



Academic Libraries' Strategic Plans: Top Trends and Under-Recognized Areas



Laura Saunders*

Simmons College School of Library and Information Science, 300 The Fenway, Boston, MA 02115, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 2 February 2015

Accepted 12 March 2015

Available online 31 March 2015

Keywords:

Academic libraries

Strategic plans

Trends

Content analysis

ABSTRACT

Rapid developments in technology, as well as changes in areas such as scholarly communication, data management, and higher education pedagogy are affecting user expectations and forcing academic libraries to develop new resources and service areas. No library can respond to every new trend in the field, but where are academic libraries generally placing their priorities right now, and to what extent are they responding to emerging trends? Through a content analysis of academic library strategic plans, this study examines the stated directions and goals of libraries to discover the extent to which they are monitoring and addressing emerging and traditional program and service areas, providing a perspective on how academic libraries are addressing current issues, and how they plan to allocate resources in response to trends.

Academic libraries are facing enormous pressures that require them to respond and adapt in order to remain relevant. Rapid developments in technology, as well as changes in areas such as scholarly communication, data management, and higher education pedagogy are affecting user expectations and forcing academic libraries to develop new resources and service areas. At the same time, these libraries must balance new initiatives with core service areas such as instruction and collection development. In addition to responding to current trends, academic libraries are also being challenged to anticipate future needs and to develop innovative initiatives to meet those needs.

No library can respond to every new trend in the field, nor should they. Decisions about how to prioritize and allocate resources should be aligned with the mission and goals of the library's parent institution. Colleges and universities are facing their own pressures, driven by increasing demands from stakeholders to hold themselves accountable, especially in terms of student outcomes such as persistence, graduation, and employment, as well as student learning outcomes, or changes in knowledge and behavior as a result of educational programs. In turn, these institutions are looking to their departments to demonstrate how their programs and services support and further the mission and goals of the college. In this environment, academic libraries must monitor both the trends in the library and information science field as well as those in higher education more generally in order to determine where to focus resources and efforts.

But where are academic libraries generally placing their priorities right now, and to what extent are they responding to emerging trends? Library and information science (LIS) literature is rife with articles and reports that track trends in the field, make predictions, and advise libraries on how to implement plans and programs related to those trends. Few studies, however, have examined academic libraries' planning documents to see how they are prioritizing among the competing issues and challenges facing them. This study aims to address the gap in the literature. Through a content analysis of academic library strategic plans, this study examines the stated directions and goals of the library to discover the extent to which they are monitoring and addressing emerging and traditional program and service areas. Academic librarians and library directors will be interested to see which issues and challenges are receiving the most attention, and how their peers are prioritizing those areas. The study will also offer campus administrators a perspective on how academic libraries are addressing current issues, and how they plan to allocate resources in response to trends. Library faculty might also be interested in the results, as understanding which trends are having the most impact in their field could inform curricular decisions and program emphases.

© 2015 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on trends and issues impacting library and information science is abundant, and includes changes in technology; scholarly communication, including open access; data services; assessment and

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 617 521 2793.
E-mail address: laura.saunders@simmons.edu.

accountability; and changes in higher education pedagogy. It would be impossible to offer a comprehensive overview of current library trends. Rather, this review will look at the areas as identified by major professional and research organizations, including ACRL, Horizon, and Ithaka S + R, followed by an overview of studies analyzing library strategic reports.

TRENDS AND CHALLENGES

Every other year, ACRL issues a list of the top trends impacting academic libraries. The lists from the two most recent reports, 2012 and 2014, reveal a number of important issues, some of which were carried over from one list to the next. For instance, trends related to working with data appear on both lists, including data curation (Association of College & Research Libraries Research Planning and Review Committee, 2012), and opportunities for librarians to collaborate and partner with researchers using data (Association of College & Research Libraries Research Planning and Review Committee, 2014). The importance of demonstrating the library's value through assessment initiatives also appears on both lists. ACRL also highlights issues of open access, the importance of student success and student retention; technology impacts including mobile devices and device neutral platforms; altmetrics; digital humanities; changes in scholarly communication; and changes in user expectations. A supplemental environmental scan points to several similar areas of concern including the impact of budgets and rising prices, noting that "the watchword is still cost" (Association of College & Research Libraries Research Planning and Review Committee, 2013, p. 2). The scan asserts that academic libraries are further impacted by changes in higher education pedagogy and delivery, such as massive open online courses (MOOCs), the unbundling of higher education, changing student demographics, open education, and trends toward competency-based learning. ACRL predicts that many of these trends will require academic librarians to rethink service provision, which could result in new positions and new competency areas that might entail reskilling of professionals.

According to the Horizon Project's report, academic libraries will continue to be impacted by changing technologies and related standards, including mobile devices, open access, and bibliometrics, as well as the Internet of things, the semantic Web, and linked data (Johnson, Becker, Estrada, & Freeman, 2014). Beyond technology changes, the report suggests that a focus in higher education on multi-discipline research and other collaborative projects will provide challenges and opportunities for libraries. Many of the issues and concerns raised in the broader field of higher education, such as course credit for life experience, emphasis on career or professional education (Quinton, 2013), the demand for accountability and assessment (The Lawlor Group, 2014) including evidence of achievement of student outcomes (Henry, Pagano, Puckett, & Wilson, 2014), and the evolution of online learning (Johnson et al., 2014), overlap with those in academic libraries, and reinforce the immediacy of these trends.

Ithaka S + R reports that faculty primarily see the library as a buyer, ranking its role as purchaser of materials as most important, with roles in supporting instruction and research less so (Housewright, Schonfeld, & Wulfson, 2012). These faculty members are increasingly turning to the Web for materials—although there seems to be some modest increase in the use of the library catalog—and are indicating a preference for online versus print resources. However, closer analysis of the survey shows that these preferences vary somewhat by discipline. In general, humanities faculty ranks more of the library's various roles as important than did social or hard science faculty (Schwartz, 2013).

Academic library directors highlight the library's instructional roles and support of information literacy as most important, a commitment which "may have far-reaching implications for how they prioritize their other functions" (Long & Shonfeld, 2013, p. 6). Directors also acknowledge budget pressures which could impact their ability to engage in new initiatives. They generally identify their staff as a top

priority. They acknowledge lack of staff skills and competencies in emerging areas as a challenge, and indicate plans to make resources for professional development and continuing education available for re-skilling. Despite the challenges, most directors report feeling prepared to meet changing user expectations.

STRATEGIC PLAN ANALYSIS

Strategic planning is "a systematic process of envisioning a desired future, and translating this vision into broadly defined goals or objectives and a sequence of steps to achieve them" (Roberts & Wood, 2012, p. 10). The process typically involves six steps: developing a vision; developing a set of core values; conducting an environmental scan; developing goals and strategies; implementing and assessing the plan; and revisiting the plan (Dole, 2013). In addition to an environmental scan, which analyzes external factors impacting the organization, libraries involved in strategic planning might also benefit from a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis, which examines internal factors (Morgenstern & Jones, 2012). The SWOT analysis and environmental scan are important steps in strategic planning, as they help the organization to take stock of the internal and external situation and make informed decisions about how to move forward. The strategic plan itself and each of its goals or strategies should be assessed against specific metrics. As such, it is necessary to establish who will be accountable for each aspect of the plan (Forbes.com, 2011). While the specific goals of a plan will vary from one library to another, libraries do not operate in a vacuum. It is important for the library to align its strategic plan with the mission and goals of the larger institution, in order to demonstrate how it directly supports those goals and mission (McNicol, 2005). Viewed as a whole, these plans can offer a perspective on how libraries are envisioning their future, and where they are planning to concentrate efforts and resources.

Several studies have used strategic plans as a source of information on the priorities and directions of academic libraries. Many of these libraries align their own plans with that of their parent institution. Indeed, as it is impossible for academic libraries to respond to all the trends and challenges in the field, they can use the mission and goals of the college as a guide for prioritizing their goals and allocating their resources (McNicol, 2005). Bielavitz found programs and services related to community engagement in the strategic plans of libraries of the Coalition of Urban Serving Universities, which supports a core tenet of these institutions (Bielavitz, 2011). Because alignment with the parent institution is so important, academic libraries will often redirect their plans as institutional priorities shift (McNicol, 2005). For instance, the library might adjust its programs and services to meet the needs of a college that is putting increased emphasis on research.

A review of Canadian and American academic libraries' strategic plans and annual reports against ACRL trends identified space, off-site storage, assessment, development, and staff as emerging themes (Staines, 2009). The study also found that Canadian planning documents incorporated more language around user needs and expectations, suggesting they take a more user-centered approach to planning. Budgets have been identified as one of the top issues addressed in academic library strategic plans (Caldwell, 2005). Indeed, Clement (1995) found that many Association of Research Libraries (ARL) used their strategic plans as a tool to deal with budget cuts. Similarly, fundraising has become a priority in many academic library strategic plans as those libraries struggle to meet increasing user demands and more expensive resources with decreasing budgets (Brown & Gonzalez, 2007). Other areas of focus include information literacy and instruction, storage challenges, and personnel issues (Caldwell, 2005).

Marketing has been identified as a key element of strategic plans, as a way to promote awareness of library resources and services (Smith, 2011). Incorporating marketing can increase the chances of achieving

the plan's goals, and help the library to be more customer focused (Germano & Stretch-Stephenson, 2012). Similarly, an outward focused strategic plan which addresses marketing can help to improve the library's external relations. Wade (2013) credits the marketing and external relations that grew out of the strategic plan of the National Library of Scotland with helping to support the passage of library-related legislation by the Scottish Parliament.

A few studies have also identified gaps in strategic plans. For instance, while assessment is crucial for demonstrating the value of the library, in most academic libraries assessment planning is "not frequently used or integrated into the library's comprehensive strategic planning process, and it does not always effectively cover the scope of assessment activities and information needed by organizational leaders and administrators to develop effective strategic plans and decisions" (White, 2010, p. 1022). A review of strategic planning documents, including mission and vision statements, found that very few academic libraries included reaffirmation of accreditation into their strategic plans, despite its importance to the campus as a whole (CannCasciato, 2011).

PROCEDURES

As tactical documents that set the goals and direction of the organization, strategic plans offer insight into how these organizations are prioritizing their goals and allocating resources. Strategic plans are necessarily individual to each organization, but a review of plans from a sample of academic libraries can give a perspective on trends in how libraries are responding to current challenges and issues, and how they are positioning themselves for the near future. To that end, this study will focus on the following questions:

- What are the most important or most highly prioritized issues for academic libraries right now, according to their strategic plans?
- To what extent do these issues align with the top trends identified by ACRL and other professional and research organizations?

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study focused on a content analysis of publicly available strategic plans of the institutions involved in ACRL's Value of Academic Libraries National Summits, held in November and December of 2011, as well as the institutions that participated in ACRL's Assessment in Action (AiA) program, which grew out of those Summits. The National Summits convened academic librarians and administrators to discuss library value and impact. One of the recommendations to come out of that summit was a training program to assist librarians in assessing evidence and communicating value to their stakeholders (Brown & Malenfant, 2012). Supported by an Institute of Museum and Library Services grant, AiA provides training and support for teams of academic librarians and campus partners in developing and implementing an assessment program (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2015). Participation in AiA involves a competitive process and commitment of substantial resources, so it is reasonable to assume that libraries selected to take part in the program are aware of and willing to engage with trends like assessment. As such, they might serve as models for other academic libraries. Thus, the group of institutions that participated in the Summits and the two cohorts that have participated in AiA since its inception were chosen as the population sample for this study.

Twenty-two institutions were involved in the National Summits. As of January 2015, AiA has had two cohorts of participants, the first with 75 institutions, and the second with 73. In total, then, 170 institutions made up the population of this study. The list of participants in the ACRL National Summit are included in the white paper that was issued from those meetings (Brown & Malenfant, 2012). ACRL publishes a list of the institutions selected to participate in AiA (Association of College

& Research Libraries, 2014). With these lists as reference, a research assistant searched the Web sites of each institution to locate strategic plans, and compiled a list of those available on the Web. The researcher then examined the plans using content analysis, a method of "identifying, quantifying, and analyzing of specific words, phrases, concepts or other observable semantic data in a text or body of texts with the aim of uncovering some underlying thematic or rhetorical pattern" (Huckin, 2004, p. 14). The researcher engaged in a systematic and iterative review of the texts and developed an emergent codebook. That is, the documents were reviewed repeatedly until no new categories of trends or challenges surfaced, and all documents were analyzed against the codes that emerged from the review. Content analysis can be quantitative—recording the frequency of occurrence of specific words and phrases. It can also be qualitative, in which the researcher identifies varied terms with the same meaning. For instance, some plans might refer specifically to information literacy, while others do not use the term, but do integrate related skills and competencies such as finding, evaluating, and using information. This review involved both quantitative and qualitative analysis. Documents were first reviewed for exact matches to keywords related to issues identified by the literature as important trends: information literacy, assessment, technology, and collaboration. Once these terms had been quantified, the documents were reviewed several more times to determine other key terms and patterns.

LIMITATIONS

This study was limited to institutions participating in the ACRL National Summits and AiA, with the expectation that these libraries might be at the forefront of some trends, and serve as role models for other institutions. However, this population is a small subset of academic libraries, and the fact that they all participated in these summits and training sessions might mean that they are alike in some ways that limits their usefulness as models. It is possible that other institutions not included in this study might offer a greater or at least different insight into academic library trends.

Also, this study relied on strategic plans that were publicly accessible through institutional Web sites. Some libraries might have a strategic plan but choose not to share it publicly, and were necessarily excluded from this review. In addition, as Pacios (2004) notes, terminology related to strategic planning is not always applied consistently by libraries. The libraries included in this study tended to use terms like direction, objective, and goal interchangeably. Also, the level of detail across plans varied widely. Some plans were no longer than a page, and consisted solely of a bulleted list of goals. Others were ten pages or more, and included SWOT analyses, overviews of the library and/or the field of library science, or other narratives. These plans tended not only to include a list of goals, but also supporting objectives or action steps to accomplish the goals, and occasionally metrics for measuring progress. Such differences sometimes made it difficult to compare trends across plans. However, since the purpose of this study was to analyze themes in the plans, rather than make judgments about the plans themselves, all publicly available plans were included, regardless of level of detail or specific use of terminology. Finally, the analysis focused only on strategic plans. Many libraries produce alternate or supplemental documents, such as annual reports, self-studies, or SWOT analyses, which might elaborate on or update the plans. Further research could review supplementary documents for evidence of support of and progress toward the goals outlined in these strategic plans.

FINDINGS

In total, this study reviewed 63 strategic plans, representing 37.1% of the 170 institutions involved in the ACRL National Summits and the first two cohorts of AiA. The analysis resulted in nearly 50 unique codes and

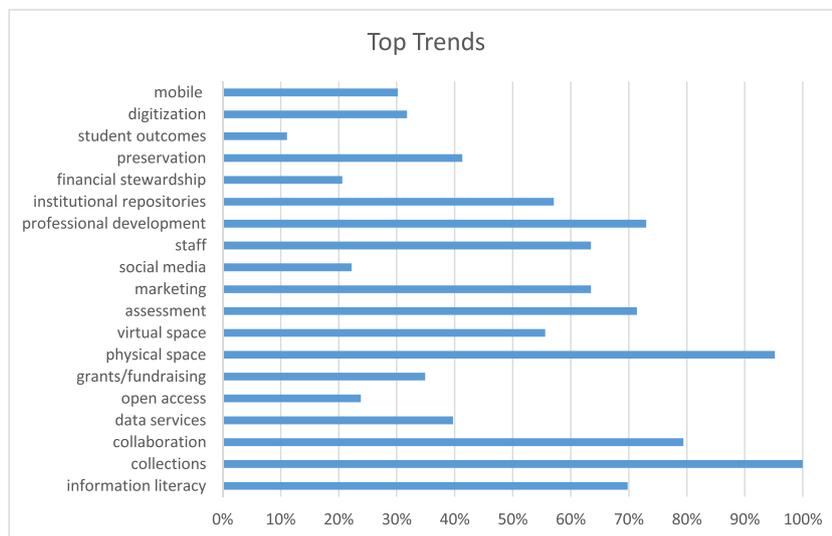


Fig. 1. Percentage of plans including each identified issue and trend.

sub-codes, ranging from one code that was included in 100% of the plans, to another area that was addressed in only a single plan. Fig. 1 shows the breakdown of trends by the percentage of plans including those trends. In addition to staking out their own strategic goals and directions, 40 of the libraries (63.5%) alluded to the parent institution's mission, goals, and/or strategic plan, although the level of attention to the parent institution varied. In some cases, the attention to the campus plan consisted of a single reference stating that the library strategic plan supported the campus mission, or was developed with the university plan in mind. Only seventeen libraries (27%) made explicit connections between their plan and the larger university plan, often by mapping each library goal to the university plan. Similarly, 17 plans (27%) integrated specific metrics for assessing the strategic goals they had set for themselves, such as target goals for satisfaction surveys, number of collaborative projects, or passing rates on information literacy tests. Five of the plans (7.9%) included a SWOT analysis, while four (6.4%) included an environmental scan.

MAJOR EMPHASES

According to the plans reviewed here, collections, physical space, collaboration, and instruction are the top priorities, with each of these areas being integrated into over three-quarters of the strategic plans. Collections topped the list for academic libraries, with a full 100% of libraries including collections in their strategic plans. These plans also included areas related to collection development and management. For instance, 51 plans (81.0%) named access to the collections as a priority, with many including the implementation of discovery platforms to improve searching and location. Several plans also discussed various formats for collection development, with 21 (33.3%) indicating a deliberate shift from print to electronic sources. The plans often connected collection development to the larger goals or mission of the university by describing the collections as supporting the teaching and learning and/or research priorities of the parent institution. While the majority of the strategic plans focused on the general collection, there was also interest in local and special collections, with 36 documents (57.1%) indicating plans to implement or expand an institutional repository, 26 (41.3%) including plans for preservation of the collection, and 20 (31.8%) engaging in digitization projects.

Facilities, specifically physical space, was the next most popular strategic direction, included in 60 plans (94.2%). Specific emphases varied. Many plans spoke generically about creating a comfortable, engaging, and safe space for their patrons. Others included specific goals, such as creating a group meeting and/or quiet study space, reorganizing space

around a learning commons model, and providing the furniture and equipment patrons needed for teaching, learning, and research. Interestingly, although collections were the most frequently mentioned priority, many plans focused on reducing the amount of space devoted to collections in order to maximize the space available for group and collaborative work and for technology. To that end, these institutions were shifting their focus to online resources, and considering compact shelving and off-site storage for low-use print resources so physical space could be used in other ways.

Collaboration was mentioned in 50 (79.4%) of the plans. In general, librarians are focusing on collaborating with individuals and departments across campus, including partnering with faculty on instruction, working with writing and tutoring centers to support student learning, reaching out to student leadership groups, and coordinating services and collections across branch libraries. However, some libraries also looked to extend beyond their own campus. Seventeen plans (27.0%) discussed opportunities for engagement with external partners, including K-12 school systems, museums, and the local community, while 7 libraries (11.1%) expressed interest in initiating or building on international collaborations.

The fourth most popular strategic direction was instruction, included in 48 (76.2%) of the plans. As noted above, many of the strategic plans indicated support for teaching and learning, but such support could come in the form of collections related to the curriculum, technology for online learning, and so on. Thus, it is important to note that the 48 plans described here had goals specifically related to library instruction, with a focus on librarians either as instructors or partners in instruction. These plans discussed partnering with faculty to integrate library instruction into the curriculum, as well as for-credit courses taught by librarians. The plans included attention to both in-person and distance learning, and the development of re-usable learning objects and online tutorials for self-paced learning. Related to library instruction, 44 plans (69.8%) included the term information literacy or equivalent language, indicating that information literacy is the focus of much library instruction.

SECOND TIER

Assessment and evaluation, staff, outreach and marketing, and virtual space or technology were all included in more than half of the library strategic plans. Of these, staff was mentioned most often, being included in 46 (73.0%) of the plans. Focus on staff varied, but the majority of the plans discussed increased opportunities for professional development. In addition, the plans expressed interest in increasing the diversity of

their staff, although the term diversity was used to refer to new areas of expertise and abilities, as well as demographic characteristics such as ethnicity, nationality, or language. Finally, many of the plans included goals related to recruiting and retaining staff, empowering staff, and raising the profile of library staff on campus.

Closely following staff was a focus on assessment, which was mentioned in 45 (71.4%) of the plans. In some cases, assessment itself was mentioned as a strategic goal, with libraries intending to develop assessment programs or expand on existing assessment efforts. In other cases, assessment was not mentioned as its own strategic direction, but assessment goals and activities were integrated into the plan as objectives for other strategic areas. For example, some plans integrated assessment of collections, facilities, and needs assessment to determine patrons' preferences with regard to resources and services provided. It is worth noting that 20 plans (31.8%) included assessment of student learning for information literacy and/or library instruction.

Academic libraries are also interested in raising awareness of library resources and services through increased outreach and communication. To that end, 45 (71.4%) plans included marketing, public relations, or a similar form of outreach as one of their goals. These plans indicated a need to raise the profile of the library, increase awareness and use of library services and information resources, and to communicate the value of the library to the community. Fourteen plans (22.2%) specifically mentioned use of social media and networking tools such as Facebook, Twitter, and blogs as marketing or communication venues, and 24 (38.1%) discussed programs and exhibits as a way to engage the community.

In addition to the focus on physical space, the strategic plans also indicated an interest in providing engaging and useful virtual spaces for their communities. In total, 35 plans (55.6%) included some reference to virtual spaces, including Web pages and access to relevant technologies. Twenty plans (31.8%) specifically mentioned improving the usability or user experience of their online resources, and 19 (30.2%) discussed developing mobile-friendly resources. In addition, 17 plans included a goal of implementing new and emerging technologies. Few of these plans offered any specific examples of the kinds of new technology they were considering. Rather, they asserted a commitment to keeping abreast of changes, including assessing and adopting new technologies as they emerge.

ADDITIONAL AREAS OF EMPHASIS

The themes listed above describe the most common priority areas for a majority of libraries. Other categories received different levels of attention with some areas being mentioned in only a handful of plans. Data management and open access initiatives were both highlighted as top trends by ACRL but included in fewer than half of the plans reviewed here. Data services were included in 25 (39.7%) of the documents, and open access in only 15 plans (23.8%). External fundraising, including grants, was included in 22 (34.9%) plans. Supporting copyright policies and initiatives, including helping faculty understand and manage their own copyright, was highlighted in 12 plans (19.1%). Other areas received even less attention. Only one library included health informatics as a focus, and only four (6.4%) included digital humanities. Similarly, environmental concerns such as sustainable buildings and green initiatives were mentioned in six plans (9.5%). The low numbers suggest that these areas are local, rather than general, priority areas, perhaps related to the particular mission or focus of the parent institution.

DISCUSSION

According to this analysis, collections, physical space, collaboration, and instruction are the most frequent focus of academic library strategic plans, followed by staffing issues, marketing, assessment, and virtual space. The fact that each of these areas was included in more than half

of the plans suggests that they are top priorities, and indeed they do reflect perennial concerns facing academic libraries. For instance, faculty consistently rate the purchasing role of the library as very important, while other roles or services such as helping undergraduates develop research skills or supporting faculty's teaching or research activities are rated significantly lower (Housewright et al., 2012). Obviously collections have always been the core of libraries, but it stands to reason that if a core patron group such as faculty view them as important, than the library will continue to make collections a priority.

It also makes sense that physical space would be an area of concern. As collections shift to digital formats, space that was once devoted to physical collections is freed up and use of that space becomes an issue. Academic libraries take up a lot of real estate, and they must justify the use of that space or risk losing it. As such, it makes sense for academic libraries to make physical space a priority and to align the development and use of the space with institutional mission and goals (Matthews & Walton, 2014). The rise of the learning or information commons is one manifestation of the library's attempt to redefine space around teaching and learning goals, rather than collection warehousing.

The focus on staff, and in particular on professional development, reflects the changing roles and responsibilities of librarians and their need for continuous learning. Librarians are exploring new areas such as data curation, emerging technologies, and informatics. Technology continues to change and evolve. In many institutions, positions are being reorganized, either to meet the demands of emerging areas, or to compensate for reduced budgets and staff. These changes often involve new skills and competencies, signaling a "need for a workforce that is flexible, forward-moving, and highly skilled" (Smith, Hurd, & Schmidt, 2013, p. 14). Although instruction and information literacy are not new areas, they continue to grow, with academic librarians taking on greater and greater instructional roles (see, e.g., Wise, Henninger, & Kennan, 2011; Sproles & Ratledge, 2004) and directors indicating that information literacy is a top priority (Long & Shonfeld, 2013).

BEYOND THE TOP TRENDS

While these top strategic priorities are not particularly surprising, certain issues identified as important areas seem to be under-represented in these plans. For instance, data services are a major trend in higher education generally (Yanosky, 2009), and were identified as key areas for academic libraries by both Association of College and Research Libraries Research Planning and Review Committee (2014) and the Horizon Report (Johnson et al., 2014). Many opportunities exist for academic libraries to take a lead role in managing, curating, and even helping to analyze the massive amounts of data being created on their campuses. Data services have been identified as a growth area in academic libraries (American Library Association, 2014), evidenced by a surge of new positions and job titles related to data services (Maatta, 2013). Still, at this point only 25 libraries (39.7%) addressed data services in their strategic plans. Of course, it is possible that the curricular and research focuses of some of the institutions included in this review are not data-intensive and therefore do not require such support from the library. Also, since these services are still relatively new, it might be that some libraries are still exploring their options and beginning to develop plans, but have not made data services a priority yet. However, the relative importance of data in the wider field of higher education suggests that most academic libraries will want to pay more attention to this area.

Budgets and fundraising are another area that received less attention than might be expected in the strategic plans. Academic libraries, like their parent institutions, continue to face challenges from the economic downturn, with new funding generally "coming from reallocation rather than new revenues" (American Library Association, 2014, 34). According to Association of Research Libraries (ARL) surveys, 89% of

libraries' administrative budgets have not kept pace with inflation, and 52% indicated that acquisitions budgets remained flat or were reduced (Lowry, 2013). Indeed, college presidents and provosts increasingly expect libraries to seek outside funding to supplement their budgets (Lynch et al., 2007). However, just over one-third of the libraries in this study (34.9%, $n = 22$) included grants or external fundraising in their strategic plans, and fewer still (20.6%, $n = 13$) included financial stewardship, or a commitment to transparent and accountable management of their budget. Since academic libraries are essentially cost centers rather than revenue producers, it is especially important that they provide evidence of a return on investment to their stakeholders. At a time of economic uncertainty when there is tremendous pressure for libraries to demonstrate their value, it would seem to make sense for libraries to prioritize efficient and effective use of their budgets. Indeed, in the past research libraries often use strategic plans to deal with budget cuts (Clement, 1995). However, the results of this study suggest that few academic libraries are linking fiscal responsibility and library value in their current strategic plans.

In fact, the value of the library is another area that is not addressed fully or in specific terms in most of these plans. ACRL emphasizes the importance of communicating the value of the library, noting that “librarians must be able to convert the general feelings of goodwill toward the library to effective communication to all stakeholders that clearly articulate its value to the academic community” (Association of College & Research Libraries Research Planning and Review Committee, 2014). Although the plans reviewed here do mention the value of the library often, they tend to tie the concept to marketing and outreach efforts, but leave it largely unsupported by a strong connection to assessment. As noted above, although more than half of the strategic plans made reference to assessment of some sort, only 27% incorporated specific metrics for assessing their goals. Of course, communicating value involves getting the message out through marketing, but if the message is not supported by data it will not be as compelling. Libraries need to assess their progress toward strategic goals, especially those related to student outcomes and student learning outcomes, in order to clearly demonstrate their contribution to the institution. Communication of that progress and contribution can then be based on evidence.

Finally, attention to technology was surprisingly low in these plans. While physical space was among the top three areas, virtual space was only mentioned in just over half of the plans, and fewer than one third (31.8%, $n = 20$) discussed usability testing or otherwise assessing and enhancing the user experience online. Other technology areas, such as shifting to mobile devices and integrating social media, received even less attention, despite the emphasis placed on them by ACRL, Horizon, and others. Only 31.8% of plans indicated that they had digitization projects underway, or plans to implement such projects. Further, only 27% ($n = 17$) of libraries specifically addressed emerging technologies, and on the whole the references were vague. Very few libraries offered examples of specific technology services or programs they planned to investigate or implement. Rather, most made broad statements about keeping abreast of new technologies, without offering any specific ideas for how they would do so. Given the centrality of technology to library services and resources, it is surprising that technology, especially new technologies, are not given more attention in these plans.

CONCLUSION

It is possible for effective strategic planning to “move you out of your comfort zone” and help shift paradigms (Kaufman, Oakley-Browne, Watkins, & Leigh, 2003, p. 40). The priorities of the plans included in this study, however, seem to be largely within traditional library areas. Rather, to put it bluntly, these plans seem to reflect the notion that “what is reported as strategic planning in many libraries is less strategic and more “a reactive form of long range resource allocation planning,” that lacks leader-defined vision, [and] does not apply competitive

environmental analysis” (Nitecki, Livingston, Gorelick, & Noll, 2013, p. 4). Few institutions indicate a push into areas such as data management, digital humanities, and mobile or device neutral environments, all identified as emerging trends by ACRL, Horizon, and others. The emphasis on traditional service areas, and limited attention to emerging ones, might reflect the priorities and goals of the parent institutions. However, it is also possible that some academic libraries are hesitant to forge into new areas, perhaps because of limited resources or due to uncertainty about the relative importance of these areas to their respective campuses and/or the fields of library science and higher education generally. Indeed, committing resources to emerging areas could be risky. If the service or resource is not ultimately successful, the library will have wasted valuable resources and might lose some credibility. Concentrating on traditional areas like collections might appear safe, but “there is a cost to not taking a risk—a danger that libraries will become stuck in a niche that becomes smaller and smaller” (Council on Library and Information Resources, 2008, p. 2).

In fact, these new areas could represent a leadership opportunity for academic libraries. Many emerging areas have been identified as important not just to libraries, but to higher education in general as well. Issues such as data management, student success, assessment, and social media are all expected to have major impacts on higher education in the next few years (Johnson et al., 2014), suggesting that they are trends that academic libraries need to monitor. Academic libraries could take the initiative and guide the wider campus into effective and efficient adoption of these trends. In this way, libraries could use the strategic planning process as described by Kaufman et al. (2003) to stretch the organization beyond its current boundaries and into new areas. As they expand into these areas, libraries should build assessment into their planning, thereby demonstrating how they can “offer real value without retreating into the stock defenses of our role as the gatekeepers of quality, guarantors of access, and the sole possessors of the true knowledge of cataloging” (Dillon, 2008, p. 54). In this way, the strategic plan itself could also serve not just as a tactical planning document, but also as a marketing tool to help communicate how the library is supporting campus goals and perhaps leading some initiatives. Overall, such use of the plan could help to move the library forward and raise its profile on campus.

REFERENCES

- American Library Association (2014). *The state of America's libraries 2014*. Chicago, IL: American Library Association (Retrieved from <http://www.ala.org/news/sites/ala.org/news/files/content/2014-State-of-Americas-Libraries-Report.pdf>).
- Association of College and Research Libraries (2015, January 18). Assessment in action: Academic libraries and student success. Retrieved from <http://www.ala.org/acrl/AiA#program>
- Association of College & Research Libraries (2014). Assessment in action: Academic libraries and student success. Retrieved from <http://www.ala.org/acrl/AiA>
- Association of College & Research Libraries Research Planning and Review Committee (2012). 2012 top trends in academic libraries. *College & Research Libraries News*, 73, 311–320 (Retrieved from <http://crln.acrl.org/content/73/6/311.full>).
- Association of College & Research Libraries Research Planning and Review Committee (2013). *Environmental scan 2013*. Chicago, IL: Association of College and Research Libraries (Retrieved from <http://www.ala.org/acrl/sites/ala.org.acrl/files/content/publications/whitepapers/EnvironmentalScan13.pdf>).
- Association of College & Research Libraries Research Planning and Review Committee (2014). Top trends in academic libraries. *College & Research Libraries News*, 75, 294–302 (Retrieved from <http://crln.acrl.org/content/75/6/294.full?sid=3055206f-af4c-48b4-a44b-98efaa629add>).
- Bielavitz, T. (2011). A content analysis of the strategic plans of the Coalition of Urban Serving Universities' academic libraries. *Urban Library Journal*, 17, 1–19 (Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.simmons.edu:2048/login?url=https://ezproxy.simmons.edu:2450/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lls&AN=527178018&site=ehost-live&scope=site>).
- Brown, W. A., & Gonzalez, B. A. B. (2007). Academic libraries: Should strategic planning be renewed? *Technical Services Quarterly*, 24, 1–14. http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J124v24n03_01.
- Brown, K., & Malenfant, K. J. (2012). *Connect, collaborate, and communicate: A report from the value of academic libraries summits*. Chicago, IL: Association of College and Research Libraries (Retrieved from http://www.ala.org/acrl/sites/ala.org.acrl/files/content/issues/value/val_summit.pdf).

- Caldwell, T. (2005). Strategic thinking. *Information World Review*, 218, 23–24 (Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.simmons.edu:2048/lisa/docview/199411193/fulltextPDF/F9171154F5004699PQ/159?accountid=13870>).
- CannCasciato, D. (2011). Incorporating accreditation into strategic planning in academic libraries: A look at nine libraries in Washington State. *PNLA Quarterly*, 75, 5–10 (Retrieved from <http://www.pnla.org/quarterly/Spring2011/PNLAQ75-3Spring2011.pdf>).
- Clement, R. W. (1995). *Strategic planning in ARL libraries*. Washington, DC: Association of Research Libraries.
- Council on Library and Information Resources (2008). *No brief candle: Reconceiving research libraries for the 21st century. CLIR Report pub.*, 142, Washington, D.C.: Council on Library and Information Resources.
- Dillon, A. (2008). Accelerating learning and discovery: Refining the role of academic libraries. *No brief candle: Reconceiving research libraries for the 21st century. CLIR Report pub.*, 142. (pp. 51–57). Washington, D.C.: Council on Library and Information Resources.
- Dole, W. (2013). Strategic planning and assessment: Pigs of the same sow? *The Journal of Library Administration*, 53, 283–292. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01930826.2013.865397>.
- Forbes.com (2011, October 25). Five steps to creating a strategic plan. Retrieved from <http://www.forbes.com/sites/aileron/2011/10/25/five-steps-to-a-strategic-plan/>
- Germano, M. A., & Stretch-Stephenson, Shirley M. (2012). Strategic value planning for libraries. *The Bottom Line*, 25, 71–88. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/08880451211256405>.
- Henry, T., Pagano, E., Puckett, J., & Wilson, J. (2014, April 10). Five trends to watch in higher education. Retrieved from https://www.bcgperspectives.com/content/articles/education_public_sector_five_trends_watch_higher_education/#chapter1
- Housewright, R., Schonfeld, R. C., & Wulfson, K. (2012). *Ithaka S + R US Faculty Survey 2012*. New York, NY: Ithaka S + R (Retrieved from http://www.sr.ithaka.org/sites/default/files/reports/ithaka_SR_US_Faculty_Survey_2012_FINAL.pdf).
- Huckin, T. (2004). Content analysis: What texts talk about. In C. Bazerman (Ed.), *What writing does and how it does it: An introduction to analyzing texts and textual practices* (pp. 13–32). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Johnson, L., Becker, S. A., Estrada, V., & Freeman, A. (2014). *NMC Horizons report 2014* (Library Edition). Austin, TX: The New Media Consortium (Retrieved from <http://cdn.nmc.org/media/2014-nmc-horizon-report-library-EN.pdf>).
- Kaufman, R., Oakley-Browne, H., Watkins, R., & Leigh, D. (2003). *Strategic planning for success: Aligning people, performance, and payoffs*. San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons.
- Long, M. P., & Shonfeld, R. C. (2013). *Ithaka S + R US Library survey 2013*. New York, NY: Ithaka S + R (Retrieved from http://www.sr.ithaka.org/sites/default/files/reports/SR_LibraryReport_20140310_0.pdf).
- Lowry, C. B. (2013). ARL library budgets after the great recession, 2011–13. *Research Library Issues*, 282 (Retrieved from <http://publications.arl.org/rli282/2>).
- Lynch, B. P., Murray-Rust, C., Parker, S. E., Turner, D., Walker, D. P., Wilkinson, F. C., et al. (2007). Attitudes of presidents and provosts on the university library. *College & Research Libraries*, 63, 213–228. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5860/crl.68.3.213>.
- Maatta, S. L. (2013, October 15). Placements and salaries 2013: The emerging databrarian. *Library Journal*, 26 (Retrieved from <http://lj.libraryjournal.com/2013/10/placements-and-salaries-2013-survey/the-emerging-databrarian/>).
- Matthews, G., & Walton, G. (2014). Strategic development of university library space: Widening the influence. *New Library World*, 115, 237–249. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/NLW-05-2014-0062>.
- McNicol, S. (2005). The challenges of strategic planning in academic libraries. *New Library World*, 106, 496–506. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/03074800510634982>.
- Morgenstern, J., & Jones, R. (2012). Library strategic planning: Voyage of Starship Enterprise or spruce goose? *Felicitier*, 58, 12–14 (Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.simmons.edu:2048/login?url=https://search.ebscohost-com.ezproxy.simmons.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ls&AN=82405084&site=ehost-live&scope=site>).
- Nitecki, D. A., Livingston, J., Gorelick, G., & Noll, S. G. (2013). Evaluating a future search conference for an academic library's strategic planning. *Library Leadership & Management*, 27, 1–21 (Retrieved from <https://web-b.ebscohost-com.ezproxy.simmons.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=7ca45d9a-5a79-4b49-ac62-826c67d666cb%40sessionmgr198&vid=6&hid=115>).
- Pacios, A. R. (2004). Strategic plans and long-range plans: Is there a difference? *Library Management*, 25, 259–269. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/01435120410547913>.
- Quinton, S. (2013, December 30). 5 higher-education trends for 2014. *The Atlantic* (Retrieved from <http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2013/12/5-higher-education-trends-for-2014/282702/>).
- Roberts, K., & Wood, D. (2012). Strategic planning: A valuable, productive, and engaging experience (honest). *Felicitier*, 58, 10–11 (Retrieved from <https://web-b.ebscohost-com.ezproxy.simmons.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=2b5b621f-3166-4a3f-9c40-52ad9508cf5%40sessionmgr110&vid=7&hid=106>).
- Schwartz, M. (2013, April 8). Ithaka survey: Humanities faculty love the library; scientists less enthusiastic. *Library Journal Online* (Retrieved from http://lj.libraryjournal.com/2013/04/academic-libraries/ithaka-survey-humanities-faculty-love-the-library-scientists-less-enthusiastic/#_).
- Smith, D. A. (2011). Strategic marketing of library resources and services. *College & Undergraduate Libraries*, 18, 333–349. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10691316.2011.624937>.
- Smith, D. J., Hurd, J., & Schmidt, L. (2013). Developing core competencies for library staff. *College & Research Libraries News*, 74, 14–35 (Retrieved from <http://crln.acrl.org/content/74/1/14.full>).
- Sproles, C., & Rattledge, D. (2004). An analysis of entry-level job ads published in "American Libraries", 1982–2002. *Electronic Journal of Academic & Special Librarianship*, 5 (Retrieved from http://southernlibrarianship.icaap.org/content/v05n02/sproles_c01.htm).
- Staines, G. (2009). Towards an assessment of strategic credibility in academic libraries. *Library Management*, 30, 148–162. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/01435120910937320>.
- The Lawlor Group (2014). *Trends for 2014: Five factors facing private higher education*. Eden Prairie, MN: The Lawlor Group (Retrieved from http://clients.thelawlorgroup.com/Lawlor_Trends_2014.pdf).
- Wade, M. (2013). Re-inventing the library: The role of strategic planning, marketing, and external relations, and shared services at the National Library of Scotland. *Library Review*, 62, 59–66. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/00242531311328177>.
- White, L. N. (2010). Assessment planning for distance education library services: Strategic roadmaps for determining and reporting organizational performance and value. *Journal of Library Administration*, 50, 1017–1026. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01930826.2010.489007>.
- Wise, S., Henninger, M., & Kennan, M. A. (2011). Changing trends in LIS job advertisements. *Australian Academic & Research Libraries*, 42, 268–295 (Retrieved from <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=5&sid=9b6e3b68-412e-4d15-b54f-765d1c335051%40sessionmgr112&hid=123>).
- Yanosky, R. (2009). *Institutional data management in higher education*. Educause Center for Applied Research (Retrieved from <https://net.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/EKF/EKF0908.pdf>).