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The Academic Library's Challenges with Stakeholder's Influence in a Digital Age

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Abstract

Academic libraries, like the universities they serve, face an ongoing challenge to achieve the best possible outcomes for stakeholders. Each library serves a variety of user groups whose specific needs exert influence on the services and resources provided in the digital age. These groups are a library's "stakeholders," who are affected by the library, and have an interest or an investment (or both) in how well the library achieves its mission, goals and objectives. Major stakeholders of the library are the students, faculty, and the general public. Libraries facing pressure to justify budgets and expenditures must analyze changing stakeholder expectations and consider how to successfully meet them. Libraries must also embrace the worth of their programs and services that they offer. This paper will provide a review of recent scholarship to identify overall worth, challenges, current student, faculty and community expectations faced by 21st Century academic libraries and how libraries might address them.

Introduction

Academic libraries of the twenty first century are faced by the expectations of students, faculty, board of trustees and the community. The challenges are how to address these expectation is the digital age. The pipeline of how information is transferred to students continue to evolve at a rapid pace. The pipeline of information includes faculty members, academic libraries, the World Wide Web, applications and digital technologies. Academic libraries should set goals of staying current with digital technology and trends. Despite these avenues of information, libraries and librarians are still searching for answers. These answers are needed for the development in academic libraries that present challenging opportunities for libraries and librarianship.

The answers for these challenges are sought, while avoiding to cross the boundaries of our stakeholders (students, faculty, and board of trustees). Various things such as desired student and faculty expectations, retention rates, and graduation rates all have an impact on the future of our libraries. Each library organization has specific groups that exert influence upon it. These groups are the library's "stakeholders" and it is the library's mission to satisfy the needs of these groups. These groups have an interest and investment in how well the library achieves its mission, goals and objectives. The major stakeholders of many libraries are their Boards of Trustees, students, faculty and the local community. Other stakeholder groups are the campus administration, members of Friends of the Library, corporations, and donors which gives significant amount of money. Other stakeholders include information services such as EBSCO, the American Library Association, libraries with which we have reciprocal agreements (for Interlibrary Loan), and more.

Student Expectations

Students expect the library to be a quiet, study-friendly, nurturing, informative place that promotes the development of information literacy, and the skills necessary for lifelong learners. Students also an informative user experience with less time consumption. Furthermore, the students want the library to continue having the latest technology, ample books, materials, articles, government documents, and the latest digital trends. In higher education libraries, the concept of the user experience has increased in profile and importance. The concept of the “student as customer” has generated much debate but there is general agreement that universities need to be more successful in meeting student expectations. A key strategic area for university libraries has been to adapt and improve their physical spaces to ensure that they are still relevant for today's students. Ultimately, students want to be successful academically, get their degrees on time, and have access to an environment conducive to learning. As librarians, when we conduct instruction classes, testimonials are vital. Also, keeping record of students who were a part library instruction classes is important. By keeping sufficient records, libraries will have substantial proof of their worth to the university and the positive impact on their students' grades.

“Students now approach doing research with an ATM attitude; they want it to be fast and easy. Web-based resources “with seemingly intuitive search screens can provide students convenient access to information. . . . As a result, students will convince themselves that they are fulfilling all of their research needs by using the Web.” Students view information as a commodity and “compromise on quality in favor of low cost (in terms of time and effort) and convenience.” (Gardner, S., & Eng, S. 2005, p.9) Having this in mind, academic libraries should embrace programs like that one in the state North Carolina. The University of North Carolina (UNC) at Chapel Hill campus libraries have the “Personal Librarian Program for Transfer

Students (2016).” This program was designed to support questions and learning, and allow library staff to connect users to the university’s complex library system. This programs also provides personal librarians that will serve as the “go-to” person for questions related to UNC libraries’ collections and services and can help students make connections across campus. Within weeks of being enrolled in their first semester, incoming transfer students are assigned a personal librarian, who will contact them at key points during the academic year to inform them of helpful resources and services. Personal librarians can help students in a variety of ways. For example, personal librarians remind students of library services periodically via email, help them navigate the campus libraries and direct them to new resources and programs, and connect them to university resources outside of the library. Overall, programs will change student’s perceptions of thinking that they can find everything they need and that they no longer need help from a librarian. It will also help them realize that Google and articles they find on the World Wide Web isn’t good enough.

Faculty Expectations

Faculty Expectations are for the advancement of the library to continue every semester. In addition to that, the faculty wants all of the necessary books and material that they request to be ordered, put on reserve or on hold immediately. Faculty also desires the necessary training and advancement of the staff to help our students find the best information, this is vital to the upward path of higher retention and graduation rates. The University of Iowa Library system’s User Needs Assessment Group conducted a survey on faculty resources usage. It states: “Faculty will use interlibrary loan and commercial document delivery services and are willing to pay for such services if it speeds up access to needed information. Studies found that humanities faculty tended to search library catalogs (local and distant) the most and science faculty the least.

They also found that lower-ranking professors used the online catalog and electronic indexes and abstracts more than higher-ranking professors. But there is an overall high usage of electronic databases.” (Washington-Hoagland, p. 5).

In addition to advancement, the faculty wants a collection that supports their mission and curriculums. Students are representations of their institutions in the real world. As the library informs their students, the world will then associate the product (students) as something of great value. The faculty depicts the library as a place that holds the integrity of this university in the palm of its hands.

Community Expectations

Budget constraints come to mind when one think of challenges in technology investment. Despite these constraints, cutting edge technology is a vital part of keeping libraries current. There are two libraries that are testament of how technology investments will help libraries overall. The community in which our libraries embrace want to have a current, advanced, technology filled information facility possible. For example, The Loughborough University and the Library and University of York Library invested heavily in technology. Their report states:

“In recent years, Loughborough and York have both invested significantly in refurbishing their physical space. In 2013, Loughborough completed a \$4.8 million project that increased library study spaces, updated different learning environments, enhanced access to information and communication technologies and increased the number of fixed PCs for users. This has proved very successful and been favorably received by University staff and students. In 2012 York completed a \$20 million program to develop a world-class library at the heart of the campus.

The project incorporated a major refurbishment of the original The JB Morrell Library building alongside a complete reworking of the adjacent former Computer Science building effectively doubling the space of the main University Library. The development delivered a wide range of IT

enabled study spaces for groups and individuals and has proved to be a great success with high occupation of the building and positive feedback on the space. Both refurbishments had proved successful and attracted a lot of visitors but both libraries wished to understand more about how and why the buildings were being used, and what differentiated the library as a destination for study from other learning spaces around campus.” (Katie Burn, 2016, p. 2)

In a recent survey of 2,000 students across the U.K., commissioned by the Association of University Directors of Estates (2015), 64 percent of those surveyed placed the University Library as the most used facility on campus. With both University Libraries attracting high use and with this statistic in mind, there was acknowledgement that this gap in understanding had to be addressed if services and facilities were to be successfully developed and delivered to improve the user experience. University libraries are increasing digital services and moving away from print, while technologies are becoming more and more embedded people's lives, including their academic career. In the digital age, where it is possible to access content wherever connectivity exists, questions are raised about university library space, the importance (or not) of print to the study experience and the challenges facing university libraries in adapting and changing their physical spaces to ensure their continued relevance. Keeping investment in technology at the forefront of the library's yearly goals, despite budget challenges yields success.

“Nitecki and Abels' article (2013) titled, “Exploring the Cause and Effect of Library Value,”, attests to the fact that librarians and libraries must show their worth to their stakeholders.

“This qualitative study consists of a series of individual and group interviews with faculty members representing different academic disciplines. It consists of typically 15 to 30 interviews addressing the gap by beginning to identify areas of library values from the perspective of stakeholders' perceptions of most valued effects of the library, and then exploring the root causes of these effects as a way to identify the valued

impact the library has for them. The perceived root causes of these valued effects will generate data to help librarians manage library activities and resources to improve the library's value. "(Nitecki and Abels 2013, p.1)

By identifying the expectations of each stakeholder, the library will gain a clear picture of interpretations that are key contributors to faculty, student, community and board of trustees perceptions of value. This in return will increase productivity, provide the resources and materials that faculty and students want, while still meeting accreditation criteria standards of value.

Board of Trustees/Internal Expectations

Retention is complex: the meaning of retention may differ for students and institutions. When a student withdraws they are recorded as a loss in a university's retention statistics. This occurs regardless of the student's next step. However, a student may be 'taking a break' to earn the finances required to continue studying and planning to complete at a later point. The Board of Trustees pay attention to these numbers and have goals of lowering retention rates. University libraries are expected to contribute to retention and other student outcomes and demonstrate that they do so (ACRL, 2017). The literature reviewed suggests several key means by which libraries can contribute to retention. These means include: working in close partnership with teachers in the delivery of academic programs that help students commit to and engage with their academic studies; catering for diverse student groups in the conception and design of services. First, libraries can contribute by helping students to commit and engage academically. To do so, students need access to appropriate information resources and library services (Hagel, 2003, p. 4). Connecting the positive impacts of higher graduation rates and lower retention rates will show the value of our libraries. Programs such as ACRL's Assessment in Action: Academic Libraries and Student Success, part of the Value of Academic Libraries Initiative, are designed to

equip more librarians with the skills to connect the library with success through better documentation. (Association of College and Research Libraries). The Board of Trustees are very attentive to the subject of organizational arrangement and strategies of collaboration for success.

Harer and Cole (2005) referenced the organization arrangement as a factor that makes performing companies different. He states:

“They are better organized to meet the needs of their people, so that they attract better people than their competitors do and their people are more greatly motivated to do a superior job, whatever it is they do. They are better organized to meet the needs of their customers so that they are either more innovative in anticipating customer needs, more reliable in meeting customer expectations, better able to deliver their product or service more cheaply, or some combination of the above.” (p. 151).

Internally, organizational departments working together for the greater good yields success. This internal success stems from collaborations between librarians, technicians, library staff, and faculty. These collaborations develop successful initiatives that serves the students, helps faculty, and provides opportunities to demonstrate library value. Collaborations between librarians and faculty to utilize our resources is a key component to success. Utilizing primary resources that are available through archivists and librarians working together would be a phenomenal collaborative effort.

There are several examples of this in the archives at the Robert W. Woodruff Library of the Atlanta University Center. It houses Morehouse College's Dr. Martin Luther King Collection, which represents much of Dr. King's life and work spanning from 1944 to 1968. This collection gives insight into his thoughts, personality, ministerial preparation, organizational skills, and strategic planning during the Civil Rights period. Many students and citizens of the community are not aware of these precious primary sources are available. The institution has

personal items of W. E. B. Du Bois such as his typewriter and keys. They have the Lemoine Pierce Papers, the Atlanta Urban League Papers, and the Samuel Williams Papers as well. In addition to those, they have Elizabeth and Irwin McDuffie Papers, the James P. Brawley Collection, the Hoyt Fuller Collection, and more. All of this information can be found at <http://www.auctr.edu/archives/collections/>

Embracing the Worth of Programs

The digital age, being led by the World Wide Web, is forcing an evolution that cannot be ignored. With the rapid change in technology, if one chooses to ignore it, they will be left behind in search of another career. The starting foundation of libraries still remains the same in terms of supporting institution's missions in delivery of their research and learning strategies. Achieving these things will require current trends in mobile technology and digital information. Librarians must acknowledge this evolution; if not, their value will decrease among our students and academic colleagues. Libraries are more of a support system now. The days of simply housing thousands of books are over. For example, Georgia Institute of Technology's plan to no longer have physical books is near completion. The Digital Age is upon us and book space is transforming to student space, so that students can come to the library and receive the support they need. Librarians should be walking billboards, advertising their libraries, their catalogues, and their worth to everyone they encounter. Librarians have always been known as the gatekeepers of knowledge but with giants like Google competing, alternative choices are now available to users. Librarians must be proactive and bold about expressing their worth and proving why they are more valuable than Google. Librarians exist to make students think critically as individuals and scholars, teaching research skills that yield the best results etc. Librarians are available to show students how to effectively access sources. After teaching

students how to find sources, librarians can take pride in knowing that they helped them to be independent, effective strategists.

In Conclusion

Academic libraries, like the universities they serve, face an ongoing challenge to achieve the best possible outcomes for stakeholders. They are faced with challenges, but with strategic planning, solutions to these challenges are obtainable. Meeting students, faculty, community, and trustees expectations not only yields success, but it also adds to the value of the library's brand. In meeting all of these expectations, higher retention and graduation rates will more than likely occur. It is important for libraries to have goals of keeping technology investments at the forefront of their yearly improvements. Libraries should set goals for their institutions to produce the best students, so it is important that they are provided with the most current technologies. In addition to technology, collaborative mindsets between librarians, technicians, library staff, and faculty are key to developing successful initiatives that serve the students, help faculty, and provide opportunities to demonstrate library value. Lastly, it is important that librarians display a level of excitement in promotion of the library and its programs. Having all of these challenges met, our academic libraries will achieve total stability in this digital age.

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