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USER-FOCUSED STRATEGIC SERVICES FOR TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

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Development of the Strategic Plan

The New Mexico State University Library serves New Mexico State University, a doctoral granting, land grant, minority-serving Research University located in southern New Mexico. The New Mexico State University Library developed rapidly in the early 1990's. A second facility was constructed, increasing the total size of library facilities to 25,000 square meters. The budget grew at annual rates exceeding 10 percent. The collection reached one million volumes. The growth of library services was significant in many areas. During this time, a process oriented long-range plan, guided the University Library development.

By the mid 1990's, significant changes in the university, technological, political and scholarly information environments suggested an impending period of rapid change, yet stable or declining resources. The University Library leadership wanted to build on the library's growing strength within the university community by creating a strategic plan that would: respond dynamically to the declining fiscal environment; create an appropriate research library role; take advantage of electronic opportunities; and further strengthen relations with users through collaboration and partnerships. We believed that all of these initiatives required a strategic approach, incorporating lower level decision-making, staff flexibility, and responsiveness to quickly changing user needs (Bundy, 1997; Hayes, 1993).

Fig. 1. Applied Strategic Planning Model. From Goodstein, et.al., 1993

Work on the new plan began in late 1995. Tommy Thomas, who is head of organizational development for the State of New Mexico, was hired as a consultant. A planning committee, composed of five library personnel and three university representatives, was named to guide the planning process. The Dean of the Library prepared and distributed a vision statement outlining his thoughts on probable futures. A two-day conference, titled "Choosing Our Future", attracted 79 participants, approximately half from the library and half from the university and the community. At this conference key points in the planning process were identified and initial drafts of missions, goals, and objectives, were discussed and transcribed. The process adopted is drawn from Applied Strategic Planning (Figure 1).

The Environmental Scanning Committee gathered information about trends that could affect the strategic future of the library. Their information was used throughout the process and forms the basis for ongoing market research to guide annual updates in the strategic plan. The Value Scan and Mission Formulation Committee identified the values of the library and articulated the purpose and mission of the library. The Strategic Business Modeling Committee used information from the planning conference and the Mission Formulation Committee to create the strategic goals that provide focus for the library's future direction and resources. This committee identified critical success indicators that are used to measure progress towards goal attainment. And the committee also identified six strategic thrusts that are used to guide and evaluate annual departmental action plans. The Performance Audit and Gap Analysis Committee reviewed the mission and vision and articulated potential objectives and activities for each goal. This committee also conducted a strength/weakness/opportunity/threat (SWOT) analysis to assure that the plan capitalized on the library strengths and opportunities and recognized its weaknesses and threats. This committee also conducted a gap analysis intended to identify the gaps between the library's current performance and its desired future. The content of the strategic goals is based on the Performance Audit and Gap Analysis. Finally, the Contingency Planning Committee reviewed the entire plan and recommended contingencies to assure the success of the plan. Among other recommendations, they suggested the creation of a standing committee to accomplish the strategic goals identified in the plan.

This level of detail and participation was consciously undertaken to increase the acceptance of the new plan. Everyone on the library staff who wished to participate in the planning process did so. All interested outside parties, including the faculty library committee, were encouraged to contribute to the planning process. At the end of the process there was good general understanding of the strategic plan, its goals and rationale. There was also an increased commitment towards achieving the goals through departmental action plans and annual personal objectives.

Strategic Plan Summary
The full strategic plan is available on the web at http://lib.nmsu.edu/aboutlib/straplan.html.

The following is a summary.

Vision
The people of New Mexico State University Library will assure a creative and supportive environment for intellectual inquiry by providing user-focused services to obtain and evaluate scholarly information and knowledge – in many formats and from multiple sources – necessary for the NMSU community to create new knowledge, to increase understanding, and to develop wisdom.

Mission

- Selecting, acquiring, and organizing resources
- Providing human and technologically mediated access
- Teaching users to locate, obtain, and evaluate information

The Library provides leadership to New Mexico State University in:

- The distribution of scholarly information
- Collaborative information projects
- Electronic access and delivery of information

Values

New Mexico State University Library values the University's mission and the library's role in producing educated graduates and citizens. We recognize the importance of our users and work to provide them with dependable, timely, comprehensive, quality information. We recognize our role in adding value to information by selecting, organizing, reformulating, synthesizing, and evaluating. We value the diversity of our users, the diversity of information in all its forms, and the diverse ways in which information is used. We value access to information and strive to eliminate or reduce barriers created by physical location, cost, censorship, difficulty of use and user status. We value the skills, talents, potential, and individuality of our library employees and encourage their unique contributions through training, opportunity, and recognition. We rely on leadership, collaboration, and innovative solutions-both human and technologically to achieve our goals and maintain our values.

Goals

7. Continue to develop a cooperative, user-centered culture.
8. Acquire information/knowledge resources to fulfill the university's land-grant mission.
9. Continue to develop user-focused products, services, processes, and systems.
10. Develop instructional initiatives and programs to support the university mission, extending from basic information literacy competencies to life-long learning skills.
11. Provide the means and infrastructure for the management and distribution of scholarly information.

Organization

The revised NMSU Library organizational chart is shown in figure 2. There are seven functional departments, each headed by a department head. There are four interdepartmental committees, including Policy, Management, Research and Service Support, Instructional Support, and Bibliographic and Collection Services Support that focus on library-wide functional issues. The Associate Dean is responsible for library operations. The Dean is responsible for policy, funding, and university relations. The Faculty Senate Library Committee advises him on matters of faculty interest. This library organization was arrived at after discussions of how best to implement the strategic plan and to reflect its mission and goals (Eustis, 1996).

Fig. 2. NMSU Library Organization

Selector-Liaisons
To implement user services emerging from the strategic plan, the Library has created the new role of selector-liaison. Individual librarians (who hold faculty rank at New Mexico State University) are responsible for coordinating all services with each of our 45 academic departments. It is common for librarians working in public services units to be selector-liaisons for two to four academic departments. Selected librarians with graduate degrees in subject disciplines and work in other library units can also be selector-liaisons for academic departments in their area of subject expertise. Responsibilities include: identifying emerging service needs; working with the departments on their planning, research, and funding efforts; selection and retention of library materials; providing research reference; and coordinating library instruction for courses offered by the department. Selector-Liaisons sit in on all the committees of the library and form the vanguard that values their relation efforts. We look to selector-liaisons to be aware of developments in technology and scholarly communication and to work to apply them with faculty and students in their assigned departments.

Two selector-liaison activities may be reasonably unique in the academic library environment, collaborative research and funding, and joint efforts to incorporate library instruction in the curriculum and specific courses. In the two years since the strategic plan has been implemented, selector-liaisons, working with the Grants and University Relations Officer and faculty in the departments, have prepared over five million dollars in joint research and demonstration proposals. Some of these proposals are now being funded, including a $450,000.00 grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. We believe that there are many benefits to this collaborative proposal preparation, in addition to the money. First, by participating in proposal development, the library is involved from the beginning in new efforts for research, service, and instruction. By working with the departments closely and early, we are able to incorporate library services more quickly into the educational and research programs of the university. Second, collaboration has been effective in improving one on one relations with academic departments as teaching faculty become more aware of the particular strengths of the library and what the library can bring to academic department goals and initiatives.

Selector-liaisons are also active in the curriculum and course development. The Instructional Technology Assisted Learning program (ITAL) is a collaborative program intended to increase the use of information and instructional technologies in the classroom. Librarians provide about 25 percent of the curriculum support and regularly receive the highest evaluations in this program for NMSU faculty. From this venue and others frequently come requests on how to integrate electronic information more completely into new and revised curriculums. The selective liaisons have been very successful in participating in the development of new curricula and courses. In doing so, they are able to insert library and information resources in ways that lend themselves more fully to the accomplishment of library and university goals.

User-Focused Service Initiatives
The largest single effort to achieve our strategic plan has been devoted to Goal One -- to continue to develop a cooperative user-centered culture. The Library has embarked on an organization development program including job enrichment, training, and

professional personnel support. All of these efforts are intended to empower employees to improve user services through direct initiative (Forsman, 1990).

We have also become more active in market research. One simple device that we are using with considerable success is a no agenda departmental meeting. In this case, the selector-liaison, one or more library department heads, and the deans meet with an academic department to discuss plans, needs, and concerns. Thus far, we have been meeting with four to six departments a year. We would like to extend that to ten so that we meet with each academic department once every four years. By having these informal meetings, we have been able to begin collaborative work on new curricula and research very early on. It also helps to put faces with names and gives a chance to praise those who have provided significant past service (Millson-Martula, 1995).

On a more empirical basis, we are collecting marketing information through telephone surveys, benchmarking, and best practices. By coordinating needs and best practices, we have been able to cut two days or about 15 percent on the delivery time for interlibrary loan. Perhaps more importantly, we have come to the decision to buy rather than to borrow materials in order to expedite delivery time. Both of these have been well received by our users who requested more than 24,000 items in the last year, ranking us number one among our peer institutions for interlibrary loan and document delivery.

To acquire knowledge and information resources to fulfill the university's land-grant mission, Strategic Plan Goal Two, the library has been aggressively moving to electronic resources. In the last two years, we have added 3,922 electronic periodical titles. These titles have been identified by our liaison-selectors and acquired, often in collaboration with other regional universities and research institutions, through joint contracts with our vendors. In 1998, use of electronic resources, for the first time, exceeded use of printed periodical resources in the library. By having a firm grasp of the information needs of our faculty and students, the selector-liaisons have done an outstanding job in selecting and promoting the appropriate material (Hirshon, 1995; Townley, 1999).

By focusing on our users, we have also come to some decisions regarding the nature of the collection, in all formats at New Mexico State University. While NMSU itself is a major American research university with an emphasis on technology and agriculture, the University Library has never enjoyed an equivalent level of support. Given the incremental nature of change in academia, we can not expect to be a strong competitor for national research collections for some time to come. Instead, after considerable discussion and concentration, the Library has decided to focus on becoming a nationally recognized regional collection. We will acquire research level scholarly information and knowledge on topics of regional interest. By doing so, we plan to achieve national recognition in a limited area.

Frankly, it has been intellectually stimulating to attempt to define the nature of a regional collection. Certainly there is history and culture. But what do we do in the areas of science, technology and agriculture? We have decided to focus on important topics like water resources, astronomy, electrical and computer engineering, and other topics of particular interest in the American southwest and northern Mexico. We even seek to become the world's premiere repository of information on chili pepper

(capsicum). Once again, this role feeds back into the liaison-selector role, particularly in funding. We are actively working with AGNIC, the U.S. National Agricultural Library electronic library program in two areas, capsicum and sustainable agriculture. We are making proposals to government agencies and private foundations to support our collections in this area and to organize them for national and international access.

The University Library has developed many new user-focused products, services, processes, and systems, Strategic Plan Goal Three. There is only space to mention a few in this paper. Last year, the Electronic Resources Librarian worked with the selector liaisons to revise library home pages. She provided advanced instruction in home page design and developed a number of templates for content. The liaison selectors brought an improved understanding of departmental goals, objectives and needs which was reflected in the content of the home pages. The result has been an 84 percent increase in use of library web pages.

In addition, the Access Services Department has developed interlibrary loan/document delivery request forms and makes them available on the library's home page and the library catalog. Faculty and graduate student users can fill out requests from their office or lab and the material is delivered to them regardless of its location. This service is very popular and responds to user needs by delivering information directly to the user so that we save their time for teaching and research. As a result of this initiative, document delivery increased by 227 percent in the past year.

Finally, we are providing an increased range of reference services in the library. Library technicians and other staff have been trained and are now providing a significant amount of support at the reference desk. This frees the selector-liaisons to spend more time with their departments, especially on research reference inquiries. An increasing number of these inquiries are received electronically at all hours of the day and night. They are being delivered to the appropriate expert for a response. Once again, the faculty and graduate students very much appreciate this convenience that takes advantage of asynchronous communication.

To develop instructional initiatives and programs that support the university mission, Goal Four, the University Library has undertaken three significant initiatives. First, we are providing the Instructional Technology and Assisted Learning (ITAL) program along with the Computer Center and instructional technology unit. This is a 40-hour experience for faculty members who wish to obtain a grasp of instructional and information technologies and their potential for improving instruction throughout the university. The library provides about 25 percent of the instruction focusing on the acquisition and use of scholarly information in instruction. We regularly receive the highest evaluation of any component of the course. More important, we have now participated in the design or redesign of numerous courses in ways that enhance the use of scholarly information and library services.

In 1998, we began developing web-based instruction for students in freshman English courses. In the past, librarians undertook a coordinated assignment with English instructors in each class. We have now put this instructional unit on the web. We train the freshmen English instructors in its use and we monitor their outcomes. This relieves a great deal of time for the library faculty to involve themselves in higher-level instruction and the other activities of being selector liaisons.

We also teach a three-credit course on information literacy. This course focuses on providing lifelong learning skills to undergraduates. We attempt to teach them how to acquire and use scholarly information in their particular discipline. The course is part of the University's general education curriculum and is very popular. The three sections offered each semester are always full.

In providing the means and infrastructure for the management and distribution of scholarly information, Goal Five, the library has made significant advances in several areas. We have provided significant leadership in developing our knowledge infrastructure. In 1997, the library provided a citation-based impact analysis using Institute for Scientific Information (ISI) data for all departments. Several departments in the College of Engineering met with the library to discuss how to increase the impact of their publications. The result of this collaboration has been an improvement in the publications of the College of Engineering and their placement in scholarly journals. This in turn has resulted in New Mexico State University being named number two in the 1999 ISI impact study regarding their publications. Only Indiana University exceeds the impact of New Mexico State University in the quality of its engineering publications – at least for 1999.

We have also been active in promoting the role of libraries in scholarly communication. Last year, we co-sponsored a highly successful symposium on Computer Law attended by more than 100 faculty and professional staff. We regularly work with the instructional technology unit to deliver outside training on the use of information and technology.

And perhaps, most importantly, we have become active collaborators in the development of proposals for research and service. We almost always work with faculty in academic departments to create joint projects and proposals. In doing so, we serve ourselves as we serve others.

Challenges

No strategic plan is perfect. And we have our share of challenges. Many of these derive from our successes. Library efforts to improve our relationships with academic departments may have weakened our common programs in part. For example, I am convinced that our undergraduate collection does not receive adequate attention. As a result, a librarian has been appointed to coordinate the core collection, which consists of materials that are heavily used for undergraduate instruction.

We also had a fling with team based management following the lead of our nearby sister institution, the University of Arizona. After two years, we have concluded that while teamwork and collaboration are critical to the success of our strategic plan, team based management is not. The department that tried to do this most extensively has returned to a traditional organizational structure (Bender, 1997).

The most vexing problem remains on how to encourage flexibility, quick responsiveness and creative dissent while at the same time maintaining a common strategic direction. The solution to this continues to evade us, in part, despite the dedication of significant resources towards its resolution. When tempers get short and egos are on the line, we encourage everyone to focus on the strategic thrusts that we adopted in the Library Strategic Plan:

- User-focus drives decisions.
- Cooperative philosophy creates a responsive and flexible organization.
- Appropriate technology serves the user.
- Collaboration fuels development.
- Risk-taking and leadership at all levels inspire innovation.
- Teaching and outreach cultivate information/knowledge consumers.

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