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**Academic Library Leadership Issues and Challenges:
An Informational Interview with Peter Sidorko,
Librarian of the University of Hong Kong**

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Abstract

Founded in 1911 during the British Colonial era, with the aim of competing with the other Great Powers opening universities in Mainland China, the University of Hong Kong (HKU) is the oldest tertiary institution in Hong Kong. Supporting the learning, teaching and research needs of the whole University community, the HKU Library is set up with the commitment to develop and deliver a wide range of resources and services dedicated for engaging the users in the efficient use of library resources in all formats.

It was the commitment to promoting a strong intellectual environment and IT infrastructure in libraries that brought Peter Sidorko to the HKU Library over 13 years ago. A seasoned librarian with an established career of working in libraries throughout Australia, Peter Sidorko was hired in 2001 as the Deputy Librarian for HKU before becoming the current University Librarian in 2011. In his current position, Peter Sidorko oversees HKU's library network, comprised of one Main Library and six other subject branches that serve a student population of over 27,000. In the following interview, Peter Sidorko discusses the ways in which he uses his participative management style to work closely with staff and faculty in supporting the unique academic environment at HKU. Furthermore, he speaks

about the deep collaboration with other university libraries in Hong Kong through organizations such as JULAC (Joint University Librarians Advisory Committee), and other services like HKALL (Hong Kong Academic Library Link / 香港高校圖書聯網). He also openly discusses the current challenges facing the field and the promising goals of supporting the unique collections that have made HKU a world-renowned academic institute.

Patrick Lo (PL) Could we begin this interview by first introducing yourself, for example, your training and educational background, and your major roles and duties at the University of Hong Kong Libraries?

Peter Sidorko (PS): My name is Peter Sidorko, the University Librarian here at The University of Hong Kong (HKU).¹ I have been serving as the Director (of the HKU Library) since 1st January 2011. Prior to that, I was the Deputy Librarian [at the HKU Library]. I have been working for the HKU Libraries for over 13 years. Prior to coming to Hong Kong, I was working as a librarian in Australia.

My first library job was at the State Library of New South Wales², working as a cataloguer, and I think that was 1984 or 1983. That was a long time ago. So I have over 30 years of experience in working in the library profession. So while I started at the State Library [of the New South Wales], it was only in a six-month temporary position as a cataloguer, which I soon realized was not my area of interest.

I went to New Zealand after that for a year, and worked in the Canterbury Public Library³, which is one of the biggest public libraries in the South Island. And I was a reference librarian, and I realized that was my area of interest. So after that year, I went back to Australia—back to Sydney—and from there, I worked at The University of Sydney⁴, then The University of New South Wales⁵, and then The

¹ The University of Hong Kong – Homepage. Available at: <http://www.hku.hk>

² State Library of New South Wales – Homepage. Available at: <http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au>

³ Canterbury Public Library – Homepage. Available at: <http://canterburylibrary.org>

⁴ The University of Sydney – Homepage. Available at: <http://sydney.edu.au>

⁵ The University of New South Wales – Homepage. Available at: <http://www.unsw.edu.au>

University of Newcastle⁶ before coming here [to Hong Kong]. Moving higher in the hierarchy, gradually and successively, before coming here.

My last position in Australia was at the University of Newcastle, where I was the Client Services Manager for the Information and Education Services Division, which was an amalgam of library, IT, and teaching and learning support. So I had dual responsibilities for library and information services (LIS) in the form of faculty liaison, reference service, and information literacy, etc. But as well as that, IT, customer service support such as managing computer labs, managing software on campus, and desktop support for most of the faculties. So it was very much a hybrid position, and it was really the reason why I came here, because HKU at that time (2001) was looking at doing something similar to its library and IT integration, and that didn't really kick off. But anyway, that's kind of my background.

PL: Have you always wanted to work as a librarian as your lifelong career since early childhood?

PS: No! My graduate degree was in mathematics purely. Back when I was studying, I studied things that I was interested in—I didn't study for a career. Mathematics was my main interest, so I did a degree in Pure Mathematics. After that, I was thinking of what to do -- perhaps a career in teaching, perhaps academia might be of interest. But then I was inspired by my aunt, who was a librarian. She sparked an interest in me, and I went from there basically.

PL: What aspects of your aunt's work as a librarian actually inspired you to become a librarian?

PS: It was just interesting—the things she was doing—and it was just something I had never thought of, and it was just a spark.

PL: Could you describe a typical day at work as the Director / Head Librarian of the HKU Libraries?

PS: Some days are more typical than others. If we look at today, there are some things happening today. Well, there's this interview meeting with you—that is

⁶ The University of Newcastle – Homepage. Available at: <http://www.newcastle.edu.au>

something different. We're having a major book sale in the [HKU] Main Library today and tomorrow, so that's why I was a little late—I was opening this book sale. You should go and buy some! Only HKD\$20 a book, so true bargains down there!

And then this afternoon, I have a meeting with some of my staff because one of my senior staff, who has been in the library for a long time—25 years—is leaving us in ten days' time. And so we have a meeting as to how to hand over his unique duties. So that's a fairly typical thing in terms of administration, not in terms of staff retiring, we have very few staff retiring. And then this evening, we have a book talk we'll be hosting. So that's a kind of fairly normal day. So it's a mixture of administrative things, meetings, and special events, etc.

PL: How would you describe your management style?

PS: Well, in my previous interviews, I say my management style is “participative”, so I stick to that. That's been my style. You need to adjust your management style to the climate of the organization, though. I have to say that because sometimes participative just doesn't work, or there are limits to how much participative management you can share among your colleagues.

PL: How would you describe “participative” in the context of library management?

PS: Well, it's making every individual staff member in the organization take responsibility for their own actions, and taking responsibility to make decisions, etc. So I think we've had pretty good success over the years that I've been here. I certainly know when I first came in 2001, there was a very different culture in this organization. Even fairly trivial issues were escalated to a senior level that was inappropriate (*laughs*).

PL: Would you say that this kind of centralized decision-making via a higher authority approach is very typical among many organizations in Asia, regardless it is profit- or non-profit-making organizations?

PS: You know, I can't—that was certainly my opinion when it first happened. But I would say now that it was really more to do with—I think that's a part of it—but it's

more to do with the inherent culture of the organization, rather than the ethnic culture (laughs). But the two have come together. Absolutely! The organizational culture has perpetuated that ethnic culture. It's very much top-driven. So I think we've moved away from that quite significantly now at the HKU Library.

PL: But do you see the advantages of switching to a more democratic, a much flatter organizational culture for an academic library like the HKU Library? Would you say this is more appropriate for the current environment? Because everybody's talking about that regardless of where we are—North America, Europe, Singapore, Indonesia, or Hong Kong.

PS: Well, I think the obvious benefits are that trivial matters are not escalated to a high level. Decisions can be made at the coal face [Editor's note: Coal face is an Australian and British expression meaning doing the actual work of a job.] But, there's risk with that, and part of the problem is encouraging people to take risks—particularly when they come from a culture, an organizational culture, that does not reward risk-taking and actually has a punitive approach to errors or mistakes. Whereas I've always, well, I don't think I've ever, in my 13 years here, chastised anybody over a mistake that they've made, but simply helped them to see the way of their mistake and purpose, and how they can do things differently.

PL: Or they can learn from our own mistakes. If you don't make mistakes, you will never make any progress or learn anything... Do you agree?

PS: Yes, I totally agree.

PL: Or sometimes it is difficult to say -- "this is a mistake!"

PS: Sure, and there is this 'face' issue in Asia as well. But you know, we have a reasonably flat structure at the HKU Library. I have a Deputy [Librarian], and then we have a series of division heads, and each of those division heads very much manage their own environment really successfully. And now they tend to escalate any issues to the Deputy rather than to me. So that gives me more quality time to work on other issues such as external relations, internal within the university as well. So those two things were really my focus, when I became the General Director here.

PL: Why would you say the flatter, more democratic organization structure has become more appropriate and more fitting for the current cultural climate?

PS: Well, why isn't it? There are advantages and there are disadvantages. Well, the first disadvantage is that it is a change of mindset and culture. It is encouraging people to do those things, make the decisions themselves, and take the responsibilities for those decisions. But, as I said earlier, at the same time, it frees up much of my time to remove those trivial things. But it also "empowers" people. I know that's a word that's thrown around loosely, but I really do believe that people can get better job satisfaction if they feel they have got a bit of power over their own working environment and their own decisions.

PL: I wouldn't even say "power" – in my opinion, it is more like being given the encouragement and a reasonable amount of freedom to fully utilize your skills, thereby enhancing your effectiveness, efficiency, as well as productivity within your own scope of work.

PS: You know, for example, dealing with a difficult client at the coalface. We have run a series of customer relations workshops—how to deal with difficult customers, how to deal with all aspects of customer relations. We can't just focus on difficult customers. So it is something of an issue. So, you know, if a person can successfully navigate a 'win-win' situation in an interaction that is negative, they're going to feel good about that and they're going to feel good about themselves, and they're going to feel good about the organization.

PL: So do you think by giving them power, encouraging them to make decisions and take responsibilities would help them to develop a better sense of belonging to the organization?

PS: Absolutely! That is if they can make the decisions along those lines.

PL: With reference to the HKU Library collections – the HKU Library is well known for its special Hong Kong Collection, which is a unique collection of books, serials, government publications, newspaper clippings and non-print materials covering almost every aspect of Hong Kong history and life. In this context,

how is HKU Library different when compared with the collections of the other seven UGC libraries? As you know, an increasing number of traditional printed libraries are migrating towards digital – and a majority of them are subscribing to the same sets of e-books and e-journals... Is it different from the other libraries? You know everybody’s talking about online collections. As some academic library director in Hong Kong before his retirement predicted that, in ten years time, all the academic libraries in Hong Kong would have more or less similar digital collections. We only need to build an online platform for all the university students to share our digital collection. So my question is - why do we still need to spend so much resources and manpower to create and maintain this physical entity?

PS: There is a great deal of truth in terms of the collections amongst all eight academic libraries becoming increasing ‘generic’ — that’s what I could call it. In fact, the student populations amongst all eight of us have also become very similar to each other. One: we run similar degree programmes or courses. Two: similar research profiles. And three: we’re building similar library collections. On the other hand, the digital collections amongst the academic libraries in Hong Kong are indeed becoming increasingly generic in that sense. And we do a lot of consortium (group) purchasing — that is collaborative purchasing amongst all the eight UGC (University Grants Committee)⁷ libraries, so a lot of the digital contents that we have, have been negotiated by the JULAC (The Joint University Librarians Advisory Committee).⁸ And you know, that is just a common practice amongst the academic library community across the globe. But the HKU has something different. We have over 100 years of collection-building. We are the only academic institution in Hong Kong that has such a long history. And therefore, we have a great legacy in terms of our printed collection that the others simply don’t have. So we can talk about printed collections becoming less relevant, and that’s true, but what we’re seeing now, is something of a backlash—particularly with e-books. And there is considerable dissatisfaction with e-books. And this is one of the projects that we are doing at the moment—is to do a study on the use of e-books, and the satisfaction of e-books. We certainly have one of the biggest e-book collections in Hong Kong

⁷ UGC (University Grants Committee) – Homepage. Available at: <http://www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/ugc/index.htm>

⁸ The Joint University Librarians Advisory Committee – Homepage. Available at: <http://www.julac.org>

and in the world. We have over three and a half million e-book titles, so we have more e-books than we have printed books. In fact, we have been collecting e-books for about 14 or 15 years, and we have been collecting printed books for 102 years. But our e-books have indeed exceeded our printed collection by quite a distance. However, we don't have the largest—the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK)⁹ has something around five million e-books. But, you know, this is just a numbers game really. There's not much analysis in terms of the usage, and the quality and the application of those e-books.

PL: But it is much easier to put this figure on the website – using these numbers to tell other people that we are 'important' or more influential – would you agree?

PS: In terms of numbers, Yes! However, I must point out that the numbers game is dead for libraries -- we just can't use the numbers game to say whether we are doing well or not.

PL: In a way, you are saying it is the unique history and scope of the printed collections, which helped shaping the unique identity of the HKU Library? And how does this unique identity contribute to the reputation and success of HKU as a whole? How did it work?

PS: Well, our unique collections have forged our own identity in a very successful way. Meanwhile, our unique identity has indirectly contributed to the reputation and integrity for the organization for the HKU institution as a whole. For this reason, as librarians we have a responsibility for the upkeep, the preservation, and the sharing of those collections. Indeed, the HKU Library's reputation is known through our collection. Undoubtedly, the uniqueness of our library collections plays an important part in building the reputation of the HKU institution as a whole. For example, many local and overseas world-renowned scholars want to come here and use our HKU Library collections for their research – and many of them who have used our collections speak highly of our collections. Meanwhile, we have also been working on improving the visibility among our faculty members, and we started with our institutional repository. In fact, we were the first higher education

⁹ The Chinese University of Hong Kong – Homepage. Available at: <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/english/index.html>

institute in Asia that made all our local theses and dissertations available online via open access – which gradually became an asset that drew in users from both within and outside of HKU to use our library resources.

So others in Hong Kong are now following suit, so now, all of those faculty research articles and theses are deposited in our Scholars' Hub. But then we wanted it to do more. We wanted this Hub to highlight visibility of our faculty. So ultimately, what we have come up with is less of an institutional repository and more of a current research information system or a CRIS. So what we've been able to do is to extract information that was kept in various sources throughout the campus such as our registry, our research office, human resources, and faculty webpages, and we have been able to extract various bits of data and put it into this system. So for almost all of our faculty now, and it's an opt-in opt-out situation, we have these single faculty pages that have their publications, articles, chapters, books, as much as we can make open-access and full text as possible. But also a list of their university contributions such as committee participation, any awards that they've received, grants, postgraduates that they are supervising.

So we have had students from overseas using the Scholars' Hub to identify whether their research area is currently supervised or has the potential to be supervised by faculty. So it's become this, what we call, a CRIS, as I said, but it's led to the increased visibility of our faculty, which in turn leads to greater usage of the faculty's output, which in turn contributes to the reputation of the institution.

PL: So you think everybody—at least in Hong Kong and all the academic libraries are aiming and working towards this direction?

PS: Certainly some of them are. The person who was responsible for this data, David Palmer, has been visiting a number of these and giving seminars and advice on how to proceed to expand their institutional repositories into a more formulated CRIS.

PL: Would you say this would be the trend that most academic libraries are working towards?

PS: Well, I don't know about everyone, but I think once HKU sets a trend, many others tend to follow. Not all, but many do.

PL: So did you face any challenges when you were working towards building this?

PS: Yes, there were many challenges. There were some misconceptions as to the purpose. For example, some of the faculty members were already maintaining their own faculty webpages. And what we noticed, though, they did not like to see the duplications, because it sent a mixed message to people who were looking at their materials—their output. But what we found was that their webpages in some cases had not been updated in years, whereas the Hub can harvest data really quite quickly. And we have people inputting this information on a daily basis for our faculties. So that was one concern.

The other concerns were different faculties have different kinds of research outputs. For example, the Department of Architecture does not publish that many articles, and similar to the Department of Law. So we had to look at what really gives the Department of Architecture prestige, and a lot of it is through awards or grants. They receive awards for designs. So we realized we cannot just be putting articles in, because not all faculties produce the same volume of articles that others do. So that was kind of an impetus to expand it into something more than just a collection of written output.

PL: So your job as the HKU Library Director is to send people out to different faculties - to talk to them, with the aim of identifying their needs, as well as to convince them to contribute articles to this centralized digital repository?

PS: Yes, that is what we have been doing. We have received funding from the University. The University gives out grants every year for the past five years or thereabout, for what is called “Knowledge Exchange.” And each of those years, we have received funding to keep improving on the Scholars Hub.¹⁰ And part of that has been to go out and promote it to the faculties. Unfortunately, some individual faculties are still reluctant for various reasons. But one reason might be they don’t want to showcase their work.

¹⁰ The HKU Scholars Hub - Homepage. Available at: <http://hub.hku.hk>

PL: We have come across people like that everywhere. Their mindset is very different.

PS: And some faculty, their emphasis is on teaching and not research, so you know, they don't have a lot to show. So why show when you've only got a little to show when your focus is teaching? So there are various legitimate reasons, I think, for not wanting to contribute.

PL: What are the roles in terms of supporting the teaching and learning? All libraries are meant for supporting teaching and learning—the ambition of the parent institution. But how have those roles been changed in the last five to ten years? Or maybe the roles have not been changed, but just the format, the way you are working towards the same direction?

PS: I think at HKU, we're still evolving in this sense. Now we had a compulsory student course that the library contributed to, which was Foundations of Information Technology. And it was run by our, well there were three partners: it was the Faculty of Engineering's Department of Computer Science, the library, and the IT department. And we together taught this subject, and it was compulsory for every student—every undergraduate student to successfully complete it or to demonstrate that they had the skills one way or the other. And that was cancelled a few years back—about four or five years ago, which was unfortunate. So it meant that we had to get out there in terms of developing student information and technology literacy. We had to be a bit more proactive and to get out into each of the faculties to try and convince them that this was a valid exercise for their students to undertake. In some ways, we've been very successful, I would say, in [Faculty of] Medicine in particular, in Law, in Education, to some extent, Social Sciences, I think would be the most successful. But in others, less so. We try to have this component integrated into their curriculum. And that's very rare. I think only Medicine and Law, where it's actually embedded in the curriculum. The others, we come in as an adjunct or an ad-hoc or add-on session. Or then we just run courses ourselves and hope that students would come along and learn. That's been something of a difficulty.

The university is now very much focused on e-learning as our future, and I think that is taking off rather successfully. We have done a lot in terms of e-learning, in terms

of creating online modules, tutorials -- all these things that faculties can now embed into their Moodle for example or in any other places that they choose. But I think that e-learning is still evolving here at HKU. The good thing is that the Librarian, myself, is now involved in most e-learning high-level decision-making, and the HKU Library's voice is being heard. For example, we now have an e-learning review committee, so we're reviewing all the practices of e-learning. That's just started last month, so that's in its initial stage, and I am a member of that working group.

PL: I can see that there is a large increase of students in Mainland China. Do you see that their learning patterns are different from the local students? I'm finding these strange patterns. I'm teaching students from China and also Japan. They don't have this habit of going to the library. They are not using library resources for finding articles for writing assignments. They wait for their teachers to give them whatever they want them to read or they have to read for writing just summaries and translations and stuff like developing and understanding a topic. Do you have this issue—the modes of learning, the preferences are very different?

PS: No, I can't really quote you figures, but anecdotally, I can tell you that when we open the library at 8:30 a.m. every morning, the overwhelming students who are waiting to come in are mainland students.

PL: But my question is, are they using resources for writing research or assignments, or are they using the library facilities as a space for printing or just a quiet place?

PS: I would say both. Definitely both. To what extent they are using the resources, I can't really comment, but just visually, I can see that they are using the spaces and they have books in front of them. So it's a mixture. But I'm sure a large number want a quiet environment.

Similarly, the courses that we run that are voluntary—I have heard from my staff that the majority of students who attend those are mainland students. Now if you think about that, the majority are mainland students—they only take up about 10% of our student population—so, you know, that's quite a disproportionate percentage. So they are very keen. My own understanding, and you know I don't have any real

research data on this, but my—anecdotally once again—is that they're not entirely convinced on the e-learning direction as a preferred direction. I think they prefer face-to-face.

PL: So what are the major projects that are being implemented?

PS: At the moment, we have a number of things. I already mentioned the e-book research. We want to do some studies into e-book usage and effectiveness. So I think that's an important one. We have several physical space renovations being undertaken. So you've seen our Level 3—we did that renovation so we converted over 3,000 square meters into a bookless study area with six different zones. We are now changing our main entrance from ground floor to the second floor so that it will connect with University Street and the Centennial Campus. So that is going to start within the next two to three weeks. We are going to have a major shift of our print collection from the second floor down to the ground floor. We want to renovate our Medical Library even though it's only 13 years old. It needs to be upgraded to a more appropriate—to suit a different learning style from 13 years ago. So that's a big area for us.

We are moving into supporting research data, so we've just appointed someone—I think you might be aware—so he's now been in charge to look at how we can manage research data, how we can get that research data from faculty and what kind of platform we need. At the moment, we think that it's our Scholars' Hub, and we do have some data sets in there, but very, very few. But we need a full management plan for research data. And we need a proper platform which we can apply metadata and encourage faculty to share it.

PL: So the issue is not about not having a budget, but having too much to do and not enough manpower to do it?

PS: We are never going to have enough budget. Every library will tell you that. But you just need to do what you can do. And sometimes you need to just reprioritize what you are doing, and this is something I think libraries don't do very well, that they have a history of doing something but it's too difficult to shake that off even though it's less important than newer things. So I don't think we have that complacency.

PL: But what I mean is compared to many libraries in the US and North America, they're facing major budget cuts and layoffs.

PS: Well, we've only had minor budget cuts over the time I've been here. As in, only 1% or 2% cuts here and there.

PL: But are you given new budgets for new projects?

PS: No. We get a flat budget. We get a single budget—single-line budget. For renovations, we apply for UGC funding primarily through the University. So we apply to the University who then applies to the UGC. UGC allocates funding for these infrastructure things that have issues every year, so you need to just put in a case. If you're successful, then you're successful. But, you know, many people put in for these renovations, so we're not sure if we're going to be successful. But we have a flat—well, a single, one-line budget is what we have.

But then we have other sources of funding as well, which I cannot deny. We have HKU SPACE, which is our School of Continuing Education. We get funding from them, which is separate to our one-line allocation. We have funding from printing and library fines as well. And we have some endowments from which we garner interest, so I can't be crying poor, but we're not exactly flooded with money at the same time. So we need to be quite frugal because even though we have some reserves, that's going to last until we don't know when—until our budget can improve, whenever that may be.

PL: Do you see any collaboration or competition? Sometimes you talk about it's kind of a competition. Even before. But how would you define competition between the eight of you? "We want our library to be the first one to do something," "We want our library to have the largest collection..."

PS: That's not just in Hong Kong. That's a global thing. Every library is trying to do the thing that no one else has done.

PL: Some 15 or 20 years ago, you didn't see that level of collaboration between the other UGC libraries. Also, I heard that they are also reluctant to do so. Can

you describe the reasons behind it? On top of so that no single library could fully support the learning—you know, you need to collaborate with other people regardless of how large and how resourceful you are.

PS: I think you have hit the nail on the head. In terms of collaboration, no library can provide everything. And we've been collaborating at various levels with other libraries for many decades. But if you just want to focus on Hong Kong, the collaboration has been largely at a sharing of collections in terms of letting my users come into your library and vice-versa. But now it's deeper. It's deeper now for a number of reasons. One is that the government has encouraged it. The UGC has encouraged work that causes a deep collaboration. So the libraries—we built the HKALL (Hong Kong Academic Library Link / 香港高校圖書聯網)¹¹, which is the unmediated sharing of books that are delivered to the home library by a courier.

In the early days, there was great reluctance. And there were many unknowns. But we received funding because the UGC was promoting deep collaboration. They saw this as an example of deep collaboration of eight institutions working together. And they gave us funding to set up HKALL, and we did it in a pilot phase, and it was just so wildly successful that once we did it with three, the others simply couldn't resist (*laughs*).

I am currently the Chair of JULAC (Joint University Librarians Advisory Committee)¹², and so, you ask about competition and collaboration. Well, you know, the competition is less between the libraries than it is between the institutions.

PL: As the Director of the HKU Library, are you also responsible to create an image and how people perceive you and your Library?

PS: And for a lot of people, that 'image' will then reflect on how well you can serve. For example, come back to the teaching and learning support -- if you're not perceived as professional, capable, and trustworthy, and various other adjectives,

¹¹ HKALL (港書網), Hong Kong Academic Library Link (香港高校圖書聯網), is a project in accelerated resource sharing jointly undertaken by the academic libraries of eight local tertiary institutions. HKALL – Homepage. Available at: https://lib.hku.hk/general/hkall_overview.html

¹² Chair of JULAC (Joint University Librarians Advisory Committee) – Homepage. Available at: <http://www.julac.org>

they won't want to collaborate. Faculties won't want to collaborate with you. They want to give you time to talk to their students about information literacy and proper skills and so on. So 'reputation' is an important thing for libraries. And the way they are seen by the administrators in particular. Because as I said earlier, the number game is over. We can't use the numbers and say, "We've got the biggest collection" or "We get the most number of students coming in." The gate counts are irrelevant these days. And volume counts—all these counts—they are only relevant and important provided you can successfully get embedded into the teaching/learning processes and research processes of the HKU community as a whole.

PL: Do you have any strategic plans worked out for the HKU Library for the next there to five years?

PS: We have a five-year strategic plan that ends this year. It is on our website under "Policies." We developed actions under our strategic plan. We have five broad objectives, and under each of those objectives, we come together once a year on our planning day, and we develop new actions under each of the objectives. And we work on those actions, which become projects, etc. throughout the year. And then we report on them at the next annual planning day.

So this year, we're at the end of our five-year strategic plan. We are intending to do a major review of our new plan. Starting in April 2015, it will be a new five-year plan.

PL: Could you share with us the agendas developed for this new five-year strategic plan?

PS: Well, because it is a major new plan, is that I am meeting with all the units at HKU, and I will be doing some preliminary discussions and workshops with each of them so that we have something we can take to our planning day. Now on the planning day, we have Paul Gandel, a professor at the University of Syracuse's iSchool—he will be coming here because he's actually coming here for our leadership institute in Xiamen. But we've asked him to stay on, and he's going to facilitate that with Arnold Hirshon--he's the Associate Provost & University Librarian at Case Western Reserve University. But he used to be Executive Director of NELINET, which was a major

library consortium in North Eastern United States. So they're going to help us, but we're going to do a lot of work beforehand, and they're going to help us to fine-tune it on the day itself. We have been working on developing strategic plans for a long time.

Okay, the major challenges. Well, this is interesting that you ask what the major challenges are. Just two weeks ago, the university invited KPMG—they're a major company that do company risk management. They do auditing, accounting, and they're a huge corporation. They [the university management] invited them in to identify what the university's risks are. Now they interviewed me. So risks are areas where we're susceptible to failure, ultimately. So for me, I had to identify what the five risks were. And for us, the five risks are: our inability to meet the information needs of our users in an appropriate manner—that is, in a timely manner, in the best format. And that relates to a number of things: budget, obviously, you know the budget isn't going to grow significantly. But what has happened is that the university has grown significantly. And our budget hasn't kept pace with the university's growth in terms of student numbers, in terms of new courses that are being taught—we're having trouble there. Second one is our infrastructure, and I have talked about that. Our physical building is really just showing its age. It needs improvement; it needs to be attuned to the overall curricula of HKU.

PL: There needs to be more space for collaborative learning.

PS: Things of that nature. But using technology as well. And flexible space is needed. So that whole infrastructure issue is important to us or a major challenge. Keeping up with technology is another one, and this relates to mainly our staff and their skill development. That's just something that is a constant struggle, and as we've been talking about today, that HKU being a leader, really the area we should be leading is in implementing technologies. I think we are maybe not doing as well as we should there, so I see that as a challenge. We have got some really motivated and talented staff. And that brings me to staffing—staffing is a problem. In terms of getting an appropriate staff for new positions, the world of libraries and academic libraries is changing really rapidly. Some of the things we've been talking about—the CRIS, the data management—and finding people with those skills is really problematic.

The word I was just going to use was mindset. Coming with the mindset that will promote innovation, will encourage change, will be ready for the next big thing or create the next big thing. It is really hard to find those people. Hong Kong is such a small place, and attracting people from afar is becoming more and more difficult.

PL: Is there anything else you would like to share with the readers before closing this interview?

PS: Life as a University Librarian in an intellectual environment like the HKU is a highly rewarding experience. The Library is fortunate to have staff who are talented, dedicated and committed to HKU. While there are challenges and uncertainties that we face, we do so in the spirit of collegiality that permeates through the Library and the wider University.

