

Carpe Diem:
Transforming Services in Academic Libraries

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Introduction

I want to turn our focus to the larger issues confronting us today. Amid a global economic crisis and spurred, in my country, by a great influx of funding intended to stimulate the economy quickly, we librarians also are confronted by other factors that could have transformative powers – if we choose to seize the opportunity. This is not a time to hunker down and gird ourselves against the onslaught of problems and challenges we see hurtling towards us. Rather, it is the time for us to run towards those challenges, grab them, and use this time to transform – not just change but transform – our libraries. In other words, it is time for us to seize opportunity. *Carpe diem!*

One of the burning questions of the day is the future of academic libraries: will, in fact, there be a future for them? I say ‘yes,’ a resounding ‘yes,’ but only if we use today’s opportunities to build for tomorrow. As I talk about those opportunities, I am going to focus on library services, simply because there is not enough time to cover everything libraries do. And although my examples will be drawn from the U.S. academic environment, and specifically from my experience at Illinois, I think it is fair to say that all libraries are focusing on services as a strategic investment for the future.

The Service Turn and the Service Imperative

Commitment to service is nothing new for librarians. Indeed, if there is one thing that I believe ties librarians around the world together, it is the commitment to service – a commitment Ranganathan articulated decades ago in his “Five Laws of Library Science.” Ranganathan

suggests that the defining characteristic of the library is its dedication to service. "Books are for use"; not books are for warehousing. "Save the time of the reader;" not save the time of the librarian. "A library is a growing organism;" not the library is a monument to the past. "Books" – or "collections" or "content"– have value not simply in their existence, but in their use. So, what is different today?

When we in the academy speak of a "turn," we refer not to a physical motion, but to a change in mind-set. The "post-modern turn" is a phrase used to encompass new modes of thought in a variety of disciplines. The "digital turn" is a phrase used to encompass not only changes in publishing, but also changes in research methods. Both phrases have been applied to the library environment. The phrase a "service turn" suggests both that we see the future of libraries as being tightly coupled to the evolution of library services, and that we are in the midst of a fundamental shift in the way we approach the design, delivery, and assessment of library services.

Perhaps the simplest way of thinking about this is to suggest that librarians are shifting from making strategic decisions from the perspective of a "collections imperative" toward making them from the perspective of a "service imperative." Making the "service turn" means that you are committed to one simple belief: the library of the 21st century will be distinguished not by the content of its collections, but by the scope and quality of its services. I called it "simple," but committing to the service turn, and making strategic investments based on that belief, challenges much of how we have operated academic libraries over the past 50 years.

There is no aspect of library operations left untouched by the service turn. As recently as ten years ago we carefully delineated among public services, technical services, and collections. Today, the boundaries have blurred, and I expect only more blurring in the future, owing to the shift in emphasis from collecting tangible content to offering a wide array of services. Just as we no longer offer access to collections only within the walls of physical spaces, so we no longer offer services only within those physical spaces either. We now have the opportunity to offer more services virtually and in physical spaces outside of

library buildings than in our traditional physical locations. If seized, these opportunities will further integrate our services into the work of the faculty and students who need them. If not, our users will find them elsewhere or their work will suffer.

I do not mean to suggest that attention to services is new to Illinois or anywhere else. Far from it. The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Library is well-known for its commitment to service, a commitment that reflects our core values of service to teaching and learning, service to inquiry and scholarship, and service to our community. Over the past century, we have made significant investments in a particular vision of library service, however, and the challenges we confront today have to do precisely with the return on that investment in the 21st century and with decisions that must be made about the investments we make in the future. I am sure that you face similar challenges at your libraries.

The King is Dead, Long Live the King

For many years, U.S. academic librarians said that "Collections are King." We believed users were drawn to our libraries because of our collections, and in fact they were, and in some cases still are. Our libraries were driven by a collection imperative. We identified excellence in academic libraries almost entirely with the breadth, depth, and especially size, of our collections. Almost everything revolved around the collections: the way our budgets were allocated, our professional staff assigned and reviewed, and our progress reported to our campuses and to the world.

For many years, we said "Collections are King" with good reason. In the days before robust, international systems of resource discovery and document delivery, in the days before the availability of digital content, the breadth and depth of one's local collection mattered in a way that today's users may find difficult to understand. It was hard to access distant collections, interlibrary loan was imprecise and slow, and most scholarly work focused on local tools and resources. What content you had available to you near home defined much of what you could do in terms of scholarly research and often research universities recruited and retained excellent faculty precisely because

of its library collections. If you were an excellent scholar, and there was room for you at the institution that had a strong collection to support your work, life was good. If not, you either struggled to access those collections elsewhere or changed the focus of your work. Collections were indeed king.

Access to content is still of paramount importance, but today most content is common. We are surrounded by – almost smothered by – content. Not simply the popular content that some argue makes up the lion's share of the Web, but also the scholarly content to which we have more and more access through licensing contracts, open access journals and archives, resource-sharing agreements, and large-scale digitization programs. Access to digital content has transformed our approach to collection development and management, and it will continue to do so; more importantly it has transformed our users' approach to information seeking and use. There is no turning back.

Our collections were once *tours de force*, sharply differentiated from one another through strategies that allowed us to amass materials that were not widely available. Studies showed surprisingly low levels of overlap, often less than 25% in common areas such as American Literature. By contrast, users today confront an information environment where almost anything may be no more than a click away. Through our partnership with the Open Knowledge Commons, Illinois has made more than 16,000 volumes available to anyone with an Internet connection, and we have committed, along with our partners in the Google Book Search Project, to do the same for millions more. This content will all be available through common search tools and archived in the HathiTrust, a collaborative designed to archive and share digital collections. Outside the confines of the special collections that will continue to distinguish individual libraries for years to come, content is common, and will become more so. It will not much matter who owns what when faculty, students, and others can access almost any content they need from almost any where.

So, when content is common, research libraries lose our role as the access point to content for the many of our users who choose to go first to search engine giants, Web portals, or social networks. When content is common, we

face questions about our value to our campus and community: "Why do we need to fund the library when everything is available on the Internet?" When content is common, we hear from users around the world, as we did in the 2005 study by OCLC, that they bypass the library because "the library brand is books." When content is common, we see elected officials proposing drastic cuts to public library budgets, arguing, as the Mayor of Bridgeport, Connecticut did recently, that "Libraries are not essential services." When content is common, service must be sovereign.

Services, like collections, have been greatly influenced in recent decades by advances in technology and other changes in the user environment. Let me now highlight selected trends in academic library service, and suggest how each reflects the broader change I have called the service turn. Through this brief review of an enormous topic, I hope to suggest ways in which you may help your library to make the service turn.

Service Programs in Academic Libraries

As I noted earlier, there is nothing "new" about commitment to library services. Indeed, many discussions of innovation in libraries over the past generation have focused on service: reference service, instruction programs, liaison services, information commons, digital curation, support for e-scholarship, and more. Recent discussions of "Web 2.0" applications in libraries, including blogging, tagging, tweeting, and social networking, focus on the ways in which new technologies can enhance the delivery of services. And discussions about digital curation and support for e-scholarship as part of the University's efforts in these areas focus our lenses even more sharply on our service profile. What is the difference between these discussions and the shift in perspective I have called the service turn?

One difference can be found in the distinction between service *activities*, and service *programs*. Taking a programmatic approach to the design, delivery, and development of library services forms the foundation of any attempt to meet the service imperatives of your library, campus, and community. Raising your vision of library services to the program level is the first step in making the service turn.

We are all familiar with service activities. We answer questions. We catalog books. We teach classes. We digitize texts. We circulate materials. We do these things one at a time, every day, and we count how many times we do them. Any assessment we have traditionally done of library services has focused on activity: how many reference questions were answered and how long did each answer take; how many classes did we teach and how many people attended? We have applied the same approach to assessing the services provided in newly-defined library spaces – information commons and research commons – how many were there logins per day, and what percentage of machines were in use; how many users and of what type? We have adapted this approach to liaison services – how many “contacts” did each librarian have in a semester? We have brought this model forward to services made possible by technology, including digital reference, online learning, social computing, and participation in virtual worlds. How many? How much? How often? These are important questions, and I do not discount them. We use these measures to justify the dedication of budgets, personnel, and space to libraries when an increasing amount of the materials we once housed have moved to remote storage facilities or to the Web. There will always be value in measuring the level of activity. But the future lies in assessing the impact of service programs.

In order to assess the impact of service programs, we must first distinguish them from service activities. Let me take a few moments to identify the characteristics of a well-defined library service program. These characteristics suggest a rubric that may be applied to any library service, and distinguish even the most narrowly defined program from the most regularly-used set of activities. As I review them, you might consider how they apply to traditional programs such as reference services, to more recently identified programs such as information literacy instruction, or to emergent programs such as scholarly communications or data curation.

A library service program begins with a **mission**. That mission aligns the service program with the strategic plans of the library and the campus, as well as with its core constituencies and historic purpose. In a public library, the mission may align with community concerns.

A library service program has identified **goals**, sets **benchmarks** for performance, and is evaluated based on its **outcomes**. Goals, benchmarks, and outcomes provide a framework for evaluating service programs far more robust than the more common rubric of frequency of use. Service program outcomes may be phrased in terms internal to the library, but it is increasingly common to see them associated with broader outcomes identified as necessary or desirable by our campus or community.

A library service program is based on staff **expertise**, and is structured in such a way as to provide appropriate support for staff wishing to exercise (and further develop) that expertise. Embracing new service programs may require you to recruit for new types of expertise or develop it internally. More difficult, the decision to discontinue an existing program may lead you to re-assess the need for expertise previously prized. Recruiting and retaining the expertise required to enhance service programs may require you to review position descriptions, revamp your continuing professional development programs, or contract from sources external to your library.

A library service program must have clearly defined **constituents**. It should be designed and delivered in collaboration with campus or community **partners**. Who uses or will use the service, and why? How does the service complement others provided on campus or in your community?

A library service program must be **flexible** in its application so that a **spectrum** of activities may be developed around the guiding mission that allows the program to have clear value for a variety of participants, from students, to scholars, to community members. Library service programs must have the capacity to evolve in reaction to the environment of which they are a part. One reason why service programs must be flexible is because they must be **relevant**, in some form, **to all users**. Because these programs are flexible, and may be adopted, to different degrees, by different user groups, the assessment of service programs must be likewise flexible, including quantitative and qualitative approaches to the question of quality and impact.

Finally, a library service program must draw upon a **research base**. That research base may come from library and information science, or from the study of management, education, or another field. We should think of the library as place where research and practice meet, and service programs should be guided by what research tells us about our users, and what it tells us about best practices in the area of concern. Susan Gibbons of the University of Rochester has concluded that the library of the future must embrace an "R&D culture," and Amos Lakos of the University of Southern California has suggested that this commitment represents the first step in moving toward "evidence-based library management." This perspective is crucial to making strategic choices about service programs.

When we discuss new approaches to library service, we still talk sometimes about service activities, but the more engaging discussions revolve around the definition of service programs. It is to two such programs that I turn next.

Student Services and Scholar Services: Emergent Programs in the Academic Library

For many years, services have been delivered to users of U.S. academic libraries through a liaison model that emphasized close connections between well-defined disciplines and subject specialist librarians. There have been several variations on this basic theme – with librarians referred to alternately as "departmental librarians," "bibliographers," "liaisons," "subject specialists," and "field librarians"– but all share certain key features, including:

1. the identification of subject specialist librarians with deep subject knowledge and documented responsibilities for providing library services and collections appropriate to the faculty and students in defined fields of research and teaching; and,
2. a commitment to fostering effective communication and collaboration between subject specialist librarians and the faculty and students in liaison departments.

More recent liaison service models emphasize outreach to faculty and students engaged in disciplinary and

interdisciplinary work through a variety of means, and they focus attention on services that may be delivered in the physical and virtual spaces that are home to our users, rather than requiring users to come to our physical locations. OCLC's Lorcan Dempsey has brought this concept from the business world to ours by referring to this as the need to put our services more "in the flow" of user routines. This focus on outreach and engagement with faculty and students in non-library spaces was probably the earliest example of the service turn in academic libraries.

While still effective in many ways, the traditional liaison service model has faced challenges in adapting to new realities in the academic environment, including: the rise of interdisciplinary research and teaching; new attention to co-curricular educational programs; different approaches to undergraduate education; changes in the scholarly communications process; emergent technologies that allow students and scholars to revisit their approach to information gathering and library use; and the glut of data generated by scholars in all disciplines that need to be managed, archived, and made accessible to others.

Although traditional liaison programs continue to form the foundation of many academic library service programs, we also see a variety of new programs that I think are particularly significant for the future of academic libraries. As this represents the section of my talk most closely related to issues specific to a particular professional environment, I would be happy to go into greater detail about them during our discussion.

The first of these new service programs is rooted in the decoupling of liaison roles from traditional disciplines and departments in support of a broader view of "student services." Where the focus for liaison services over the past several decades has been on subject expertise related to discrete fields of study, and especially on the management of collections meant to support those fields of study, we now see more attention to liaison roles based on relationships with student groups or campus-wide instructional programs. At Illinois, we have hired a librarian whose responsibilities focus on what we call "multicultural outreach services." Her work is not tied to a specific discipline, but to educational programs aimed at students coming from racial and ethnic groups traditionally

under-represented in U.S. higher education, and at students coming from abroad. At the University of Chicago, a "Class Librarian" is affiliated with all students in a given year of study, regardless of program focus. At the University of Kansas, an "undergraduate initiatives librarian" is responsible for developing service programs associated not with an academic department, but with student services programs such as Residence Life. Similar positions have been established across the U.S. for librarians supporting interdisciplinary programs such as First-Year Experience, Writing Across the Curriculum, and Undergraduate Research.

While many of these librarians are among those adopting new technology tools, it is important to note that advances in technology are not driving these new approaches to library services. They are being adopted because they have the greatest potential to enhance those services. Student services librarians may be the most likely to adopt "Web 2.0" technologies, but their approach to their work would represent an important innovation in academic library services even without the availability of new technology.

By contrast, changes in technology are essential drivers in the second of these new service programs, which some in the U.S. refer to as "scholar services." Just as student service programs are related to broader changes in the campus environment for teaching, learning, and student support, scholar service programs are related to broader changes in the design, conduct, and dissemination of research. Often discussed under the broader rubrics of "e-scholarship" and "scholarly communications," and often building on service activities that existed in discrete areas for years, these programs may include data services, digitization services, and services related to intellectual property management and open access. They may include instruction in how to access and make use of large data sets, as well as in how to apply appropriate metadata to a personal collection of digital content. At Illinois, our concept of the "scholarly commons" is founded on the idea of "bringing people together in support of scholarship," and our service program is being designed in collaboration with campus partners from the areas of information technology, graduate education, and faculty development, as well as from campus research centers and interdisciplinary academic programs. At the University of Calgary, a similar program brings together maps, geographic information

services, and academic data. At Ohio University, a "faculty commons" in the library provides a common space for a variety of campus faculty support programs. There is no prevailing model for "scholar service" programs in the U.S. at present, but early efforts share a commitment to providing a range of support services to faculty members confronting changes in their teaching and research programs influenced by advances in information technology and broader shifts in the scholarly environment.

No discussion of library services can we complete with considering innovations in the design and use of library space. You may already be familiar with the concept of the "information commons" – technology-enhanced spaces that allow users to access a suite of hardware and software tools in an environment where information services and technology assistance are equally available. At Illinois, we have extended the concept to the idea of a "learning commons," where our vision for the space is not driven by the tools we can make available to our users, but by the ways in which our service program goals dovetail with those of campus partners, such as academic advising, housing, career counseling, writing skills, and student health, to extend the effectiveness of student learning. It is fair to say that the Learning Commons service program is defined by the common objectives for student learning shared by its partners. We are now building a "Scholarly Commons" that, like the Learning Commons, is finding its direction not from the catalog of technology tools made available through this service environment, but from shared commitments with our partners to provide support to faculty and graduate students in an environment where the very definition of scholarship is in flux.

New approaches to supporting students and scholars, and new ways to conceptualize the use of space; I chose to highlight these programs not just because they represent some of the most innovative discussions of library service in American academic libraries, but because we pursue them at Illinois as part of broader strategic planning processes guiding both our library and our campus. In order to bring together the multiple facets of our commitment to the service turn, I will spend the remainder of my time introducing you to the campus-wide discussion of library services that we have pursued over the past eighteen months.

Strategic Thinking About Service Programs: A Case Study in Progress

Earlier today, I introduced you to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, the largest of the 3 campuses making up the University of Illinois system. Some of you may be familiar with Illinois, either through our top-ranked Graduate School of Library & Information Science, which has extended its reach globally over the past decade through its distance education programs, or through the Mortenson Center for International Library Programs, which has provided professional development opportunities to hundreds of librarians from around the world. If you are familiar with Illinois, you are likely familiar with our distinctive, departmental library service model.

For over a century, our approach to library services has been tied to a specific service model: the *departmental library*. The departmental library is defined by its collections, their alignment with the teaching and research needs of specific disciplines, and their management by librarians with expertise and experience in the fields of inquiry central to the concerns of liaison departments. At their best, departmental libraries provide access to the universe of information most relevant to the academic pursuits of the faculty and students in liaison departments, and are led by librarians who are expert in providing library services, as well as in acquiring and providing access to the materials needed for the collection. This model served our users well for years, but it has strained to meet the challenges of the contemporary information and higher education environments. Unlike many other institutions, not all of our departmental libraries are located in the buildings that house faculty and students in the disciplines they serve; instead, many are situated in our very large Main Library.

Recognition that our departmental library service model required attention dovetailed with the arrival of a new administration on our campus, and the establishment of a more strategic approach to campus planning and budgeting. The campus strategic plan emphasized interdisciplinary initiatives, including informatics, health sciences, and environmental studies and sustainability. It emphasized the establishment of strategic initiatives at the college

level, as well, and the coupling of college-level initiatives with their counterparts at the campus level. Finally, it emphasized establishing metrics, benchmarks, and regular processes of reporting progress toward established strategic goals. Collaboration across academic units was rewarded, and efforts were made to ensure the most efficient use of resources in support of strategic goals. "Bigger" was no longer thought to always mean "better." For a library tied to a service model developed in the early 20th century, one that promoted narrow views of traditional disciplines rather than flexible approaches to the delivery of collections and services to students and faculty navigating new scholarly landscapes, and one that reported its success through measures of input, rather than impact, this was a brand-new world.

I have already described one attempt made since the establishment of these new priorities to identify the impact of investment in the library – the ROI study – but we have also engaged in a thorough review of our service model and service programs during this time, a process we call "New Service Models." While there were certainly economic reasons behind our desire to review the departmental library structure, and those economic pressures caused our provost – my boss – to write to me in January 2009 to ask for a more aggressive approach and a more aggressive timeline. I sent her our action plan on May 6, a week beyond her April 30 deadline. But, despite these economic factors, which we used to our advantage when engaging with campus faculty, I can look back at this process as an important example of our embrace of the service turn.

The New Service Model process was launched based on both the Library's and the University's strategic plans and represented an accelerated formalization of changes we had been making over the past decade. It was clear that our traditional approach to library services would not allow us to move effectively into areas of importance for campus leadership, nor would our pace of change be rapid enough for us to meet emerging needs. At the same time, we had received significant feedback from users through surveys, focus groups, advisory boards, and other means, that confirmed that our departmental library structure was not well suited to their day-to-day needs. Our strategic plan emphasized enhancement of user services as a priority, and

it was obvious that our progress toward that goal would be limited unless we were bold in our thinking about new ways of designing and delivering services.

The New Service Model process was informed by input from a broad range of our staff and our users. Following an open call for suggestions about what we might "do better or do differently," our leadership group received almost 70 discrete ideas for change. Some were not feasible, some were not wise, but many demonstrated that our faculty and staff were fully committed to looking anew at a service model that did not meet the needs of the 21st century campus. Others, I must be honest, suggested that we had a significant minority of faculty and staff who remained wholly committed to our traditional service model. Balancing traditional commitments with novel approaches to meeting emergent needs became a critical component of our thinking about the future of library services.

Following a review of these initial ideas, and using strategic plans as our guide, we produced a list of almost 30 ideas worth pursuing and presented them to the Library and the campus. Several ideas were widely embraced almost immediately, but others required extended discussion. We held three open meetings at different campus locations to foster discussion and debate and to share around the campus our thinking about the strategic priorities for a research library in the 21st century. We held these meetings over several months during 2007-08, and also met with concerned faculty around campus. The process was enlightening, and there were few proposals that were not strengthened, if not entirely re-shaped, by those discussions.

One of the suggestions accepted almost immediately was to close our City Planning & Landscape Architecture Library and integrate its collections and services into a complementary unit. Time will not allow me to detail this process, but it was one in which we worked with our users to shift their thinking about what is valuable in a library from the collections available to the services available. Discussions about the future of library services to the students and faculty in the departments associated with the CPLA Library have yielded new insights about the priorities of these academic programs and about the full range of services in which they may be interested – a range not fully explored under our previous service model. In the absence

of a departmental library to serve as the (increasingly unused) nexus of interactions between library and users, we have engaged in a forward-thinking discussion of new models by which those services that are essential to the success of our faculty and student users may be pursued in new physical and digital environments.

As I mentioned earlier, economic pressures have intensified around the country, and our campus is no exception. Our provost wrote to me in January 2009 both to praise the new service model work we had undertaken and to ask that we intensify and speed our efforts. She made some specific suggestions about which libraries to consolidate. We spent the time between receiving her letter and submitting the action plan she required us to develop by early May putting new teams together to look at her suggestions and reducing the timelines for the work of other teams that had already started their planning. We did not accept all of the provost's suggestions, and we did not complete all our work, primarily because input we received during the process, which featured a series of open campus meetings, made us realize that we had overlooked some important factors. We are moving ahead to implement many of our plans and organizing new groups to reexamine some of our faulty planning. Overall, we're on a good path to make substantive changes within a short time frame. I do not have time today to tell you about all of our plans, but I'd like to highlight one.

Just a few weeks ago, we closed our iconically important but little used Library and Information Science Library and moved our LIS Librarian and a staff member to the Graduate School of Library and Information Science building; they also have offices in our Main Library building. They are now "in the flow" of their users and have created a robust virtual portal that provides the same iconic value as the physical space did. For these users, at least, we had made a service turn. Moreover, for our librarians, used to a very traditional model of library service, we had set the stage for the sort of "re-examination of ideas" that Michael Stephens and Michael Casey remind us is one of the most essential – and most often forgotten – features of thinking about what some in the U.S. still refer to as "Library 2.0".

I find it intellectually pleasing that the space formerly occupied by the Library and Information Science Library now houses the Illinois Informatics Initiative (I-cubed), of which the Library is a founder; the Illinois Center for Computing in the Humanities, Arts; and Social Sciences; and a small group from the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences that offers support for social science data users. Right across the hall is one of the Library's instructional facilities and just a few doors from that is our new Scholarly Commons. We've made the service turn in a new and important way.

I have taken too long with this talk already, I'm afraid, and have done only partial justice to this important topic. Let me conclude by saying, again, that it has been an honor to talk with you today. I am especially grateful for the opportunity to speak with you twice and to suggest how thinking about strategic investments in collections and services must be complementary facets of a broader approach to strategic thinking about the future of the library. I would be pleased to try to answer any questions you may have or to engage in discussion about any of the points in my talk.

Thank you very much.