copyright compliance"¹¹ and that many of them "did not understand or could not remember or retrieve the agreements that were signed with publishers for the publication and dissemination of their work".¹² Interest in these issues is illustrated by the growth in SPARC membership: more than 200 North American research and academic libraries belong to SPARC; about the same number participated in the Open Access Week in 2009.¹³

Recruiting content for IRs provides a natural entrée for conversations about scholarly communication issues. This also illustrates the need for libraries to provide guidance and user education on copyright law, and, in particular, the need to obtain permission to use copyrighted material in one's work if the use is not covered by the fair use exception. Libraries are addressing the need to provide value-added scholarly

communication services in a variety of ways. Some libraries have created scholarly communication librarian or copyright officer positions. Others have taken a more distributed approach. The University of Minnesota, for example, has included scholarly communication responsibilities in the position descriptions of all of its liaison librarians.

Other trends, including growing use of open source products, creation of more locally created digital collections, the increasing complexity of licensing issues, and litigation involving the use of materials in course e-reserves and course management systems, reinforce the need for academic libraries to provide value-added intellectual property services.

- *Technology will continue to change services and required skills.* Cloud computing, augmented and virtual reality, discovery tools, open content, open source software, and new social networking tools are some of the most important technological changes affecting academic libraries. As with mobile applications, these developments will affect nearly all library operations. Two exciting developments are OCLC's new cooperative Web-scale library management services and discovery tools, which provide a single interface to multiple resources using a centralized consolidated index that promises faster and better search results than federated searching.

While social networking tools can help libraries go where their users are, many librarians see challenges in determining which tools to use, how many resources to devote, and how to assess effectiveness. Librarians also will be monitoring the success of open source integrated library systems software and the RDA: Resource Description and Access standard.

- *The definition of the library will change as physical space is repurposed and virtual space expands.* Most academic libraries provide access to a more resources than ever before. However, the number of physical items in many libraries is declining, as libraries withdraw journal runs to which

they have permanent online archival access and/or move lesser-used materials to off-site or shared storage facilities, thus freeing up areas that are repurposed to provide space for individual student and collaborative work. Libraries are expanding their virtual space, reducing space within the library facility for collections, and re-purposing it for student use. The concept of "Library as Place" is still important to students, researchers, and many faculty members. Some libraries have added writing, tutoring, and media centers to provide multiple academic support services in one convenient location.

Finding a balance that serves all clientele continues to be a challenge. These changes are coming at the same time that in-person reference desk statistics are declining at many academic libraries, while online reference statistics are increasing. In some instances, this is tied to a growth in distance or online courses offered by the institution; in others, it may simply be due to user preference and convenience: "It is clear that regardless of age or experience, academic discipline, or context of the information need, speed and convenience are important to users and are factors when selecting discovery tools and resources."¹⁴

Librarians are also expanding the library's virtual presence through involvement in course management systems and online social networking sites, the creation of online tutorials and other instruction aids, and more vibrant and interactive Web sites. How to convey the value of the complementary nature of the physical and online services to support the teaching and instruction mission of the university to campus administrators presents an ongoing challenge.

There were a number of other trends that the committee considered but that did not yet rise to this level. Sustainability, in particular, was an issue that the committee sees as a growing trend that will probably be included in this list in coming years.

The committee welcomes your comments and feedback on the trends. A virtual session will be held on July 7 as a

part of the ALA Annual Virtual Conference to allow for a more in-depth discussion of this report.

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