We Can Imagine the Future, But Are We Equipped to Create It?

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This special issue of *portal: Libraries and the Academy* grew out of a discussion about the need for speculative, creative space within the library and information science (LIS) literature.[1] While venues for exposing important research and illuminating case studies are plentiful, the LIS literature lacks an obvious platform on which to speculate—to *imagine the future*. This issue is an attempt to create such a space.

To accomplish this task, several leaders from different sectors of the academic library ecosystem were asked to imagine the future at some critical inflection point. Based on their knowledge of current trends and emerging realities, the authors were asked to project a future for an aspect of this ecosystem they find particularly important or impactful. To challenge their thinking, they were prompted with several future-oriented questions, which included:

How will we define the academic library in the future?

What will a globally networked library look like?

How will we use information differently?

Where will the library begin and end relative to academic computing and other campus and network services that will be available to faculty and students?

How will higher education evolve and how will the academic library align with that change?

How will scholarship and its products evolve?

How will we define collections?

Will current large-scale collaborative efforts create the efficiencies and infrastructures they promise?

This special issue is the product of the authors' collective response to this challenge, in which they explore the possibilities of what academic libraries might become or cease to be. These leaders from different sectors of academia, publishing, and technology share their thoughts about the future with the intention of producing insights that ignite our imaginations—to leapfrog the intellectual adjacencies of next week or next month and

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land on a strategic horizon a little farther afield. By anticipating future directions, they attempt to help us build effective roadmaps to the future we are collectively inventing and possibly avoid paths that could lead to negative consequences. Responding to Johanna Drucker's futuristic vision of the university as "a fully integrated and distributed platform" based in the library, Kelly Miller argues that academic libraries and librarians must become *future-present,* fostering a new culture of learning where technology is iteratively spawning and responding to change. Within Miller's vision, student learning is the focus of library activity, and the fundamental issues librarians should engage are how to cultivate the imagination of students and better enable their learning and development.

Like Miller, Frank Menchaca argues for a future focus on student learning support, but from the perspective of measuring an academic library's value to its institutional mission. He discusses economic and societal changes that have "problematized the question of an academic library's value and how it can be measured" and argues that measuring value in terms of support for student learning could lead to increased institutional support and relevance; and for publishers, the potential for stable sales.

Steven Bell tackles the future of the library user experience, envisioning "a future where user experience design moves from the periphery to the core of academic library operations." Bell describes a future shaped by ever-advancing technology and rapidly evolving user expectations, but imagines a futuristic library user experience based on core academic library service values.

As the pressure increases for higher education institutions to innovate, Malcolm Brown argues that campus information technology organizations should actively engage the teaching and learning missions of their parent institutions and serve as pivotal partners and facilitators of the ongoing change process. To do so, he argues, will necessitate "a rethinking of the roles of the chief information officer (CIO) and the academic technologist, as well as a new vision for the campus academic technology infrastructure."

Turning to the future of collections, Lorcan Dempsey, Constance Malpas, and Brian Lavoie provide a sweeping view of evolving collecting practices in a network environment. They suggest future directions based on an analysis of the changing dynamics of print collections, academic libraries' increasing engagement with the processes and products of research and learning, and emerging trends in scholarly communications. The authors argue that "the network is reconfiguring not only individual academic libraries but also the whole library system" as reduced transaction costs drive the "unbundling" of many functions traditionally supported at the local level, consolidating these activities in network platforms or with other external service providers.

Michael Levine-Clark predicts a radical shift in how most academic libraries will define their collection development role. He sees decided shifts in focus toward special collections and the provision of access to a broad body of content, all tied to local teaching and research interests. In his view, an academic library's collection will be seen as "everything that the library can identify that fits local curricular and research needs, and the means of access will be driven by cost."

Myrna Morales, Em Claire Knowles, and Chris Bourg embrace a vision of the future where academic librarians actively address the range of diversity issues within the profession while pursuing a social justice agenda within their organizations and the

communities they serve. The authors point out that many long-standing professional practices "reinforce existing structures of inequity and privilege" and urge academic librarians to support diversity and social justice efforts within the profession and beyond.

Finally, Brian Mathews offers some "guidance for thinking about the future." He argues that understanding how to effectively conceptualize and assess possible future scenarios is quickly becoming a critical skill for library leaders. To increase the impact academic libraries have on higher education in the future, Mathews suggests adding the tools and approaches utilized by futurists, or "practitioners of strategic foresight," to the librarian's professional toolkit.

Taking wildly divergent approaches to the task, these authors show how academic libraries and librarians can effectively imagine the future and how this type of speculation can be important for triggering individual and collective thinking. A question left open by the authors is whether we, as individuals and organizations, are adequately prepared to create the futures we might imagine. Are we equipped to bridge the gap between the "sci fi" nature of speculation and the effective creation of these futures (or others!) from within our current individual and institutional realities?

Creating positive, dynamic futures aligned with ever-evolving teaching and research missions will require expanded capacities for self-reflection, flexibility, and resilience within academic library organizations. Difficult, but necessary, decisions about how to reposition the library within the higher education enterprise must be made, obliging academic libraries to rethink collections and services programs and the human, facilities, and technology resources deployed to support them. It seems obvious to state, but creating change is hard, often painful work. This work is difficult at the organizational level but often more so when viewed at a human scale. Successful change management is often less about *what* needs to be done than *how* the work of sustaining and growing a vibrant, effective library organization is accomplished.

Often conversations about academic libraries' collective ability to evolve or increase impact on the educational or research enterprise devolve into debates about "skill sets" and whether or how a library should "re-skill" existing staff or recruit staff with different professional preparation to support new service models.[2] But while what an individual staff member, or an organization for that matter, knows is critical to success, the ability to effectively create the futures we imagine will be less about specific operational or technical skill sets (data, coding, constructivist pedagogy) and more about the *metacognitive* capacities that enable the individual and collective growth that fuel organizational change.

Metacognitive skill refers to people's awareness or knowledge of their cognitive processes, as well as their ability to control and manipulate cognitive operations.[3] Research in both developmental and cognitive psychology has established that individuals with more highly developed metacognitive capacities—those who effectively monitor and control their thinking and emotional states—outperform others with less developed metacognitive abilities in solving complex problems.[4] These are the skills leaders must utilize and develop across their organizations to successfully create dynamic futures for academic libraries, fully integrated with evolving research, teaching, and learning practices. Change is often contentious, involving deep-seated issues of personal and professional identity. This is certainly true in academic libraries. While there is no end

to the ideas about what should be done operationally to create a vital future, there is little discussion about how to develop a workforce equipped with the metacognitive tools needed to work through difficult change processes in constructive, thoughtful, and effective ways.[5]

A focus on metacognitive skills provides a framework for bringing intentionality into workplace interactions. By developing the self-management capacities of emotional intelligence (self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation) individuals can become more aware of their own behavioral and emotional states and how they affect others in both positive and negative ways.[6] People can learn to better control disruptive behaviors, think before acting, and increase their intrinsic motivation for work, which can lead to greater persistence in difficult situations. By developing a more attuned social capacity (empathy and social skill), individuals can better read and react to others' emotional states and more effectively build relationships and broaden their personal and professional networks.[7]

High-functioning metacognitive skills are rooted in what psychologist Carol Dweck describes as a *growth mindset,* based on the belief that a person's basic qualities can be cultivated through effort and experience.[8] An individual with a growth mindset sees setbacks, and even failures, as opportunities to learn and improve.[9] Because they are motivated to succeed through effort and perseverance, growth-minded individuals take charge of the "processes that bring success"[10] and engage in the hard work that makes individual and, by extension, organizational change possible.

Creating the future, like any change, will be hard work, rife with adversity. To successfully bridge the gap from imagining a dynamic future to creating one, we must invest in developing both the operational (*the what to do*) and metacognitive (*the how to do it*) capacities of the people who make up academic library organizations. Effective, growth-oriented, resilient people beget effective, growth-oriented, resilient organizations, the type of organization that can create the futures it imagines.

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Notes

1. While editing another journal focused on library administration and leadership issues, I approached Brian Mathews about collaborating on a theme issue, following the success of his publications on bringing "start-up" and entrepreneurial thinking into academic library management. He suggested inviting thought leaders from different sectors of the academic library ecosystem to speculate on what they think that world might look like in the future. Thus, a special issue was born.
2. For a helpful introduction to the "re-skilling" discussion, see Mary Auckland, *Re-skilling for Research* (London: Research Libraries UK, 2012), accessed on May 4, 2014, http://www.rluk.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/RLUK-Re-skilling.pdf.
3. Norbert Jaušovec, "Metacognition," in *Encyclopedia of Creativity*, ed. Mark A. Runco and Steven R. Pritzker (San Diego: Academic Press, 2011), 107, accessed May 4, 2014, http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/B9780123750389001461.
4. See *Meta-Cognition: A Recent Review of Research, Theory and Perspectives*, ed. Michael F. Shaughnessy, Marcel V. J. Veenman, and Cynthia Kleyn-Kennedy (New York: Nova

Science Publishers, 2008) and *Applied Metacognition*, ed. by Timothy J. Perfect and Bennett L. Schwartz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) for helpful overviews of the research on metacognition.

5. The University of Minnesota Libraries is one academic library out front in attempting to develop metacognitive capacities in its workforce. See Jerilyn Veldof, "Leadership Development in Action: Changing Lives, Changing Libraries" (presented at the 11th Columbia Library Symposium, New York, March 21, 2014), accessed May 10, 2014, https://symposium.cul.columbia.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Veldof-Columbia-Presentation-March-2014.pptx.
6. Daniel Goleman, "What Makes a Leader?" *Harvard Business Review* 76, 6 (1998): 95–100.
7. Goleman, "What Makes a Leader?" 100–102.
8. Carol S. Dweck, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* (New York: Ballantine, 2006), 6–7.
9. Dweck, *Mindset*, 32–35.
10. Dweck, *Mindset*, 101–3.